

Treading the Path of Salvation:
The Religious Devotion of
Shaqīq al-Balkhī, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī,
and Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz



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To my cherished family

Mary Beth, Daniel, Rebekah, Garrett, and Heather

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Abstract

In the early ninth century Muslim renunciants developed the metaphor of DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH to teach their disciples how to cultivate virtues that would enable them to escape attachment to the world. Alongside these virtues were ascetic practices, sometimes extreme, that demonstrated their commitment to God. The earliest example of this renunciant path is the ascetic manual *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* attributed to Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 198/809–10). Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857–8) took exception to exaggerated practices of Shaqīq's path and insisted that religious devotion must adhere to the commands God gave in the Quran and in the Sunna. Unique in the ninth century, Muḥāsibī also insisted that God's commands were not limited to exterior actions, but included specific expectations of the interior dimension of religious devotion. Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 277/890–91 or 286/899) expanded the renunciant path of Shaqīq's followers, but also responded to Muḥāsibī's censure and softened the more extreme practices of the renunciant path. He was firmly committed to the interior dimension of religious devotion, but gave no indication that he accepted Muḥāsibī's insistence that these virtues were incumbent. Rather, he argues that the noblest expression of these virtues exists only among God's friends, whose religious devotion has its origin in the excellence of their primordial condition.

This thesis will introduce a conceptual hierarchy of religious devotion that facilitates the analysis and comparison of each of these authors. Current discussions of ninth-century Islamic piety are limited by inadequate definitions of asceticism and mysticism. A holistic approach to their religious devotion will provide tangible indicators of the ascetic or mystical orientation of their piety. This provides better parameters for discussing the relationship between asceticism and mysticism in the ninth century.

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Abbreviations

<i>Ādāb al-‘ibādāt</i>	Shaqīq al-Balkhī, <i>Ādāb al-‘ibādāt</i> .
<i>al-Ḍiyā’</i>	Al-Kharrāz, Abū Sa‘īd, <i>Kitāb al-ḍiyā’</i> .
<i>al-Farāgh</i>	——— <i>Kitāb al-farāgh</i> .
<i>al-Makāsib</i>	Al-Muḥāsibī, Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith, <i>al-Makāsib</i> .
<i>al-Qaṣd</i>	——— <i>al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū‘ ilā Allāh</i> .
<i>al-Ri‘āya</i>	———. <i>al-Ri‘āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh</i> .
<i>al-Ṣidq</i>	Al-Kharrāz, Abū Sa‘īd, <i>al-Ṭarīq ilā Allāh: aw Kitāb al-ṣidq</i> .
<i>al-Ṣifāt</i>	——— <i>Kitāb al-ṣafā’</i> .
<i>Ḥilyat al-awliyā</i>	Abū Nu‘aym Aḥmad al-Iṣbahānī, <i>Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ wa-ṭabaqāt al-asfiyā’</i> .
<i>Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiya</i>	Al-Sulamī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn, <i>Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiya</i> .

Chapter 1

Introducing the Path of Salvation

Scholars rely upon categories for analysis and discussion. Despite ever present concerns about their accuracy, it is difficult if not impossible to enter a scholarly discussion without relying upon them. Historians, especially those interested in the history of ideas, have a tenuous relationship with categories. Analysis almost always involves pointing out differences, and differences become unmanageable if they are not catalogued and categorised. In an era when the liberal arts are expected to demonstrate their value to society, historians are put in the difficult position of communicating through non-specialist categories without compromising the integrity of their research. Despite important advances in understanding the way the human mind relies upon categories for cognition and communication, the application of these advances to the seemingly unrelated field of historical studies remains largely unexplored.

This study of three ninth-century scholars faces that very dilemma. Even within an Islamic studies faculty, introducing them requires that they either be labelled as mystics or ascetics, or that a credible argument be presented about why those labels are inaccurate. In the case of Shaqīq al-Balkhī, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, and Aḥmad al-Kharrāz, insisting that such categories are too inaccurate to be useful likely results in an obscure study that makes it difficult for the reader to know how to relate these scholars within their social context or within the larger scope of religious studies and the history of ideas.

Yet this study seeks to allow each of these scholars to introduce and promote

the unique features of his religious devotion. As they seek to defend the merits of their own approach and to pass their wisdom on to new generations of disciples, none of them demonstrates a reliance upon the categories of mysticism and asceticism as they are understood today. This doesn't mean that these categories are irrelevant, but that an honest assessment of their ideas should not permit these categories to obscure the way these scholars organised and presented those ideas within their own context.

Given the scarcity of reliable sources for the ninth century, it would not be unfair to challenge the viability of such a study. With that in mind, I have chosen three scholars whose essential works are extant. All three authors are part of the Sufi biographical tradition, though only Aḥmad al-Kharrāz belonged to the ninth-century network of religious enthusiasts in Baghdad that were named Sufis. Once the native category of 'ṣūfī' or '*taṣawwuf*' became well established in the tenth century, even Shaqīq al-Balkhī and al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, though they preceded any Sufi network, became associated with this category.

As my presentation aims to allow each scholar to speak for himself, one may begin to question whether the synthesising approach of later Sufi manuals and biographical dictionaries has obscured the unique piety of each of these scholars by unreservedly placing them within the *taṣawwuf* category. A careful analysis suggests that al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, in particular, was a critic of the renunciant path and was at odds with the tendency to extol the renunciant as the ultimate paragon of religious devotion.

I propose that Shaqīq al-Balkhī, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, and Aḥmad al-Kharrāz sought to promote their own convictions about religious devotion. Each of them believed that devotion to God was a progressive experience—that the quality of one's devotion to God could increase through time and effort. This increase of religious devotion is connected with improving the inner dimension of worshipping God, and they take for granted that the external requirements of religious devotion are clear. Successively, each of them addresses this inner dimension of worshipping God and develops a series of practices and virtues that leads their disciples toward

an enhanced worship of God. Though one doubts that any one of them would have been satisfied with the programme of the others, they share the strong belief that the inner condition of the soul must be improved in order to please God.

For each of them, devotion to God is a continuum that begins once one becomes aware of his obligation to obey God. Generally speaking, the condition of one's heart at the onset of religious devotion effects the process that follows. Though the process of development that each one promotes is different, all of them describe a transition through beliefs, practices and virtues that leads toward pleasing God and curbing or eliminating harmful desires. A select few discover that God has chosen them as His friends and that they are destined to demonstrate the true nature of religious devotion to other believers.

These three scholars are also remarkable in the way they presented the continuum of religious devotion to their disciples. For them, religious devotion was a path that one followed to become pleasing to God. Practices, virtues and even beliefs became stopping places along the way that helped mark progress toward perfected worship of God. Comparably, reaching a particular level of devotion demonstrated that a disciple belonged to a certain rank of piety. Successive generations of scholars were able to develop these metaphors as pedagogical aids for teaching students, and as a framework for differentiating various approaches to piety.

The first three chapters of this thesis will explore the most significant works of each of these scholars. Significant traditions attributed to them in the biographical dictionaries will be consulted, though this is not the focus of my research. I will use the metaphor of DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH as a framework for presenting each scholar's piety.

The first chapter focuses on the short treatise of Shaqīq al-Balkhī, *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*. Despite the prominence of love as the endpoint of his path of salvation, it will become clear that his piety is oriented toward denying the world and its pleasures. Though overlooked by modern scholars, Shaqīq believed that ascetic habits like poverty and the restricted intake of food were key to progressing toward God's love. I will clarify al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī's censure of not only these practices, but

of the ascetic assumptions they are based on. I will demonstrate that these assumptions fit together as a renunciant path that became the prominent method of becoming a renunciant in the ninth century.

The second chapter demonstrates that though al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī's piety recognises salvation as a progressive path toward pleasing God, his preferred method of describing this continuum is with ranks. God's friends are at the highest rank because they have perfected their obedience to God's revealed commands. Ordinary believers rank lower as they strive to repent of their sins; while the obdurate sinner stands at the lowest rank. The prominent pursuit in his approach to piety is not denying the world, but developing a circumspect devotion to the Quran and the Sunna. This is impossible unless one scrutinises himself for deficiencies and learns to maintain a posture of self-examination. This self-examination is primarily focused on uncovering the diseases of the heart that put one at odds with God's internal requirements of worship.

Chapter three demonstrates that Aḥmad al-Kharrāz interacted with the piety of Shaqīq al-Balkhī and al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī. He exploits a subtle division in Shaqīq's path to develop two different sets of progressive virtues: an ascetically oriented set and a mystically oriented set. Though he moderates extremes in Shaqīq's renunciant path, he ultimately ignores Muḥāsibī's criticism of the renunciant approach to trusting God. In a remarkable expansion of the renunciant path, he attributes the successful passage of God's friend into an awareness of His nearness to the timeless insight he acquired in a primordial state. I will demonstrate how Kharrāz presents a public version of the renunciant path in his main work, *Kitāb al-ṣidq*, and then links this to the primordial saga in his esoteric treatises.

Chapter four introduces the issue of categorisation and suggests a taxonomy of religious devotion based on prototype theory within cognitive linguistics. As it seems likely that scholars no longer consider asceticism and mysticism to be classical categories, my suggestion uses terminology now standard in cognitive linguistics to provide a better framework for moving beyond the classical model. Religious devotion is a superordinate category that consists of the practices, beliefs

and virtues one pursues, perhaps best termed ‘components’. At the same time, the taxonomy of religious devotion can be described with type-of categories like mysticism and asceticism.

Table 1.1: Selected Taxonomy of Religious Devotion within Islam

Term	Definition
religious devotion	a superordinate category that consists of one’s virtues, practices, and beliefs
asceticism	a type-of category for religious devotion that denies pleasures and possessions
ascetic component	a virtue, practice, or belief that is shaped by a commitment to denying the world
ascetic piety	religious devotion whose ascetic components have salience
renunciant path	an ascetic lifestyle that seeks purification by limiting participation in the world
mysticism	a type-of category for piety that strives for the immediate awareness of God’s nearness
mystical component	a virtue, practice, or belief that is shaped by a commitment to pursue an awareness of God’s nearness
mystical piety	religious devotion whose mystical components have salience

I suggest that asceticism is a mode of religious devotion that is indicated by the orientation of that devotion toward the denial of the world. (Table 1 provides useful definitions that I will formally introduce in chapters four and five.) The adjective ‘ascetic’ will be encountered throughout this thesis to describe components of religious devotion that are influenced by this orientation. Within this theoretical framework, I will discuss how denying the world affects the beliefs, virtues, and practices of each scholar in this study. It should become clear that denying the world is not the most significant value in Muḥāsibī’s religious devotion. Given this profile, I will argue against the attribution of *al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujūʿ* to Muḥāsibī and demonstrate that it rather fits within the ascetic trajectory of the renunciant path. Acknowledging the ascetic commitments of the renunciant path is foundational for an understanding of Sufi forms of mysticism in the ninth century.

Chapter five applies this same taxonomy to mysticism and proposes that mysticism is a type of religious devotion whose salient feature within Islam is an awareness of God's nearness. Using this model, I will examine the religious devotion of each scholar and determine to what extent his beliefs, virtues and practices can be labelled 'mystical'. If God's nearness is the most salient feature of Islamic mysticism, a careful look at Shaqīq's piety challenges the view that he represents a good example of that kind of mysticism. Muḥāsibī's limited attention to mystical virtues affirms the growing scholarly opinion that his religious devotion lacks a pronounced mystical orientation. In both cases, and especially with Shaqīq, the unique relationship that God has with select friends suggests affinity with good examples of mystical piety. It is Kharrāz whose piety represents a good example of mystical piety, especially in the 'waypoints of nearness' that describe the ultimate goal of his path to salvation.

Categories like asceticism and mysticism cannot be separated from the beliefs, virtues, and practices of religious devotion. Either category is significant only when ascetic or mystical components have salience within religious devotion. Moreover, even when that salience exists, the religious devotion of the practitioner himself should not be concealed by a rigid definition of that category. Both categories function best when they aid the researcher in analysing the components of a particular scholar's piety—they function best as adjectives. This thesis will demonstrate that ascetic components are essential to Shaqīq's religious devotion, and that he places those components upon a renunciant path. Divine love and intimacy on his path only resemble the nearness mysticism of later Baghdad Sufism. The salient feature of Muḥāsibī's religious devotion is his conviction that the Quran and Sunna require mankind to remedy deficiencies in the interior dimension of his worship. Neither ascetic nor mystical components play a prominent role in his piety. Kharrāz teaches a path of salvation that merges ascetic and mystical features of piety in the beliefs, virtues and practices that he prescribes. I document interaction between their pieties and ultimately conclude that their shared convic-

tion that the inner dimension of worship can be improved makes this interaction possible, and allows Muḥāsibī a place within the traditions of later Sufis.

Chapter 2

The Renunciant Path of Shaqīq al-Balkhī

Sufi biographical dictionaries present Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/809–10) as one of the first renunciants to systematise the denial of the world’s pleasures. Sufi tradition attributed to Shaqīq an ascetic manual, *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*, that provided a basic curriculum for aspirants to the renunciant lifestyle. This curriculum established ascetic practices and placed a succession of virtues upon a ‘path of salvation’. The organisation of this manual permits an investigation into the expectations that early renunciants had of their disciples and the progress they could expect. Shaqīq promises a select few the possibility of being drawn into a reciprocal experience of God’s love. Though later Sufis like Abū Sa‘īd Aḥmad al-Kharrāz (277/890–91 or 286/899) built upon Shaqīq’s legacy, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857–8) directly challenged his teaching and countered key assumptions that had become essential to the renunciant path. Subsequent chapters will explore how Kharrāz interacts with Muḥāsibī’s challenge of the renunciant path, but ultimately remains faithful to Shaqīq’s legacy.

2.1 Background

I begin this investigation of early Islamic piety with Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/809–10). Biographical dictionaries provide few details about his life.¹ He was famous as

1. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī, *Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya: Texte arabe avec une introduction et un index par Johannes Pedersen*, ed. Johannes P E Pedersen (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1960), 54–59 (here-

a renunciant master in Khurāsān, the disciple of Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (d. c. 165/782) and the teacher of Ḥātim al-Aṣamm (d. 237/851–2). He may have been a trader before abandoning his wealth and dedicating himself to an ascetic lifestyle of poverty. He carried absolute trust in God into battle, and it is reported that he was killed in battle on the frontier of Central Asia at Kūlān.²

Shaqīq al-Balkhī was remembered for an extreme commitment to God's direct provision and the rejection of financial remuneration and occupational pursuits.³ As part of his legacy, his disciples promoted the idea that belief in God's preordained provision was incompatible with the pursuit of sustenance through labor or business. This ascetic practice seems to have been an exaggeration of the virtue *tawakkul*, literally 'trust', discussed in Sufi dictionaries and manuals. This legacy is consistent with the renunciant path presented in *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*,⁴ the primary source of Shaqīq's teaching, though this specific virtue is not acknowledged.

The biographical dictionaries also suggest that Shaqīq al-Balkhī may have been the first renunciant master in Khurāsān to give an account of 'inner states' (*aḥwāl*, sg. *ḥāl*).⁵ This observation may reflect awareness of Shaqīq's *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, though Shaqīq's four waypoints (*manzila*) of the renunciant path would have been recast as 'inner states'. In later Sufi teaching the term *ḥāl* would approximate inner states attributed to the activity of God rather than individual effort.⁶ It was assumed

after cited as *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*); Abū Nuʿaym Aḥmad al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-asfiyāʾ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1980), vol. 8, pp. 58–73 (hereafter cited as *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*); Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥman ibn ʿAlī Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb ṣifat al-ṣafwāh* (Haydarabad: Matbaʿa Dāʾira al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 132–3; Abū ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾu abnāʾi al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1973), vol. 2, pp. 475–6; Muhammad ibn Shākir Kutubī, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣadr, 1973), vol. 2, pp. 105–6; ʿAbdallāh al-Wāʾiẓ Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Balkhī, *Faḡāʾil-i Balkh*, trans. ʿAbd Allāh Ḥusaynī Balkhī (Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Irān, 1971), 129–143; Ibn al-ʿImād, ʿAbd al-Ḥayy, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār dhahab* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudsī, 1931), vol. 1, p. 341; Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Balkhī, *Faḡāʾil-i Balkh*, 129–142.

2. For an overview, see Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique; nouvel essai sur le lexique technique des mystiques musulmans* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq éditeurs, 1970), 213 and Richard Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums / 2. Teil: Scheiche des Ostens* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 13ff.

3. *Ṭaṭarraḥa al-makāsib, wa-l-maṭālib; fī al-asbāb wa-l-madhāhib*, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 8, p. 59.

4. Shaqīq al-Balkhī, *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, in *Trois Oeuvres Inédites de Mystiques Musulmans: Shaqīq al-Balkhī, Ibn ʿAṭā, Niffārī*, ed. Paul Nwyia (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1973), 17–22 (hereafter cited as *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*).

5. *Wa-ʿazunnu-hu awwal man takallama fī ʿulūm al-aḥwāl*, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 69.

6. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 233.

that these experiences came to those who were diligent to pursue ascetic practices, though their ultimate manifestation would not be directly attributed to these practices. Shaqīq’s piety does describe God’s activity in the life of the disciple as part of the renunciant path, though there is no attempt to bracket this off from the progressive virtues he prescribes. Shaqīq’s *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* does not designate any of the waypoints he describes with the term *ḥāl*.

2.2 *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*

The most direct evidence we have for the piety of Shaqīq al-Balkhī is his small treatise *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, *The Disciplines of Devotion*. The source of this treatise is an undated manuscript held in the Topkapı collection in Istanbul, Emanet 1762.⁷ The treatise describes four waypoints along which the ‘People of Fidelity’ (*ahl al-ṣidq*) progress. The People of Fidelity are clearly renunciants (*zuhhād*, sg. *zāhid*). Attached to the treatise is a short summary of *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*. The chain of transmission mentions only two names: Abū ‘Aqīl⁸ al-Ruṣāfī and Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Zāhid. These transmitters are also narrators of traditions found in Abū Nu‘aym’s entry on Shaqīq. Appended to *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* is a small collection of *logia* attributed to Shaqīq, as well as the account of his decision to become a renunciant (*zāhid*).

Nwyia argues for the authenticity of *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*.⁹ There is room to dispute this:¹⁰ the biographical dictionaries and extant indices do not mention this or any work of Shaqīq by name,¹¹ the transmission chain for the treatise is thin, and the sole extant manuscript containing it is undated. Yet the ideas the treatise presents are compatible with al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī’s discussion of Shaqīq al-Balkhī and his critique of the renunciant path. Muḥāsibī also seems aware of waypoints like love, fear, disapprobation of the world (*zuhd*), and hope. These approximate Shaqīq’s

7. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 213n4.

8. The Topkapı manuscript clearly vocalises the name as ‘‘Aqīl’’, Nwyia vocalises it as ‘‘Uqayl’’.

9. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 213.

10. Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums* / 2. Teil, 25.

11. Though the comment by Hujwīrī: ‘He was versed in all the sciences—legal, practical, and theoretical—and composed many works on various branches of Sūfism.’ Reynold A Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge, 1914), 111.

waypoints, though his ordering is not acknowledged by Muḥāsibī. Even if the treatise was not available to Muḥāsibī, it appears that Shaqīq's expression of the renunciant path was. The ideas presented in the text appear to be uninfluenced by either the Baghdad Sufi circle or the writings of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. c. 300/910). Such influence would be expected if the treatise were written in the late ninth century. Specifically, the treatise does not promote nearness (*qurb*) to God as the goal of religious devotion.¹² It is plausible that the Sufi tradition's acknowledgement of Shaqīq's contribution to the 'knowledge of inner states'¹³ (*ʿulūm al-aḥwāl*) refers to his legacy of four waypoints on the renunciant path and indicates an awareness of this treatise. Even if the text is a pseudonymous work of Shaqīq's disciples, it would be difficult to argue that it was written later than the mid-ninth century.

2.2.1 The Beginning of the Renunciant Path

Ādāb al-ʿibādāt is Islam's earliest extant ascetic manual. In contrast, the *Kutub al-zuhd* were collections of discrete traditions, usually arranged by the eponym of the saying.¹⁴ Another source of early ascetic ideas were Quranic commentaries that presented discrete traditions attached to Quranic verses. One assumes that early renunciant masters would expect students to memorise these and perhaps offered synthesising teaching alongside these traditions. If early renunciant masters working within this model presented a systematised approach to religious devotion, its content is difficult if not impossible to reconstruct. Nwyia's analysis of the commentaries by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767) and Jaʿfar Ṣādiq (d. 148?/765–6?) suggests that ascetic and mystic terminology was in use very early, but falls short of offering any kind of ascetic curriculum.¹⁵

Ādāb al-ʿibādāt promises to guide aspiring renunciants toward God's love. This process includes four discrete stages called waypoints (*manzilāt*). These waypo-

12. See 6.1.5, p. 218.

13. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 69.

14. e.g. ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-zuhd wa-l-raqāʿiq*, ed. Ḥabībullaḥmān Aʿzamī (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 1971).

15. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 25–34; 156–188.

ints suggest that the process of becoming a renunciant is thought of as a ‘path’. Shaqīq designates those who progress through these four stages as the People of Fidelity¹⁶ (*ahl al-ṣidq*). Renunciant masters like Shaqīq had stories to tell of their conversion from a lifestyle of comfort to one of absolute devotion to God.¹⁷ Aspirants wanting to join them would find in *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt* both encouragement and instruction for the renunciant path. Later biographical dictionaries have reports of aspirants attaching themselves to renunciant masters like Shaqīq, though there is not enough evidence within the treatise to establish whether joining the path of the *ahl al-ṣidq* meant becoming part of a distinct community. Muḥāsibī indicates that groups of people (*aqwām*) followed Shaqīq in his opinions about abandoning occupation, which at least implies some shared identification with that practice.¹⁸

Shaqīq’s manual does not expect aspirants to withdraw from society, and he promises that a successful passage along this path will be recognised and appreciated by broader society. His ascetic programme surpasses commonplace Islamic piety and is admired by ordinary Muslims. As this analysis unfolds, it will become clear that the People of Fidelity share certain convictions about the danger of worldly pleasures that urge them to pursue ascetic practices and virtues. Though the aspirant to Shaqīq’s path might have no further ambition than the discipline of his unruly desires, Shaqīq’s treatise invites him to consider a higher calling by embracing the practices and traits of the People of Fidelity. Those interested in following Shaqīq’s manual would be aspirants to the purification of their hearts from the love of the world via the renunciant path.

2.2.2 The Prescribed Outcome of Shaqīq’s Piety

Shaqīq al-Balkhī gives a clear description of those who finish his curriculum on two separate occasions, both in the main manual and in the summary that follows.

16. The main work of Aḥmad ibn ‘Īsā al-Kharrāz, the third scholar of this thesis, is *Kitāb al-ṣidq*.

17. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 59,9–17.

18. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā’il fī al-zuhd*, in *al-Masā’il fī al-māl al-qulūb wa-l-jawāriḥ*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Cairo: The World of Books, 1969), 28. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy reports that he had 300 disciples, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār dhahab*, 341.

I provide an extract of these descriptions:

And if his intention is purified, then he will become [God's] beloved on that day, noble, brought near, refined, gentle, compliant, very pious (or reverent), righteous (free from sin), shunning (loathing) debauchery, and renouncing worldly authority. Whenever you encounter him, he will be smiling, gentle, noble, of refined character, and pleasant (even with) the insincere. He will not frown. He will have the excellence of joy and [carry] pleasant tidings. He avoids sins and opposes lying. He only listens to what God loves and whoever hears him or sees him loves him with the love that God has toward him.¹⁹

In Shaqīq's program, those who pass through the final waypoint (*manzila*) of 'love' (*maḥabba*) become characterised by noble traits. As described in the selection above, this new disposition and its benefits are acquired in this life, primarily in relationship to others. While Shaqīq recommends a programmatic rejection of finding pleasure in this world, those of this highest rank will nonetheless experience joy and happiness while in it. That he 'shuns debauchery' and 'renounces leadership' suggest that his love for God has enabled a detachment from the world that transforms his character. This love for God makes it easy for him to 'hate what God hates'.²⁰ Shaqīq encourages his followers toward the highest rank of love by describing a state of contentment and noble character that is the natural consequence of their love for God.

In the final summary, Shaqīq provides his students with details of the kind of relationship that an advanced practitioner can have with God if he persists in this path. He has displaced any attachment to the world so that his heart is concerned only with God. God recognises this singular devotion and responds by granting the practitioner new experiences of His grace.²¹ He is no longer driven by fear or the hope for Paradise. He also experiences a private intimacy with God that establishes an internal perception of security, tranquility and joy. He does not bring

19. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 21.

20. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

21. '...*karāma min Allāh wa-raḥma wa-nūr wa-anʿām ʿalay-hi*', *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

about these experiences himself; rather, they mark the climax of a series of God-given ‘lights’ that correspond to each stage of Shaqīq’s program. The focus of this potential relationship is love—not just a one-sided love for God, but a reciprocal relationship in which God loves him as well. ‘God will look upon the one who seeks his love and have mercy on him, and cast love upon him,’²² an allusion to *Tā’ Hā’* 20:39.

This reciprocal love and elevated character grant the advanced practitioner a new standing before other men and even angels. In the second stage of Shaqīq’s path, practitioners are already admired by the general public²³ for outward indications of their fear and disapprobation²⁴ of the world (*zuhd*): weeping, abundant prayer, frequent utterance of praise and diminished sleep because of night vigils. Their ascetic acts and contentment in meagre subsistence are observable and attributed to their uncommon devotion. Once the final stage of love is reached, they will not simply be admired, but loved.²⁵ Advanced practitioners will encounter and experience God in their inner life, and that experience will produce an observable character through ascetic practices that grants them special status in society. Despite the single-mindedness necessary to sustain their devotion, they are known for their felicity and contentment rather than somber wariness or severity. This practitioner adheres to an ascetic lifestyle; he enjoys a special relationship with God; and his standing in society is assured.

One final observation about the projected outcomes of Shaqīq’s piety is the effect that the final stage of love has upon the fear that an advanced practitioner had cultivated in the second stage of his journey. Shaqīq predicts that the practitioner’s love and longing (*shawq*) for God will make him forget the fear that he had cultivated earlier. This shift of attention is further attributed to God as an act of mercy, which Shaqīq calls ‘a light’. This mention of light is characteristic of those

22. *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*, 19.

23. ‘*manzila...jasīma ‘inda al-‘āmma*’, *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*, 19.

24. On my translation choice of ‘disapprobation’ for *zuhd*, see 5.0.3, p. 165.

25. *Zāda-hu Allāh mahabba ḥattā yaṣīra ḥubbu-hu fī qulūb al-malā’ika* (MS, *al-malayka*) *wa-qulūb al-‘ibād*’, *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*, 21.

states that Shaqīq attributes not to self-effort, but to divine grace. Later in his description Shaqīq clarifies that the initial fear he had cultivated has been eclipsed by the stronger light of love for God, but is still present. This idea of a change in the advanced practitioner's experience of fear suggests an awareness of the Qur'anic verse, *Yūnus* 10:62: 'Surely God's friends (*awliyā'*) — there will be no fear on them nor will they grieve.'²⁶ For reasons that will become clear in the comparison of Shaqīq's piety with those of Muḥāsibī and al-Kharrāz, I suggest that this is an inter-textual allusion common within some forms of early Islamic piety. Shaqīq is claiming that the outcome of the renunciant path is his recognition that God has chosen him as one of His friends—as one of His *awliyā'*.

2.2.3 Shaqīq al-Balkhī's Method

Shaqīq offers renunciant aspirants a path toward friendship with God. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* provides a curriculum that is especially structured to facilitate guidance along that renunciant path.

Fundamental to this image of the renunciant path is Shaqīq's usage of the term '*manzila*' (waypoint). According to lexicons, the feminine²⁷ form of this noun can indicate not only 'a space which one traverses in journeying', but also a 'rank'. The potential for this word to be used in two different senses is important because Muḥāsibī typically uses it in the sense of 'rank'.²⁸ One might be satisfied that Shaqīq's usage is no different, except that his treatise makes the idea of 'progress' through these *manāzil* explicit. For example, renunciants 'pass through' one *manzila*,²⁹ and they 'arrive' at the next *manzila*.³⁰ A practitioner can also 'seek' a particular *man-*

26. Jones trans.

27. The masculine form appears once in the final summary of his treatise: '*wa-ṣinf min-hum fī manzil al-shawq*', *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 21.

28. For examples, see Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1990), 46, 55–57, 69–70 (hereafter cited as *al-Ri'āya*) = ed. Smith, 11, 19–21, 30–31.

29. '*Jāzū manzilat al-khawf wa-l-shawq ilā janna*', *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

30. '*Fa-ṣārū ilā manzilat al-maḥabba li-llāh*'. Also, '*fa-la-yanzila manzilat al-khawf min al-zuhd*', *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 18.

zila.³¹ For Shaqīq, God causes the renunciant to reach each subsequent waypoint.³² Various adjectives are used to describe them; for example, ‘fine’, ‘beautiful’, ‘good’, ‘auspicious’, and ‘high’.

Shaqīq’s usage of *manzila* as a waypoint assumes an underlying metaphor of DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH. Shaqīq works within the scope of this metaphor to project a specific approach to religious devotion. In order to project this devotion as a progressive process, he segments this journey into different stages. Using metonymy, he then identifies each of these stages with the waypoint associated with that segment. As Shaqīq’s literary structure suggests, it is insufficient to limit each of Shaqīq’s waypoints to only one aspect of the stage he is describing. Though technically *manzila* might refer only to the ‘stopping point’ of each segment, Shaqīq’s descriptions clearly intend both the process and outcomes associated with each particular stage. For example, his description of disapprobation not only includes instructions for the ascetic practices that develop disapproval of the world, but also descriptions of the inner state of one who has attained this virtue.

Though this metaphor appears so natural as to seem unremarkable, Shaqīq’s adoption of this metaphor suggests significant development from Quranic usage. In the Quran, righteousness is presented as a ‘straight path’ in its introductory chapter, *al-Fātiḥa* 1:6. There is a way (*ṣabīl*) to God (*Al-Insān* 76:29) that is contrasted with the way toward Hell (*Al-Nisā’* 4:115). The former is one of guidance (*ruḥd*) and the latter one of error (*Al-A’rāf* 7:146). Mankind can stray from this path, though guidance to it is from God alone (*Al-Naḥl* 16:9, *Al-Insān* 76:3). These examples focus not on progress through life, but on life itself as a path that ultimately ends in an eschatological appointment with God. Perhaps there is a weak implication that the preferred path is one of obedience or righteousness, but this is not prominent. Precedence for the Sufi term ‘*ṭarīqa*’ is even thinner. Some stray from God’s path (*ṭarīqa*) of guidance to become fuel for Hellfire, in eternal torment (*Al-Jinn* 72:14–17). The Recitation (*qur’ān*) given to the Prophet provides guidance to the straight

31. ‘*Wa-huwa ākhidh fī al-riyāḍa wa-l-khawf li-ṭalab manzilat al-khawf*’, *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*, 19.

32. ‘*Wa-lā yuṣayyiru Allāh ilā hādhihi al-manzila aḥadan ...*’, *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*, 20.

path (*Al-Aḥqāf* 46:30). Only one passage associates a path with moral excellence, but only in an accusative construction (*amthalu-hum ṭarīqatan*) that relies on the more basic metaphor of LIFE AS A PATH.³³ Moreover, *manzila* never occurs in the Quran as the waypoint of a journey, but only as the phases or stages of the sun and moon's course (*Yūnus* 10:5, *Yāʿ Sīn* 36:39).

Shaqīq not only extends this basic metaphor to include defined stages or steps, but he associates these steps with virtues.³⁴ Nwyia suggests Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148?/765–6?) as an earlier scholar who discussed an interior dimension of religious devotion, even mentioning virtues.³⁵ But these are not associated with this metaphor of DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH, nor are they presented with any pattern of organisation or progression. Muḥāsibī fully develops the interior dimension of religious devotion, but never reduces his piety to a defined path through specified waypoints. Further discussion will suggest that Muḥāsibī preferred to depict the progressive acquisition of virtues with other metaphors, and may even have avoided Shaqīq's approach. Later Sufi manuals, perhaps better characterised as Sufi encyclopedias, develop specific terminology to highlight different aspects of these virtues and do not usually maintain a progressive pattern.³⁶

By depicting the virtues he has chosen as 'waypoints', Shaqīq operates within this metaphor of DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH, though he never uses the terms 'journey' or 'path'. His programme has four distinct waypoints. They are disapprobation (*zuhd*), fear (*khawf*), longing for Paradise (*shawq ilā al-janna*) and love for God (*maḥabba li-llāh*). He structures each of these waypoints into four sections with reoccurring formulas:

After identifying each waypoint, the first section gives the aspirant specific instructions for that waypoint. These instructions can be involved, for example the

33. For a rich discussion of the similar metaphor, LIFE AS A STORY, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 173–75.

34. The prototypical virtue is probably a habitual attitude or mental state, though its association with a habit meant to evoke or even characterise these attitudes seems common. My usage prefers to reserve 'virtue' for traits or character qualities.

35. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 215–6.

36. e.g. Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhi, *The doctrine of the Sufis = Kitāb al-taʿarruf li-madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf*, trans. A J Arberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 79–99.

Table 2.1: Textual Structure of Shaqīq's Waypoints

	Translation	Arabic	Content
1	'The entry into'	<i>wa-mubtada'</i>	the basic requirements
2	'If he practises it'	<i>idhā maḍā bi-hi</i>	God's reaction
3	'And on that day'	<i>yawma'idhin</i> or <i>hīna'idhin</i>	inward results
4	'You will only encounter him'	<i>laysa talqā-hu illā</i>	outward results

detailed description of ascetic practices in the waypoint of disapprobation (*zuhd*). The second section explains how God reacts to the aspirant's initial pursuit of this waypoint.³⁷ Shaqīq uses temporal language to indicate a progression of human and divine activity that culminates with God granting a state of illumination. The third section explains what kinds of changes the aspirant can expect. Generally speaking, the renunciant will master his desires and have a more manageable relationship to the world. The final section introduces a list of observable changes in the comportment of the aspirant, including descriptions of how society will view him. Though Nwyia's editing of the text makes it difficult to notice this structure, its consistency suggests that Shaqīq and his followers considered the pedagogical sustainability of his teaching in the way they structured and transmitted this text.

2.2.3.1 The Waypoint of Disapprobation

The first waypoint of Shaqīq's journey is disapprobation (*zuhd*) of the world, usually translated 'renunciation'.³⁸ In order to acquire this virtue, an aspirant's first priority is to discipline the *nafs*—the inner source of his desire for the pleasures of the world.³⁹ Though there is a direct connection between the *nafs* and the passions of the body (*al-shahawāt*), there is a clear distinction. While the *shahawāt* are limited to physical urgings of the body,⁴⁰ like hunger, the scope of the *nafs* includes these,⁴¹

37. The introductory phrase is missing from the waypoint of love, though a corresponding paragraph describes progress made within it.

38. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 216–21; Sara Sviri, 'The Self and Its Transformation in Ṣūfism', in *Self and Self-transformation in the History of Religions*, ed. David Dean Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 200–201. My translation choice of 'disapprobation' will be explored fully in chapter four.

39. 'Wa-mubtada' al-dukhūl fī al-zuhd adab al-nafs', *Ādāb al-'ibādāt*, 17.

40. 'Fa-inna al-tamannī min al-shahawāt', *Ādāb al-'ibādāt*, 17.

41. 'Wa-inna shahawāt al-fuḍūl ḥubb al-dunyā', *Ādāb al-'ibādāt*, 18.

along with pleasures of the world (*al-dunyā*), like wealth and possessions. The *nafs* urges the heart to value the life of this world so that the love of the world becomes imbedded there. Though the localisation of the *nafs* within physiological features is lacking, Shaqīq does recognise a connection between desires and physiological phenomena. Shaqīq's description suggests that his regimen will weaken the *nafs* as a source of this love for the world⁴² and extinguish what remains of that deviant love from the aspirant's heart.⁴³ In this way he will develop disapprobation of the world.

In literature of devotion and in ethical contexts, '*nafs*' often refers to the centre where man's desires originate, his organ of desire. I use a variety of strategies for translating *nafs* in this context and sometimes leave it untranslated.⁴⁴ It is not certain that Shaqīq uses the term in the same way as later Sufis. In this treatise, the *nafs* stirs up not only the sensual desires of the body (*al-shahawāt*), but also pleasures of the world, such as wealth. When active, it urges a person to desire what is in this present world more than what God might give him in the next world (*al-ākhirā*). Shaqīq's usage is significantly more primitive than al-Tirmidhī's.⁴⁵ I find no evidence to link Shaqīq's transformative process with a juxtaposition of Quranic passages containing '*nafs*', as Sviri suggests for Sufis.⁴⁶ For further reflection, see my discussion in chapter four.

Disapprobation of the world is in juxtaposition to desiring the world and therefore involves diminishing the outflow of desires from the *nafs*. Disapprobation requires a resolve to remove the love of the world from the heart of the believer. It is critical that this outpouring of desire be diverted away from passions that are unavoidably entangled in the love of the world. Perhaps Shaqīq's resolve is

42. 'Idhā ... yarawwaḍu nafsu-hu wa-yu'addibu-hā lā yaqṭa'u 'an-hā shahawāt al-fuḍūl akhrajā min qalbi-hi shahawāti-hā', *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 17.

43. 'Fa-idhā maḍā bi-hi [al-zuhd] ... akhraj min qalbi-hi ṭā'ifa min ḥubb al-dunyā', *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 18.

44. One notes that the word *nafs* has entered the basic religious vocabulary of English-speaking Muslims.

45. For a discussion of al-Tirmidhī's localisation of the *nafs* within the humours of the body, Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 219; Sviri, 'The Self and Its Transformation in Ṣūfism', 198–9. They are correct that this is lacking in Shaqīq's treatise. Nonetheless, his conviction that a person's potential love of the world has a vital connection to physiological appetites must not be overlooked.

46. Ibid., 197. For further reflection see 5.2.3, p. 187.

strengthened by Quranic passages that link the love of the world with unbelief.⁴⁷ His concern for eradicating the love of the world may indicate that he understands these passages in absolute terms. It is eschatologically risky to love the world. Divesting oneself of any love of the world grants eschatological security—a compelling motivation for complete severance from the world’s delights. There are Quranic verses that suggest a more mediated position of loving the things of the next life *more* than the things of this world,⁴⁸ but these seem out of place in Shaqīq’s account, especially in traditions attributed to him. It will become clear that this is an important distinctive of Shaqīq’s piety.

Shaqīq’s strategy for extinguishing the influence of the *nafs* upon physical passions is to divert its desires through hunger. In this way man’s organ of desire occupies itself with the desire for food. Hunger distracts it from the love of the world. And conversely, satiety will distract the believer from worship and prayer. Through hunger, the *nafs* will be starved of its love for the world and become weakened.

To accomplish this, Shaqīq recommends eating two meagre meals each day. These should not be combined into one larger meal, lest the renunciant find his hunger satisfied for some portion of the day. For each day that the renunciant continues in this regimen, he will find that God has expelled a measure of his love for the world from his heart. In its place God will place what Shaqīq calls the ‘light of disapprobation’,⁴⁹ a state of disapproval, ambivalence and even rejection of the world. After forty days of this regimen God will have removed the darkness of loving this world from his heart and he will experience a profoundly new attitude toward the world:

If you meet him he will be strong, energetic, contented and self-sufficient. He will have few worries and a great rank. ... The illumination of the renunciants (*al-zāhidūn*) will be in his heart. He has no

47. *Al-Naḥl* 16:107, *Al-Qiyāma* 75:20, *Al-Insān* 76:27, *Al-Fajr* 89:20.

48. *Āl ‘Imrān* 3:14; *Al-Mā’ida* 5:41; *Al-Naḥl* 16:107; *Al-Ḥadīd* 57:20–21; *Al-Nāzi‘āt* 79:40; *Al-A‘lā* 87:16.

49. *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*, 18.

need of anything in the world except subsistence in living, though he is better off than everyone else.⁵⁰

2.2.3.2 The Waypoint of Fear

Fear has a unique relationship to disapprobation because it ensures its efficacy. Without fear a practitioner will not be able to maintain his attitude of disapprobation. Though Shaqīq says in the first section that a disciple can end his journey with the waypoint of disapprobation, he explains in this section that this is not sustainable without fear.⁵¹

There are two imperatives in this stage: to meditate on death and to frighten oneself with an awareness of God's constant oversight. Shaqīq's description provides scant details to establish the nature of this self-imposed fear. Is this fear of death to be equated with a fear of God's judgement? This seems natural, in which case the collapse of disapprobation would seem to have eschatological consequences. Is this another hint that lapsing from disapprobation of the world to desire for it situates one within the realm of unbelief? But perhaps one should fear not the final judgement, but rather the suffering of the disobedient in the grave.

There is no mention that the awareness of God's oversight is linked to the transgression of God's commands. Rather the link seems to be disapprobation, suggesting that one fears God's awareness that he has lapsed back into the love of the world. Perhaps sustained disapprobation of the world grants the aspirant confidence for the day of judgement—ought the aspirant to fear losing that confidence and thus stick to his disapprobation? This close connection between disapprobation and fear, 'brothers' to one another, foreshadows Muḥāsibī's concern that the legal status of *zuhd* be clarified: is it incumbent or supererogatory?⁵² Shaqīq's link between *zuhd*, fear, and the final judgement suggests that he considered it incumbent. And if the only way to ensure disapprobation of the world is to distract the

50. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 18.

51. 'Wa-lā yalzamu al-ʿabd al-zuhd alladhī huwa al-zuhd ḥattā yalzama al-khawf', *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 18. Nwyia considers this account incoherent, Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 221. I consider this an indication of the tension between Shaqīq's juxtaposition of human and divine activity.

52. See 5.2, p. 175.

nafs with ascetic practices, then are not those ascetic practices also incumbent, at least if one wants confidence about the day of judgement? These are all questions that are unanswered in *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*.

As with disapprobation, God observes the efforts of the aspirant to awaken fear and responds with an act of grace. He places ‘the light of fear’ in his heart, meaning that the aspirant’s fear is no longer self-effected.⁵³ After forty days, these divine lights of disapprobation and fear are ‘united’ and become a source of changed attitudes and social interactions. This follows the same pattern observed with disapprobation: the aspirant pursues an ascetic programme for forty days, God observes this practice, and illuminates the aspirant’s heart so that his character, lifestyle, and social interactions change.

The results of this stage contrast sharply with those of the other waypoints. Whatever sense of accomplishment the practitioner experienced in his disapprobation should be replaced by introspective self-effacement. He is characterised by fear and sorrow, perhaps from the cultivation of constant attention to God’s awareness of his shortcomings. This fear and sorrow will consume him and inspire constant weeping, sleepless nights and abundant worship. He no longer receives any benefit from his life in this world. Both his changed demeanour and religious devotion will be noticed by society around him and he will receive a new social status. Because common people are unaware of the higher stages that could follow, they believe that he has reached the apex of religious devotion and honour him accordingly.⁵⁴ The sobriety of his fear and disapprobation, and the caution with which he interacts with the world will set him apart in society and earn him the respect of the larger community.

53. This fear that God effects is called ‘awe’ or ‘reverence’: *ʿfa-alzama-hu shayʿ min al-mahāba ... zāda-hu Allāh mahābaʿ*, *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 19.

54. *ʿFa-qad nazzala nafsū-hu manzila ʿazīma jasīma ʿinda al-ʿamma li-anna-hum lā yaʿrifūna ghayra-hāʿ*, *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 19.

2.2.3.3 The Longing for Paradise

Shaqīq's third waypoint, the longing for Paradise,⁵⁵ provides relief from the burden of fear and sadness experienced in the second stage. Like fear, this waypoint involves engaging the mind, in this case with the delights of Paradise as they are described in the Quran.⁵⁶ God will then recognise the 'sound intention of his struggle' in the stimulation of his imagination toward these delights. God's response of grace is to settle the light of longing in his heart.⁵⁷

It is important to clarify how this God-given peace relates to the prior waypoints Shaqīq has described.

So when [the light of longing for Paradise] overcomes his heart, he has arrived at [this waypoint] of longing. And God makes him forget the [burden of] fear which was in his heart from [the waypoint] of fear. His burden is cast from him without any decrease in the light of his fear or separation from it.⁵⁸

These lines are cryptic because Shaqīq uses the term 'fear' in two different ways in the same sentence. Though the light of longing that God places in the practitioner's heart will remove the disturbing emotions of the second stage, Shaqīq does not mean that the practitioner no longer fears God. Shaqīq may mean that the practitioner will no longer have to frighten himself in order to invite God's gift of fear, perhaps better labeled as awe (*mahāba*). And unlike self-imposed fear, God's gift of reverent fear might not carry the same emotional burden as its human inspired precedent.

Shaqīq's language is unclear because there are three aspects to 'fear' in this treatise. First, fear is a practice in which one contemplates death and the oversight of God. Secondly, 'fear', along with grief, is the emotional result of this practice. Finally, 'fear' also appears as the 'light of fear', which is an act of God's grace in the

55. 'al-shawq ilā al-janna'.

56. For example, *Al-Wāqī'a* 56:11–40.

57. 'Wa-ʿalima Allāh min-hu al-niyya al-ṣaḥīḥa fī al-ijtihād, sakana qalba-hu nūr al-shawq ilā al-janna', *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 19. Shaqīq's use of 'ijtihād' in this passage probably refers to his ascetic programme comprehensively.

58. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 19. This translation relies on a parallel passage in the next section on love.

heart of the practitioner. I suggest that on one occasion Shaqīq refers to this new kind of God-given fear as reverence or awe (*mahāba*).⁵⁹ These layers of reference are consistent with Shaqīq’s strategy of referring to entire stages of devotion through the label of one waypoint—what I am suggesting is an example of metonymy.⁶⁰

As with the first two stages, the practitioner is to continue in this longing for Paradise for forty days. And again, as with disapprobation and fear, God will respond by granting him the ‘light of the longing for Paradise’. Not only has he been delivered from the negative emotions of the waypoint of fear, he no longer experiences negative emotions that might have their source in an attachment to the world. This contentment has an important connection to Shaqīq’s ideal of abandoning remuneration and occupational pursuits. ‘He never sets out to acquire money nor occupies himself with work nor saddens himself over misfortunes.’⁶¹ He can even laugh and rejoice because he is no longer concerned about what he possesses.⁶² This change of attitude encourages his ascetic practices: ‘He fasts fervently and is fervent in his practice of arising at night for prayer.’⁶³

2.2.3.4 Love

The culmination of Shaqīq’s renunciatory path is the love (*maḥabba*) of God. This waypoint is the most prestigious stage and demands certain qualifications of anyone who pursues it. The aspirant’s heart must have been strengthened by ‘certainty that is authentic (*al-yaqīn al-ṣādiq*) and by surpassing actions that are purified from sins’.⁶⁴ The first qualification likely refers to the practitioner’s confidence in his own progress.⁶⁵ The second indicates the central outcome of the prior three waypoints—to purify the heart of sinful actions. Devotion to God is a path toward

59. See n. 53 on p. 22.

60. See 2.2.3, p. 15.

61. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

62. ‘*Fa-laysa talqā-hu illā dāḥik mustabshir bi-mā fi yaday-hi*’, *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

63. ‘*Huwa al-ṣawwām wa-al-qawwām*’, *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20. These are intense or iterative forms of the active participle.

64. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

65. It is tempting to see here a reference to the overarching theme of this treatise, *al-ṣidq*. The necessary construct chain is absent.

purification. The development of ascetic habits through the first three waypoints is not sufficient without their desired outcome, a heart purified from the love of the world. Notably absent is any reference here to the *nafs*.⁶⁶ After successful completion of these first three stages the renunciant is ready to pursue the love of God because his *nafs* is no longer a significant factor.

Shaqīq explains that the waypoint of love does not displace the practitioner's prior experiences of God's grace⁶⁷ in the waypoints of disapprobation, fear, or the longing for Paradise. Yet Shaqīq insists that the practitioner's love and longing for God will cause him to forget the inner states caused by the waypoints of fear and the longing for Paradise. It is not clear whether Shaqīq would identify these as emotions, or if he simply means that the practitioner now meditates on God's love instead of on fear or the longing for Paradise. Notably absent from what one forgets is disapprobation.⁶⁸

This introduction has foreshadowed the basic method for this waypoint. Through the preparation of ascetic practices and their resulting virtues, the practitioner is in a position to experience God's love. There is a departure here from the pattern of the prior three waypoints in that the initiative for it is with God and not with the practitioner. The characteristic phrase '*wa-mubtada' al-dukhūl*' (see Table 2.1, page 18) now introduces God's action rather than that of the aspirant. It is God who inspires his heart (*an yulhima qalba-hu*) to love what God loves and hate what he hates.

Yet the disciple's response is not absent: he must strive for God's love and His pleasure so that God will look upon him and 'cast his love on him'. Further, it is the practitioner's responsibility to persist in striving after God's love⁶⁹ for forty days. This indicates that 'loving God' is also a practice and not entirely a passive experience. Its 'ascetic' character might rightly be questioned, but it does require

66. *Contra* Sviri, see 2.3.1, p. 29.

67. Shaqīq's descriptions justify this term.

68. '*Wa yansá mā kāna fī-hi min al-khawf wa-l-shawq ilá al-janna*', *Ādāb al-ibādāt*, 20.

69. 'God's love' in this treatise may refer to (1) what God loves, (2) God's love of him and, or (3) his love of God.

sustained human effort.

If the disciple continues in this practice, his character will be transformed and his standing among men and angels will be elevated. Most importantly, he will experience God's love. 'He only listens to what God loves. Whoever hears or sees him loves him, with that love that God has for him'.⁷⁰ It is important to note that Shaqīq's description of experiencing God's love is couched within language that maintains the practitioner's connection to the world. There is no sense in which this experience of God's love is a departure from the world.

Shaqīq ends this treatise with an analogy to explain the relationship between God's acts of grace in disapprobation, fear, the longing for Paradise and love. He uses the terminology of light to describe God's response to the practices of each waypoint. These lights are the final, transformative effect of each waypoint upon the practitioner. Shaqīq compares the effects of each waypoint with celestial bodies whose light is visible in the sky. Disapprobation and fear are like the stars; the longing for Paradise is like the moon; and love is like the sun. The appearance of each is overpowered by the presence of what is brighter. Though a brighter light dominates lesser lights, the lesser lights have not lost their position in the sky. Rather they are no longer noticed because of the intensity of the greater light.⁷¹

The key to understanding this analogy is understanding what Shaqīq means by 'lights'. A careful look at his treatise indicates that there are two relevant sections within each waypoint. The first is indicated by the phrase, 'so if he continues in it[each waypoint]'. The second begins with the phrase, 'at that moment'. In each case the first explains how the light of God in each waypoint affects the inner life of the practitioner. The second introduces a description of new behaviours that indicate a new status within society. I suggest that the focus of the analogy of celestial lights is on the former; that is, on the changes of character that God effects within the practitioner.

70. 'Lā yasma'u illā fī-mā yuḥibbu Allāh. Qad aḥabba-hu man sami'a bi-hi aw ra'ā-hu wa-dhālika bi-ḥubb Allāh 'azza wa-jalla īyāhu', *Ādāb al-'ibādāt*, 21.

71. *Ādāb al-'ibādāt*, 21.

Though the latter descriptions are significant as the observable indicators of the lights God has placed in the heart, the picture of brighter lights outshining lesser ones does not fit well with the outward behaviours and social perceptions that are the consequence of each stage. Rather, taken together, these descriptions yield Shaqīq’s renunciant path, including a common thread of contentment in subsistence and the abnegation of seeking any profit (see Table 2.2). Other practices include meditation, continuous thanksgiving, copious fasting, frequent night vigils, and the refusal of leadership. The aspirant has put aside vicious practices like slander, lying and theft. With the exception of the weeping observed as a consequence of the waypoint of fear, all of these outward practices and effects are cumulative.

Table 2.2: Livelihood in Shaqīq’s Waypoints

Waypoint	Outward Effects on Livelihood
1 <i>zuhd</i>	‘He has been delivered from the toil of seeking and has released his <i>nafs</i> from all kinds of toil.’
2 <i>fear</i>	‘Living [in the world] has no benefit for him because of the intensity of his fear.’
3 <i>longing</i>	‘He never sets out to acquire money nor occupies himself with work.’

Though these outward effects provide a comprehensive picture of Shaqīq’s path, his analogy of the celestial lights presents God’s acts of grace as discrete, yet fused to culminate in a life no longer lived in the diminished clarity of the stars and moon. It is the second section of each waypoint that maps to this analogy. The highest stage for the *ahl al-ṣidq* is the culmination of God’s transformation of the aspirant’s heart. His *nafs* no longer influences his passions and God’s light suffuses any darkness of the world in his heart. His reverence for God strengthens this estrangement from the world through caution and dissatisfaction in his dealings with it. The hope of blessings in the Hereafter further intensifies this alienation from the world while warding against depression and an obsession with failure. This

progression of inner virtues begins with disapprobation of the world and culminates with the love of God (see Table 2.3). All of these purify his heart so that his striving for God’s love is met with God ‘casting his love upon him’:

Their hearts have become attached to their Lord because they delight in His private discourse (*munājā*) with them when they are alone with Him. His mercy and kindness, which they had expected [from him], appear upon their hearts. [God] overcomes (*huwa al-ghālib*) their hearts. God is their intimate friend in this world and their tranquility, their joy and the happiness of their hearts.⁷²

Table 2.3: Transformation of the Heart in Shaqīq’s Waypoints

	Waypoint	Inner Waxing of God’s Grace
1	<i>zuhd</i>	The <i>nafs</i> is weakened and love of the world is banished from his heart.
2	fear	Awe for God fills his heart.
3	longing	God calms his heart and banishes fear.
4	love	God ‘casts His love on him’ so that nothing is more beloved to him than God.

The consistent ordering of outward manifestations after the description of God’s act of grace in each waypoint clearly communicates the priority of this inner transformation.

2.3 Prior Analyses of *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*

Paul Nwyia and Sara Sviri have provided detailed analyses of the piety that Shaqīq al-Balkhī presents in *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*. Nwyia has produced the critical edition of this treatise and its seminal analysis. Sviri’s discussion offers limited interaction with Nwyia’s discussion, though her parallel discussion of Tirmidhī’s *Manāzil al-‘ibād min al-‘ibāda* is valuable. My discussion will focus on chief points of disagreement with each of them.

72. *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*, 21-22.

2.3.1 Sviri's Analysis

Sviri discusses Shaqīq's treatise within her article, 'The Self and its Transformation in Ṣūfism'.⁷³ In this article she contests the view that successive movements within early Islam demonstrate a transition from asceticism to mysticism. Rather, she distinguishes movements that idealise asceticism from those that promote asceticism as a temporary technique to achieve inner transformation. The Sufis, she suggests, embody the latter and concentrated their efforts on transforming the '*nafs*', which she defines as 'the inferior aspect of the human psychological condition'.⁷⁴ She suggests that Shaqīq's treatise is an early treatment of this transformation process, and examines it in parallel to Tirmidhī's *Manāzil al-ʿibād min al-ʿibāda*.⁷⁵ She does not discuss how Shaqīq's approach differs from that of Tirmidhī, nor does she explain how Shaqīq's understanding of the *nafs* relates to her conclusions about the Sufi desire to transform the self (*nafs*).

Shaqīq's treatise indicates that his piety does not fit within the model she suggests for Sufism. Shaqīq does not define the *nafs* with metaphysical terms, but simply describes it as the source of desires that lead the heart away from worshipping God. As such, it is not the *nafs* that undergoes transformation, but the heart. The *nafs* is the primary object of his programme only in the first stage, in which Shaqīq prescribes hunger as a distraction to its fundamental impulse to love the world. Even then, the goal is to prevent the *nafs* from inciting passions and desires within the heart. Except for one reference within the introduction to the waypoint of fear, the *nafs* is not mentioned again in any of the subsequent waypoints.

More significant are assumptions she makes in her treatment of *zuhd*. Modern academic treatment of *zuhd* is complex and began with the assumption that Islamic *zuhd* is equivalent to the asceticism of late antiquity.⁷⁶ She acknowledges and perhaps accepts this association in her rejection of Goldziher's suggestion that

73. Sviri, 'The Self and Its Transformation in Ṣūfism'.

74. Ibid., 196.

75. Muḥammad al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Manāzil al-ʿibād min al-ʿibāda*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Juyūshī (Cairo: Dār al-Nahḍa al-ʿArabiya, 1977).

76. See 5.0.1.1, p. 160.

mysticism within Islam developed from a more primitive asceticism.⁷⁷ With this assumption in place, it is logical to assume that instances of *zuhd* refer to ascetic practices, for example Shaqīq's waypoint of *zuhd*. To convey this, she translates *zuhd* in this context as 'abstention'.⁷⁸ Her insistence that ascetic practices (*zuhd*) have no sustained role in Shaqīq's approach to piety requires that she limit abstention to the initial waypoint of *zuhd* with its focus on hunger. 'Periods of fasting ... do not convey an ascetic ideal that should be adhered to indefinitely; they are a temporary means to an end.'⁷⁹ She interprets Shaqīq's language of illumination to mean that inner transformation 'overrides the need for external ascetic practices'.⁸⁰ These statements are critical to her conclusion that Sufis do not idealise asceticism and that ascetic acts serve only as temporary techniques of inner transformation.

Even if one grants that 'abstention' or 'ascetic practices' is an accurate translation of *zuhd*, Sviri's analysis neglects ascetic practices in Shaqīq's treatise that are the consequence of God's illumination of the aspirant's heart. Table 2.2 (page 27) follows the development of abandoning livelihood in Shaqīq's treatise, surely an ascetic practice. Even in the third waypoint Shaqīq describes the illuminated aspirant as a fervent faster (*al-ṣawwām*) and one who makes frequent night vigils (*al-qawwām*).⁸¹ Shaqīq presents ascetic practices throughout his treatise, even in the idealised descriptions of those who have received God's light. Shaqīq's People of Fidelity are *zuhhād*. Certainly Shaqīq suggests that forty-day periods of sustained focus on particular ascetic practices should result in God's granting the practitioner a new kind of internal experience.⁸² And this new internal experience may well affect the nature and intensity of ascetic acts. Yet the treatise does not suggest that ascetic practices, like limiting food or sleep, are temporary practices. One

77. Sviri, 'The Self and Its Transformation in Ṣūfism', 197.

78. Ibid., 200. She switches between 'abstention' and ascetic practices.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

81. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

82. As Nwyia and Sviri indicate, 'forty days' is symbolic. I conjecture that Shaqīq is referring here to the maturity of these practices into lifelong habits, even if their character and intensity changes once God's light has entered the practitioner's heart. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 222; Sviri, 'The Self and Its Transformation in Ṣūfism', 200–1.

of Nwyia's concerns with Shaqīq and Sufis after him is the 'idolatry of the empty stomach'.⁸³

Sviri's conclusion is further challenged by Shaqīq's comparison of God's illumination to the light of celestial objects. He does not present *zuhd* there as a temporary practice, but as a state that continues even if its light is dim in comparison to the light of love.

What this also suggests is that the translation of *zuhd* as 'ascetic practices' is problematic.⁸⁴ At least in Shaqīq's treatise, *zuhd* is presented as a virtue or state in which the heart is no longer pursuing desires for the world. The first section of this waypoint focuses on the ascetic practice of hunger because this is Shaqīq's recommendation for disciplining the *nafs*, to prevent it from influencing the heart. His emphasis is strong, even to the point of mentioning the 'light of hunger'. But it is disapprobation of the world, achieved through hunger, that maintains its celestial station even when the brilliance of God's love is discovered.

I conclude that Sviri is mistaken in using Shaqīq's treatise to support her conclusions about the place of asceticism within Sufi piety. *Zuhd* is something other than ascetic practices and is not a temporary stage on the renunciant path. Disciplining the *nafs* does not transform it, but redirects its energies away from inciting evil in the heart. When the *nafs* is distracted by hunger, the heart is free to be transformed by the light of disapprobation so that it maintains proper distance from the world and its pleasures. It is the heart of the renunciant (*zāhid*) that is transformed; his disapprobation of the world doesn't fade; and it is unlikely that he abandons a renunciant lifestyle.

2.3.2 Nwyia's Analysis

Nwyia's treatment of Shaqīq occurs across several of his works as part of a larger project to chart the development of Sufi mystical language. Though his periodisa-

83. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 219.

84. See 5.0.2, p. 163.

tion of the Sufi movement is no longer considered historical,⁸⁵ his research does not operate within an essentialist approach.⁸⁶ Nwyia contrasts Shaqīq with Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, who presents ‘stations’ as static and unconnected.⁸⁷ Shaqīq’s waypoints carefully balance the disciple’s ascetic practices with the divine response of inner transformation.⁸⁸ *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* does not interject new vocabulary into the early Islamic discourse of spiritual purification. Rather Shaqīq expresses his own progressive spiritual experience through a Quranic lexical matrix not dissimilar to the early commentary evidence of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.⁸⁹ Nwyia recognised in this treatise the earliest extant expression of inner purification as a progressive journey through defined stations.⁹⁰

Nwyia is thorough in his analysis of the two complementary aspects of human effort and divine grace within each waypoint. He suggests this as a precursor to the later Sufi distinction between these two components as *maqām* and *ḥāl*. One important distinction between Shaqīq and later Sufis is the appearance of divine initiative as light within each station. For later Sufis, divine initiative is reserved for the seasoned practitioner who has already traversed the preliminary stations defined by human effort.⁹¹

Perhaps it is this observation that inclines Nwyia to interpret Shaqīq’s fourth station as categorically different from the others. He sees in Shaqīq’s description a discontinuity in the manner in which a practitioner enters into this fourth stage. Unlike former stages, there is no place for human effort. The balance of human effort and divine initiative in the prior three stages has granted to the practitioner the pure heart that is the pre-requisite of the station of love.⁹² Perhaps on this

85. See Karamustafa for a good discussion, especially the bibliography he provides in his notes. Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 6-7.

86. Ibid., vii-viii.

87. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 216, 230.

88. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 15.

89. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 210-211, 230.

90. Ibid., 215-16.

91. Ibid., 233.

92. ‘Il est donc clair que le passage à cette quatrième mansion ne dépend plus de l’initiative de l’homme. ... Quand ces conditions sont remplies, Dieu introduit l’homme dans l’étape de l’amour en faisant luire dans son cœur la lumière de l’amour.’ Ibid., 227.

basis, the entry point is exclusively a divine act: 'The beginning of the entry in the love of God is that God inspires the heart to love that which God loves.'⁹³

Sviri interprets this passage differently: 'This stage starts with the following practice: the seeker motivates his heart to love all that God loves and to detest all that God detests. The beginning of this stage, too, is a self-willed practice that, when carried out with sincerity, is complemented with a corresponding God-inspired love whose light increases in the heart.'⁹⁴

Though acknowledged expressly by neither Nwyia nor Sviri, at stake in this discussion is whether Shaqīq is suggesting a level of piety that is wholly passive. Shaqīq has described each of the first three waypoints as a subtle balance between human effort and divine passivity. Is his fourth stage of love one in which human effort plays only a minor role?

The resolution of this discussion is not simply a matter of how to translate '*an yulhima qalba-hu*'. Later in the paragraph, the practitioner is exhorted to 'seek the love of God', at which point God will 'cast his love upon him'. Understanding the agent of this 'inspiration toward love' as exclusively God creates an awkward progression. God inspires the practitioner to love so that he loves God above all else. Yet God grants love to the one who seeks His love. Even though there is no lexical evidence to support *ilhām* as a reflexive human act, this suggests that the practitioner is not wholly passive. Yet *alhamā* does suggest God as the primary agent of this stage. And despite the element of human effort, the paragraph in its entirety, along with the description of this stage, suggests that God's initiative outweighs human effort in this waypoint.

I suggest that the underlying continuum in Shaqīq's treatise is a movement away from the love of the world toward the love of God. Success in the renunciant lifestyle removes the love of the world from the heart and restrains the tendency

93. 'Le commencement de l'entrée dans l'amour de Dieu, c'est que Dieu inspire au cœur d'aimer ce que Dieu aime.' Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 228. Arabic, '*wa-mubtada' al-dukhūl fī maḥabbat Allāh 'an yulhima qalba-hu maḥabbat mā aḥabba Allāh*', *Ādāb al-'ibādāt*, 20. Also Gramlich, 'In die Gottesliebe beginnt der Mensch einzutreten, wenn Gott seinem Herzen eingibt, zu lieben, was Gott liebt,' *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums* / 2. Teil, 53.

94. Sviri, 'The Self and Its Transformation in Ṣūfism', 198.

of the *nafs* toward it. Shaqīq describes a terminal state of experiencing God’s love that is just beyond the human effort of asceticism. Nonetheless, an ever-present element of ascetic piety would seem to exclude absolute passivity even for the most advanced practitioner.

There is then an underlying tension throughout Shaqīq’s treatise that underscores the push and pull of human effort and divine initiative. Sviri disregards this tension by insisting that ascetic practices are absent in Shaqīq’s programme beyond the first forty day cycle. Nwyia does not make this mistake. Yet throughout his discussion he fails to interact with the ascetic nature of Shaqīq’s piety. He is put off by Shaqīq’s acceptance of the Baṣran ‘idolatry of hunger’. His castigation of the later Sufis for their physiological explanations of the *nafs* suggests that he undervalues the relationship that these pieties posited between the spiritual and physical domains.⁹⁵ Shaqīq did not advocate an absolute flight from human initiative, and he envisioned an attachment to God that required the nurture of ascetic virtues and practices⁹⁶ that would compete against the pleasure of the world.

Both Nwyia and Sviri lapse in their analysis of Shaqīq’s asceticism. Sviri strives to find in Shaqīq the Sufi whose enlightenment has led him past ascetic practices and the renunciant lifestyle. Nwyia does not neglect Shaqīq’s ascetic piety altogether, but fails to integrate his experience of ascetic virtues and practices into the larger project of developing a lexicon of Sufi mysticism.

2.4 Muḥāsibī’s Criticism of Shaqīq

Though Shaqīq promised the renunciant aspirant love and respect from the Muslim community, there were Muslim scholars who questioned his approach to religious devotion. Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857–8) challenged not only Shaqīq’s teaching, but also the growing number of renunciants who shared his ascetic approach. In the short treatise *al-Makāsib*⁹⁷ or *Profits*, Muḥāsibī focuses that challenge against

95. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 218–19.

96. See 5.0.1, p. 159.

97. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, in *al-Masā’il fī a‘māl al-qulūb wa-l-jawāriḥ*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Cairo: The World of Books, 1969), 171–234 (hereafter cited as *al-Makāsib*).

the idealisation of abandoning profitable livelihood for a lifestyle of dependence upon God's provision through the charity of others. That challenge is part of Muḥāsibī's larger project to anchor religious devotion to God's revealed commands.

2.4.1 *Tawakkul*

Muḥāsibī's first task in *al-Makāsib* is to establish the legal requirements of trusting in God, the islamic virtue called *tawakkul*.⁹⁸ One Quranic precedent for this virtue is *Ibrāhīm* 14:12: 'Why should we not put our trust in God, when He has guided us on our ways? We shall endure patiently under the hurt you do us. Let the trusting put their trust in God.'⁹⁹ Muḥāsibī explains from this verse that since God did not distribute His provision equally among mankind, they must trust him.¹⁰⁰ Muḥāsibī's definition of trust (*tawakkul*) branches out from this:

Believing God in what He has communicated about the [divine] allotment, the assurance of sufficiency, the surety [of His pledge] in conveying provisions to [mankind], and the intersection of the sustenance which he has allotted with the times which he has appointed, according to a faith by which confidence is firmly established in the heart. Through trust (*tawakkul*) any doubts or suspicions are removed from their [hearts] and their certain confidence (*al-yaqīn*) is purified.¹⁰¹

This definition has implications for the nature of the world as the place of God's allotted provision, as well as for the destiny of mankind to pursue that provision in this life.¹⁰² It is upon this foundation that Muḥāsibī builds a case against Shaqīq's renunciant ideal of abandoning all worldly pursuits, including livelihood, for the sake of absolute devotion to God.

98. For a brief history of this discussion by later Sufis, Jean-Jacques Thibon, *L'œuvre d'Abū 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Sulamī (325/937–412/1021) et la formation du soufisme* (Damascus: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2009), 181–83; also the excellent monograph, Benedikt Reinert, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968).

99. Jones trans.

100. *Al-Makāsib*, 178–9.

101. *Al-Makāsib*, 180.

102. See 5.2.2, p. 184.

Though Shaqīq’s treatise does not explicitly address the virtue *tawakkul*,¹⁰³ it seems certain that he and his followers promoted the concept that Muḥāsibī challenges. Table 2.2 (page 27) gives clear indication of this. Sulamī begins his entry on Shaqīq with praise for his ‘path of trust (*tawakkul*)’;¹⁰⁴ Abū Nu‘aym also makes the association: ‘He loathed what was entrusted to [God’s] representatives and thus he abandoned himself in trust (*tawakkala*) [to God].’¹⁰⁵ Sulamī transmits a tradition from Shaqīq that summarises *tawakkul* as ‘calming your heart in God’s promises’.¹⁰⁶ Another tradition emphasises that true repose requires being satisfied with what God has allotted, implying that one should not work to attain it.¹⁰⁷ Shaqīq’s retelling of *Al-Qaṣaṣ* 28:60 suggests that he distrusts any provision from the world that does not come directly from God.¹⁰⁸

Based on a series of Quranic quotations,¹⁰⁹ Shaqīq comes to the conclusion that anyone who doesn’t trust God is in fact an unbeliever.¹¹⁰ Shaqīq does not simply mean that a believer is someone who trusts God, but that someone who believes is obligated to rely upon God for his daily provision. The conclusion of the tradition softens this somewhat—‘whoever isn’t certain (*mu’minan*) of this is ignorant’, but nonetheless warrants Muḥāsibī’s understanding of his position.

Muḥāsibī cites Shaqīq’s position candidly: ‘Shaqīq asserted in what has been transmitted from him, that he said “the pursuit of profitable gain is sin”’.¹¹¹ Since this phrase is not recorded in the biographical dictionaries, is Muḥāsibī exaggerating Shaqīq’s position?¹¹² Certainly Shaqīq taught that the renunciant path requires abandoning livelihood, but did he actually teach that pursuing provisions through

103. Hujwīrī is the earliest author to mention *tawakkul* in a quotation of Shaqīq. See Reinert, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, 171.

104. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 54.

105. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 59,1.

106. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 56,4. Gramlich translates *iṭma’anna* as ‘sich verlassen’, Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums* / 2. Teil, 33.

107. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 59,7–8.

108. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 56,11ff = *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 60, 15–18.

109. *Āl ‘Imrān* 3:159; *Al-Mā’ida* 5:23; *Al-Shu‘arā’* 26:79.

110. ‘*Man lam yatawakkal ‘alā Allāh yuṣīru khārījan min al-īmān*’, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 61, 21–62, 2.

111. ‘*Inna al-ḥaraka fī al-kasb ma‘ṣiya*’, *al-Makāsib*, 189.

112. Reinert says he is, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, 172.

an occupation is sin? In the waypoint of fear (subsubsection 2.2.3.2) Shaqīq does suggest that one should fear the eschatological consequences of giving up the renunciant path. His interpretation of *Al-Qaṣaṣ* 28:60 further supports this by declaring any use of the world's provisions off limits for the believer.

Perhaps the strongest indication that Muḥāsibī's accusation is accurate is his summarisation of those who follow the 'abandonment' view of *tawakkul*, i.e. occupational pursuit is sin. 'Some people assert that *tawakkul* is absent in its aspirants unless they abandon any activity in the pursuit of their subsistence and refrain from troubling themselves (*iḍṭirāb*) [with it].' The infinitive *iḍṭirāb* is difficult because it can denote a mental state of anxiety rather than hectic activity.¹¹³ And it would be understandable for any explanation of *tawakkul* to censure anxiety about one's source of subsistence. Even Muḥāsibī does this: 'But if he directs his attention to his Lord in His generosity and in the degree of His loyalty to His promises, his concern will be small, even when he is ruined because of what takes place during his life.'¹¹⁴ Muḥāsibī's rebuke of this position could suggest that the *iḍṭirāb* of those who promote *tawakkul* as abandonment is not simply mental anxiety, but the frantic activity of one who seeks subsistence.¹¹⁵

This is further strengthened by Muḥāsibī's view that God allows ordinary people (*al-ʿawāmm*) to pursue subsistence, yet expects *tawakkul* of them as well. It is in the nature of mankind to pursue material gain, which will not harm them as long as they obey God's conditions for its use. 'They have a drive (*ʿajala*) in their hearts and trouble themselves (*iḍṭirāb*) when [their subsistence] is withheld.'¹¹⁶ Working for provision does no harm as long as one avoids what God has forbidden. The incumbency of *tawakkul* is that mankind affirms God as the source of their provision

113. Reinert translates its occurrence here with 'Anstrengung' (effort). Reinert, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, 170.

114. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd*, 51–52.

115. One curious counterexample is the report of Sulamī: 'He said that whoever has these three things will be spared Hellfire: security (*amn*), fear, and unrest (*iḍṭirāb*).' There is no context to determine what *iḍṭirāb* means here, but perhaps it refers to unsettledness about the judgement. That of course seems to contradict the first requirement, security. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīya*, 59,4–5.

116. *Al-Makāsib*, 181.

and acknowledges his promise to provide for believers. Even if they sin by pursuing what He has forbidden, they do not lose their trust (*tawakkul*) in Him unless they deny His promises of provision. This passage suggests that without the natural concern that mankind experiences for his subsistence, genuine trust in God could not be experienced.¹¹⁷

If Shaqīq and his followers did not consider it a sin for ordinary people to pursue occupational livelihood, it was because they held them to a different standard. It seems well established that those on the renunciant path should imagine dire eschatological consequences if they fall from that path. Later discussion (see 5.2, page 175) will suggest that this is why Muḥāsibī devotes considerable attention to differentiating what is obligatory (*al-fard*) from what is only recommended (*al-nāfila*). Muḥāsibī suggests that a person striving to be obedient can develop a character that is always at peace with just what he needs—without requiring voluntary poverty.

To clarify, Muḥāsibī attributes three statements to Shaqīq and his followers: that occupational pursuit is sin; that it indicates doubt in His promises since He has guaranteed mankind's subsistence; and that this guarantee of provision requires the person who trusts God to stop working. In fact, 'any [occupational] activity is a concession for those who are weak'.¹¹⁸

Muḥāsibī's rebuke is harsh. In his view, those who promote this extreme view of trust are overstepping the Quran (*Al-Nisā'* 4:29, 32) and the Sunna: 'It is good for a man to eat from what he has earned.'¹¹⁹ They have given themselves a higher rank than the prophets and his companions, who gathered, saved and spent wealth for the sake of God's commands.¹²⁰ And if they have not overstepped the Quran and Sunna, it is only because God has made a concession for them: that He allows them to abandon the test of occupation and wealth because they have not learned how to rely on His grace. Having confidence (*thiqa*) in God means being

117. See 5.2.2, p. 184 for a similar argument by Muḥāsibī.

118. *Al-Makāsib*, 196.

119. *Al-Makāsib*, 197.

120. *Al-Makāsib*, 196; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 45.

convinced of His promises and being at peace in every circumstance. Confidence in His faithfulness is sufficient to keep one from relying on created things rather than on Him.¹²¹ These renunciants abandon occupation because ‘the state of [receiving] this grace is not present among them and they have not reached a state of nearness [to God]’.¹²²

2.4.2 Hunger

Muḥāsibī also counters Shaqīq’s teaching on hunger and situates his approach within various approaches of the Baṣran school (*madhhab al-baṣrīyīn*). The first approach, which comes closest to Shaqīq’s teaching, is that hunger provides ‘training for the *nafs* by transferring [it] from one state (*ḥāla*) to the next, and cutting off [its] companion (the person) from invitations to things that are potentially forbidden (*al-shubuhāt*).’¹²³ Another approach within the Baṣran school believes that hunger grants them an auspicious rank because it is the master of pious deeds (*sayyid a‘māl al-birr*). They strive to eat only when hunger overtakes them. There are also those that use hunger as a means of punishing and disciplining the *nafs* when it has urged them to sin.

Certainly Shaqīq taught that hunger was a method for training the *nafs*. That method was to limit consumption to two meagre meals, perhaps even limiting the assortment of food. Muḥāsibī’s description of the Baṣran school is interpreted by Van Ess to mean that the Baṣrans never allowed themselves to become accustomed to a routine of eating.¹²⁴ Muḥāsibī’s mention of ‘invitations’ in the next clause rather suggests Shaqīq’s paradigm. Hunger moves the *nafs* into a state where it no longer invites a person (‘its companion’) to forbidden desires. Muḥāsibī uses a similar phrase in *al-Ri‘āya* in a discussion of why repentance should not

121. *Al-Makāsib*, 197.

122. *Al-Makāsib*, 198. This mention of nearness (*qurb*) may be a direct challenge of proto-Sufi currents. For another example, see 6.2.5, p. 230.

123. ‘*al-Ta’dīb li-l-nafs, bi-l-naqala min ḥāla ilá ḥāla, wa-qaṭ‘ al-īlf min dawā‘ī al-shubuhāt*,’ *al-Makāsib*, 226.

124. Josef van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī* (Bonn: Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1961), 116. For a passage that might give this idea, see al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā’il fī al-zuhd*, 82.

be delayed: ‘Can you agree to being transferred to a state in which you are pleased with death?’¹²⁵ In *Kitāb al-zuhd* Muḥāsibī explains that the best service (*‘ibāda*) to God is ‘the transition in contemplation from one state to the next state’.¹²⁶ The verb is used in the II form (*naqqala*) in *al-Makāsib* for God’s transferral of an embryo from one stage to the next.¹²⁷ This interpretation suggests close association between Shaqīq and the Baṣran approach that Muḥāsibī identifies.

Shaqīq’s position seems to be different from the position of those who suggest hunger as the ‘master of pious deeds’. Though critical in Shaqīq’s piety, I maintain that hunger is for him a method of attaining disapprobation of the world. It is that virtue (*zuhd*) and not hunger itself that severs the heart from the negative influence of the *nafs*.

I also see little evidence that Shaqīq uses hunger to ‘punish’ the seat of desire. Certainly he ‘disciplines’ (*ta’dīb*) the *nafs*, but this seems to mean that he restrains it. Perhaps Shaqīq’s approach could be exaggerated to suggest punishment, but I doubt this is his intent. The *nafs* can’t be trusted and it will lead the heart into illicit passions unless it is distracted from those desires. Perhaps a renunciant master no longer requires hunger to maintain his disapprobation of the world, but this would be because his heart has abandoned the world altogether.¹²⁸ In any case, Shaqīq’s concept seems not to include any idea of punishment.

Muḥāsibī clearly outlines what he considers to be the normative position on hunger. It is not a virtue (*faḍīla*) in itself. When encountered, the pious endure it with patience and find in it fresh reliance upon God. As such, the benefits of hunger can be praised. Those who willingly subject themselves to it, however, are acting from ignorance and misunderstand the Prophetic example.¹²⁹ This is the position of the Prophet and his early followers, including the People of the Bench

125. ‘*Fa-hal ajma‘-ta li-l-naqala ilā ḥal tarḍā fihā al-mawt?*’, *al-Ri‘āya*, 112 = ed. Smith, 72.

126. *Wa-ḥaṣuna al-intiqāl fī tafakkur min ḥāl ilā ḥāl*’, *al-Muḥāsibī*, *al-Masā’il fī al-zuhd*, 73.

127. *Al-Makāsib*, 176.

128. Even with this concession, I still maintain that the prototypical renunciant preferred hunger and poverty. These were part of his identity.

129. *Al-Makāsib*, 226ff. Translated in van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī*, 116–18.

(*ahl al-ṣuffa*), who did not consider hunger to be a ‘means or a method’.¹³⁰ Muḥāsibī provides a list of scholars¹³¹ who hold to this normative position, including Shaqīq’s teacher, Ibrāhīm ibn Ad’ham (d. c. 165/782).

In his polemic against the Baṣran school, Muḥāsibī claims that these renunciants are sinning when they urge their disciples to pursue hunger.

Whoever entices (*da‘ā*) people to hunger has sinned against God [since] he knows that hunger can kill. Many people have starved themselves to death because they lost their mind, to the point that they abandon what God requires—some have even taken hold of a knife and slain themselves. They have changed their very nature (*ṭab‘a-hu*).¹³²

Muḥāsibī’s treatment of hunger suggests that Shaqīq’s treatise formulates a Baṣran approach toward hunger. And though Ibrāhīm ibn Ad’ham and Sufyān al-Thawrī are presented by the biographical dictionaries as primary influences upon Shaqīq, Muḥāsibī distances Shaqīq’s approach from both of these.

Muḥāsibī’s treatment also allows the interpretation that Shaqīq advanced the idealisation of hunger by systematising its relationship to disapprobation of the world and the discipline of the *nafs*. From the biographical dictionaries we know that Shaqīq was the first to speak of ‘states’ (*aḥwāl*, sg. *ḥāl*). If this statement is combined with Muḥāsibī’s characterisation of the Baṣran teaching on hunger, then perhaps al-Sulamī is referring not simply to the four stages (*manzilāt*) of Shaqīq, anachronistically labelling them states (*aḥwāl*), but to his teaching that hunger transfers one to a state (*ḥāl*) in which his *nafs* no longer corrupts the heart with desire. Muḥāsibī’s censure corroborates Shaqīq as the source of this doctrine and clarifies his contribution to the development of a renunciant path later adopted by Sufis. Despite Muḥāsibī’s detailed arguments against the practice of voluntary hunger and its effectiveness in disciplining the *nafs*, later Sufis continued to idealise this approach as characteristic of those who reached the highest levels of friendship with God.

130. ‘*Fa-lam yaj‘alū al-jū‘ la-hum sababan, wa-lā ṭarīqan*,’ *al-Makāsib*, 227.

131. Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778); Shu‘ayb ibn Ḥarb (d. 197/812–13); Ḥudhayfa al-Mar‘ashī (d. 207/822); and Bishr ibn al-Ḥārith (al-Ḥāfi) (d. 227/841).

132. *Al-Makāsib*, 227.

2.4.3 Poverty

Muḥāsibī dismisses another important facet of Shaqīq’s piety: voluntary poverty. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* teaches that the light of disapprobation enables a person to be satisfied with subsistence (*qawāmi-hi min al-ʿaysh*).¹³³ Once the aspirant reaches the stage of longing for Paradise, he will no longer seek to acquire money.¹³⁴ Biographical traditions convey Shaqīq’s commitment to poverty—no other theme receives the same attention. Riches are to be feared,¹³⁵ and only the covetous man asks God for wealth.¹³⁶ Scarcity (*qilla*) is preferable to material blessing (*niʿma*), which has no power to bring joy in the Hereafter.¹³⁷ The renunciant should only take something from the world if it would be sinful for him to refuse it.¹³⁸ The state of poverty must be preserved because it is a gift from God.¹³⁹ Goodness and wisdom don’t dwell in a person’s heart unless he disposes of everything that is nonessential.¹⁴⁰ ‘The fear of poverty obscures the fear of Hell’.¹⁴¹

These sayings are supported by reports that Shaqīq abandoned his possessions when he became a renunciant. In one story, Shaqīq entered a temple in Central Asia and preached monotheism to the idol worshippers inside. One of them challenged that his actions didn’t corroborate his message. If he really believed that there was one Creator who provided for mankind, why had he left his homeland to engage in business? Surely God could provide for him just as well there.¹⁴² In another story Shaqīq is compelled to absolute trust in God because of the contentment he notices in his slave. The slave explains that his master (Shaqīq) owns a village—he lacks for nothing. Shaqīq reflects that since God controls the entire world, a believer should have no concern for his subsistence.¹⁴³ In both stories Shaqīq determines to give

133. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 18.

134. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

135. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīya*, 56, 8–10; 58, 2–4; 58, 5–7.

136. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 70, 17–25.

137. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīya*, 57, 11–58, 3.

138. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīya*, 56, 6–8; 58, 5–7.

139. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīya*, 58, 10–12, 3.

140. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 68, 5–7.

141. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 68, 8–9.

142. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 59, 4–17.

143. Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Balkhī, *Faṣṣal-i Balkh*, 133–134.

away his possessions and adopt a renunciant lifestyle. These stories clearly link the legacy of Shaqīq's renunciant lifestyle with poverty and his abandonment of livelihood.

It is difficult to separate Muḥāsibī's caution about voluntary poverty from his censure of Shaqīq's abandonment view of trust (*tawakkul*). To forgo any occupation or livelihood certainly entails a commitment to poverty. Rather than disparage poverty, Muḥāsibī demonstrates that a person can maintain disapprobation of the world and remain wealthy. One must of course avoid what is forbidden and fulfil God's legal requirements in his wealth, but ultimately it is the regard he has for his possessions that would interfere with his devotion to God, and not his wealth. In fact, even a rich man may be a renunciant (*zāhid*) and become 'God's treasurer'.¹⁴⁴ This challenges Shaqīq's censure of wealth in traditions attributed to him.

Though Muḥāsibī is careful to never denigrate poverty, he doesn't consider it helpful for obeying God. And even God's rich renunciant should have no attachment to his possessions that would prevent him from giving them away freely. Unlike Shaqīq, Muḥāsibī does not fear riches and considers voluntary poverty to be an indication of weakness. God has created man to have possessions and yet choose to serve him without trusting those possessions. Certainly man's desire centre (*nafs*) can deceive the rich man so that he falsely assumes that he disapproves the world, only to discover upon bankruptcy that he mourns what he has lost.¹⁴⁵ But refusing the provision that God has allotted through voluntary poverty can also give the renunciant false confidence. God has created the world as a place of temptation so that he chooses to obey God while facing that temptation. Removing every temptation of the world through voluntary poverty does not insure that the renunciant's heart has been freed of his love for the world.¹⁴⁶

144. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 44.

145. *Al-Ri'āya*, 260 = ed. Smith, 203.

146. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 51–3.

2.4.4 Muḥāsibī's Underlying Criticism of the Renunciant Path

The ascetic programme of Shaqīq seeks to purify the heart of the believer from any love of the world. This love of the world is a darkness in the heart driven by a person's locus of desire (*nafs*) and channeled through the appetites (*shahawāt*). Though Shaqīq makes no attempt to ground his manual in Quranic teaching, it is not conjecture to associate his programme with the Quranic indictment against the world: 'whatever you have been given is a [temporary] enjoyment and ornament of the life of this world'.¹⁴⁷

Table 2.4: Muḥāsibī's Critique of Shaqīq's Piety

	Shaqīq	Muḥāsibī
poverty	a virtue—abandon riches	a trial—not to be intentionally pursued
hunger	a means of purification	a trial—forced hunger is against Sunna
<i>tawakkul</i>	abandon gainful occupation	working for provision is in man's nature
basic approach	distract the <i>nafs</i> through hardship	guard against the <i>nafs</i> , but focus on obedience

One may assume that obedience to God's commands is an important part of any Islamic piety. Yet Shaqīq's description of the renunciant path has no mention of obedience. He gives no indication that his programme will transform a disobedient person into an obedient one. Rather, it will obstruct and eventually block the actualisation of appetites and desires within the heart. God responds to this programme by introducing light into the heart of the renunciant so that the dark love of the world is expelled and replaced with God's love.

Shaqīq encourages renunciants to a programme of systematic hunger so that this hunger distracts his locus of desire from further appetites. Over time, the love of the world will decrease in his heart and eventually be replaced by a consuming love for God. His satisfaction in this experience will enable him to disregard the world altogether, including procurement of provision, so that he embraces poverty as a sign of his reliance (*tawakkul*) on God.

147. *Al-Qaṣaṣ* 28:60, Jones trans. See also Abū Nu'aym, who records that this verse was significant to Shaqīq. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, p. 60. See also *Al-Ḥadīd* 57:20.

Muḥāsibī would agree that loving this world is forbidden. He would not encourage anyone to find contentment in it.¹⁴⁸ Yet this is not the primary focus of his piety. Rather, God created mankind as his servants and men are obligated to obey his commands. This world was created by God as a test for believers because he has revealed what is permitted and forbidden within it. Salvation (*naḥā*) in this world cannot be equated with inner or outer disassociation with the world. Rather, it is to walk in the world without disobeying God's commands.¹⁴⁹

Repentance, an acknowledgement of past wrongdoing and a resolve to future obedience, is the beginning of Muḥāsibī's program. Though obeying God's commands requires disapprobation of the world, it is not a therapeutic practice in *al-Ri'āya*. Self-examination is the only way to expose the sins that the *naḥs* wants to hide, lest it be forced to give up its attachment to them. Once a believer's repentance is complete and his resolve for future obedience firm, his experience will be similar to the description of Shaqīq's highest rank. Pious circumspection will characterise his life as he seeks to avoid slipping back into sin. Muḥāsibī seeks to provide an understanding of how the desires will lure the mind into sinful intentions, and provides descriptions of inner vices that might spoil otherwise acceptable worship. Perfected obedience to God's commands is the highest priority.

2.5 Conclusion

Ādāb al-ibādāt of Shaqīq al-Balkhī is an important representation of early ninth-century Islamic piety. Unlike earlier examples, *Ādāb al-ibādāt* presents a programme that places Islamic virtues of spiritual purification upon a continuum that is projected as a path. The desired outcome of this continuum is to forsake possessions and pleasures in life so that one enters into a reciprocal relationship with God's love. His depiction acknowledges an interplay of human effort and divine activity. The human dimension is characterised by ascetic practices that go beyond the recognised obligations of Islamic piety, including the abandonment of oc-

148. *Al-Ri'āya*, 64–65. = ed. Smith, 26–27.

149. See the following chapter for details on Muḥāsibī's religious devotion.

cupation, diminished consumption, and poverty. Muḥāsibī censures this approach because it exceeds the requirements of Islamic law and obscures the true goal of Islamic piety, obedience to God. Shaqīq's treatise is an important precursor to later Sufi movements because its renunciant path establishes fundamental assumptions about the nature of journeying to God's love.

Chapter 3

Muḥāsibī's Path of Devoted Obedience

Scholars have long considered Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857–8) to be a pivotal figure for the development of Islamic piety. Early work by Margaret Smith recognised his importance in the later development of Sufi psychology, especially as evidenced in al-Ghazālī's *Revival of the Religious Sciences*. Though her work is seminal, her interpretive framework relies on Christian and later classical and post-classical Sufi categories.¹ Mahmoud categorises Muḥāsibī's thought into three dimensions: his religious theory, his moral theory, and his ascetic and mystical theory. He notices Muḥāsibī's distinct approach in comparison with the later Sufi tradition; for example, that his teaching on *tawakkul* and *zuhd* is restrained.² His breakdown of Muḥāsibī's teaching is sensible and engages well with various manuscripts to incorporate most of Muḥāsibī's works into his discussion. His conclusion fails to recognise that though later Sufis may have taken inspiration from him, Muḥāsibī's 'inner struggle' differs significantly from theirs.³ Schoonover translated the first part of Muḥāsibī's most important work, *al-Ri‘āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, but followed up with only one article.⁴ The most influential analysis of Muḥāsibī's thought is by Josef van Ess, who clearly demonstrates that it is mankind's understanding (‘*aql*’)

1. Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (London: Sheldon Press, 1931), 257; Margaret Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad* (London: Sheldon Press, 1935), 53.

2. Abd-el-Halim Mahmoud, *al-Mohāsibī: un mystique musulman religieux et moraliste* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1940), 213–233.

3. *Ibid.*, 250.

4. Kermit Schoonover, 'Kitab al-Ri‘āya li-Ḥuqūq Allāh by al-Muḥāsibī: A Translation with Introduction and Notes' (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1948); Kermit A. Schoonover, 'Al-Muḥāsibī and his al-Ri‘āya', *Muslim World* 39, no. 1 (1949): 26–35.

that struggles against errant desires.⁵ Van Ess also began the task of questioning the Sufi tradition's recollection of Muḥāsibī's piety.⁶

Al-Ri'āya offers the most complete picture of Muḥāsibī's path of salvation. It is a collection of 'books' (*kutub*), most of them addressing various aspects of the 'observation of God's requirements'. It begins with an extended discussion of circumspect devotion (*al-taqwā*), Muḥāsibī's one word description for the culmination of his motto for piety, '*al-rī'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*'. This phrase is derived from *Al-Ḥadīd* 57:27, which ostensibly expresses a condemnation of monasticism: 'But monasticism they invented. We did not prescribe it for them [but it arose] through desire for God's satisfaction; and they did not observe it as they should have done (*famā ra'aw-hā ḥaqq rī'āyati-hā*).'⁷ The middle and later sections are devoted to what Muḥāsibī calls the 'Diseases of the Heart,' with specific studies on hypocrisy (*al-riyā'*), conceit (*al-ujb*), pride (*al-kibr*), and envy (*ḥasad*). A reoccurring theme is the condemnation of errant theological and ascetic movements.⁸ The bulk of his theoretical framework appears in the first section, whose title is that of the entire collection.

The discourse style of *al-Ri'āya* is not primarily expository, but hortatory, and is directed at exhorting his interlocutor to repent and obey God in all that He requires. Its title, along with the emphasis on pious circumspection (*al-taqwā*), suggests that his exhortation is also designed to clarify his model of piety over against ascetic or renunciant models in his day. Though didactic at times, this ongoing exhortation requires careful analysis for an accurate exposition of his piety. This study will focus on the first section, with limited reference to later sections as is necessary for understanding his path of salvation.

5. van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī*, 67–78.

6. e.g. sayings attributed to him about love, *ibid.*, 223.

7. Jones trans. For remarks on its interpretation, *ibid.*; and Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 101–102.

8. Especially *Kitāb al-ghirra*.

3.1 Those who Begin the Path of Salvation

In the model I am suggesting, Muḥāsibī's religious devotion consists of the virtues, practices and beliefs that he promoted. Like Shaqīq, Muḥāsibī communicates the progressive nature of religious devotion, though the journey metaphor is not prominent. Recall that Shaqīq's treatise *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* formalised this progressive dimension to religious devotion. For Shaqīq, certain practices develop virtues that lead to a closer relationship with God, which he communicated with the metaphor of DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH.

Muḥāsibī is aware that some renunciants speak of DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH. His critique of Baṣran approaches to hunger faults them for turning hunger into a 'means and path (*ṭarīqa*)'—something lacking in the piety of Muḥāmmad's earliest followers.⁹ He is also able to describe his own approach to religious devotion with this metaphor: 'obedience is the path (*sabīl*) of salvation'.¹⁰ In a later passage of *al-Riʿāya* Muḥāsibī illustrates key aspects of his religious devotion with the picture of a man making his way along a dark path (*ṭarīqa*). In this instance he must rely on his sight, knowledge ('his lamp'), and focus to avoid losing his way.¹¹ Despite this basic usage, there is little evidence that Muḥāsibī communicated the virtues of his piety as waypoints on this path of salvation. Occasionally he uses the term *manzila* for a virtue of piety: 'godly devotion (*taqwā*) is the first stage of [God's] servants... by it they purify their works.'¹² His use of 'first' here may not mean that there are others to follow, but that this is the 'most important' stage. This usage is infrequent and Muḥāsibī uses *manzila* in the sense of 'rank' or 'status' more often.¹³ For example, those who observe God's obligations belong to seven 'ranks' or 'levels'.¹⁴ I will discuss below how Muḥāsibī uses this terminology to communicate the concept of progression within religious devotion.

9. *Al-Makāsib*, 103.

10. *Al-Riʿāya*, 47 = ed. Smith, 11.

11. *Al-Riʿāya*, 85–86 = ed. Smith, 45–46.

12. e.g. *Al-Riʿāya*, 44 = ed. Smith, 9.

13. e.g. *Al-Riʿāya*, 46, 55, 69, 87 = ed. Smith, 11, 19, 30, 47.

14. e.g. *Al-Riʿāya*, 106 = ed. Smith, 66.

Muḥāsibī also calls pious circumspection (*taqwā*) a station or standing (*maqām*). Sufis will reserve this term for virtues that are the result of human effort, in contrast to states (*aḥwāl*, sing. *ḥāl*), which are the result of divine grace. Though Hujwīrī finds this distinction among the followers of Muḥāsibī,¹⁵ *al-Ri'āya* uses the terms interchangeably. In his discussion of repentance, Muḥāsibī explains: 'If this state (*ḥāl*) [had been produced] by the *nafs* or by Satan then he would be deceived by prideful thoughts through the importance he attached to this station (*maqām*).'¹⁶ Though 'station' is an acceptable translation, *maqām* simply means state and is not used as a technical term in the way Hujwīrī describes.¹⁷

The term 'state' (*ḥāl*) is frequent in *al-Ri'āya*, but also lacks the technical meaning given to it in the later Sufi manuals. Its usage is quite ordinary. For example: 'So whenever he examines himself and reflects on his [inner] condition (*aḥwāl*), he realises that he had spoiled his religion without being aware of it.'¹⁸ There is often a slight grammatical shift for English speakers because a 'state' or 'condition' in this context is difficult to express as a plural noun. It is likely that Sufi manuals also use 'state' or 'circumstance' (*ḥāl*) nontechnically. But I have not found an instance where Muḥāsibī uses *ḥāl* as a technical term.

Discussion below will make it clear that Muḥāsibī considers religious devotion to be a progression toward God. He probably even acknowledges the pre-Sufi depiction of this as a path along a series of virtues. But he generally only describes this progression by listing the different levels of an important characteristic, like repentance. He is also able to use this language to describe different levels of disobedience. On occasion he will describe a series of virtues as a chain of causation.

If devotion to God is a progression of virtues or states toward God, one expects that Muḥāsibī had an idea about its beginning. His description of religious devotion, especially in *al-Ri'āya*, contains an invitation to heed his advice and begin this

15. 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf al-mahjūb; the oldest Persian treatise on Súfiism*, trans. Reynold Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1936), 176–182.

16. *Al-Ri'āya*, 72 = ed. Smith, 33.

17. For another example, *Al-Ri'āya*, 70 = ed. Smith, 31.

18. *Al-Ri'āya*, 71 = ed. Smith, 33.

process of approaching God. How does Muḥāsibī describe a beginner? To determine this I examine lists of characteristics that Muḥāsibī calls ranks or tiers (*manzila*, pl. *manāzil*).¹⁹ Through the descriptions of these tiers Muḥāsibī correlates a variety of human experience with the broad continuum of devotion to God. Initial tiers suggest starting points for anyone who wants to participate in Muḥāsibī's approach to piety. Each set of tiers suggests a systematised approach to how different individuals might respond to the process of growth and purification. This section will examine three sets of tiers that Muḥāsibī presents and provide a classification of the various conditions from which individuals might begin their approach toward God.

3.1.1 People of Forgiveness or People of Enmity

Muḥāsibī's first contrast is between the people of forgiveness (*ahl al-ʿafw*) and the people of enmity (*ahl al-ʿadāwa*).²⁰ At stake is whether one is on the 'path of salvation'²¹ or not. This distinction establishes itself when a person reaches maturity (*bulūgh*) and his sins begin to accrue against him.²² Once he realises that he will face punishment for these sins, he either begins the lifelong pursuit of forgiveness or he persists in his sins, ignoring their consequences in the Hereafter. Muḥāsibī assumes that most people will sin—wrongdoing is not the significant difference between these two tiers. Instead, there are some who respond to the awareness of their culpability by seeking God's forgiveness, even though they continue to sin. Every new sin they commit drives them to a more intense petition before God. This is not a tepid apology, but involves internal toil (*taʿab ghayr mawṣūf*), often accompanied by weeping. The person of enmity, on the other hand, ignores the terrible suffering that is multiplying with each transgression. 'Every day that we increase the innovation of [our] sins, there is a multiple increase in [our future] suffering,

19. *Al-Riʿāya*, 46, 55–57, 69–70 = ed. Smith, 11, 19–21, 30–31.

20. *Al-Riʿāya*, 46 = ed. Smith, 11.

21. *Al-Riʿāya*, 47 = ed. Smith, 11.

22. *Al-Riʿāya*, 46 = ed. Smith, 19.

humility and abasement.’²³

3.1.2 The Obdurate

The contrast between the People of Forgiveness and the People of Enmity corresponds to two distinct ranks, each containing several tiers: the repentant (*al-tawwābūn*)²⁴ and the obdurate (*al-muṣirrūn*).²⁵ These distinctions are not significant until a person reaches maturity. Muḥāsibī’s description lacks mention of sexual maturity and implies an inner awareness of wrongdoing and the judgement to come. From that point forward every act of transgression multiplies God’s wrath upon the obdurate sinner. If he does not repent and forthwith, his sins will not only merit him painful suffering in the Hereafter, but they will imbed a remorselessness into his heart which hardens it to the terrors he will face in the afterlife.²⁶

‘The thickness of remorselessness’²⁷ (*ghilaz al-qaswa*) is the phrase Muḥāsibī uses to describe the highest tier of the ranks of those who persist in their sins, the obdurate. Its origin is *Al-Baqara* 2:74: ‘Then after that your hearts became hardened and were like stones or even harder’.²⁸ Though their sins are great and evident, they seldom consider their consequences. When they do, the thought of future punishment doesn’t come to mind. They do not fear God’s wrath. Muḥāsibī believes that candid reflection upon the Hereafter is meant to lead quickly to a fear that can release the heart from its careless insensitivity. When such fear is slow to emerge, a person’s desires (*nafs*) join forces with Satan to plant insinuations in the heart that cause deeper apathy and carelessness. They suggest, ‘This (repentance) isn’t your station (*maqām*)! Fear can’t be kindled in a person like you! You are just tormenting your own soul’.²⁹ These negative thoughts convince the person that fearing God and the Hereafter is simply not his lot in life. This unresponsiveness

23. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 46 = ed. Smith, 11.

24. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 55-57 = ed. Smith, 19-21.

25. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 69-70 = ed. Smith, 30-31.

26. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 54 = ed. Smith, 17.

27. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 69 = ed. Smith, 30.

28. Alan trans.

29. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 69 = ed. Smith, 30.

produces diseases within the heart that will prevent any return to health unless extended treatment is applied. Their chief strategy is to weaken a person's resolve so that he quickly wearies (*malāl*) of the necessary treatment and remains mired in his obduracy.³⁰

Table 3.1: The Ranks of the Obdurate	
Rank	
1	Freely sins with no thought of God's judgement
2	Chooses to remain ignorant of sins
3	Temporarily obdurate in a few sins

In a slightly better situation are those whose persistent sin is great yet they remain unaware of their condition. Their organ of desire has joined forces with Satan to convince him that he has repented of his sins. In fact he has, but only from *some* of his sins. Flawed words, actions, and inner attitudes remain. His condition is not simply the result of ignorance, but of heedlessness.³¹

On the cusp of joining the ranks of the repentant are those who persist in only a few sins. Muḥāsibī's description is brief: 'Among the ranks of the obdurate (Table 3.1) are those whose sins are few. His indifference [to them] is not drawn out, and their concealment from him of the Hereafter [does not last long].'³² It is not clear why Muḥāsibī gives no further comment. Practically there seems to be little difference between the 'temporarily obdurate' and the 'occasionally repentant' (next section)—except that the obdurate's occasional reflection on the Hereafter produces no fear.

3.1.3 A Protected Childhood

From Muḥāsibī's description of the ranks of the repentant we learn that some beginners have a distinct advantage over others. Those of the first tier were nurtured

30. *Al-Ri'āya*, 69 = ed. Smith, 30.

31. *Al-Ri'āya*, 70 = ed. Smith, 31.

32. *Al-Ri'āya*, 69 = ed. Smith, 30.

in an environment of moral excellence. Exactly what constitutes this kind of nurture is unclear in *al-Ri'āya*. This person has a heart which never became captive to youthful desires and passions (*ṣabwa*). His mistakes are best termed 'lapses' (*al-zalla*) as they had no damaging effect upon his heart. In fact such lapses are of the sort which even prophets and saints (*ṣiddīqūn*) experience. When these lapses occurred the person's 'pure heart' (*qalb al-ṭāhir*) was not the active agent of sin, and thus remains blameless. His heart neither surrendered nor negotiated with the passions (*al-shahawāt*) so that no hardening or filming (*al-rīn*) of the heart occurred as a result of the lapse.³³

In this description Muḥāsibī introduces the class of humanity known as God's friends, *al-awliyā'*. They gain maturity along the path of obedience and excellence because of this unique status. God protects their upbringing because he loves them and would never reject them. As the basis for this description Muḥāsibī paraphrases a Hadith collected by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: 'God is certainly amazed with the youth who has no youthful desires (*ṣabwa*).' Muḥāsibī interprets the phrase 'amazed with him' to mean that God has a select love for him and that He is pleased with him. His interpretation rests on the fact that God's amazement cannot be of the sort which implies He had been ignorant of the youth's innocence and was amazed when he discovered it.³⁴ According to a non-canonical Hadith transmitted through Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, God regards them as if they were his angels because they sacrificed their youth and abandoned their pleasures.³⁵ Even though maturity enabled a capacity to sin, God's enabling grace (*tawfīq*) safeguarded the purity of their hearts.³⁶ Their occupation with God and devotion to Him, even if rooted ultimately in God's choice and love of them, has prevented any erosion of the purity they possessed before they came of age.

33. *Al-Ri'āya*, 55–56 = ed. Smith, 19.

34. *Al-Ri'āya*, 55–56 = ed. Smith, 19.

35. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, vol. 5, p. 237.

36. *Al-Ri'āya*, 56 = ed. Smith, 19.

3.1.4 The Permeable Heart

Most believers probably belong within the ranks of the repentant, but at lower levels than those who begin adulthood as God's friends. The second tier of the repentant consists of those who give in to their youthful passions after maturity. Though Muḥāsibī offers no time frame, they remain in pursuit of these lusts long enough for evil tendencies to become embedded within their hearts. Nonetheless, as Muḥāsibī's description unfolds, it becomes apparent that those within this tier never sever themselves from the influence of God's guidance (*al-hudā*). Their conscience is never seared by their lapses and they always regret their sins. Though God makes their path of obedience (*sabīl al-ṭā'a*) easy, they will nonetheless struggle (*yujāhidu-hā*) against residual tendencies to sin. But this struggle indicates that their hearts are still receptive to God's guidance and that they have an underlying commitment to draw near (*taqarraba*) to Him. Their hearts have not been infected with the diseases that afflict the obdurate. Muḥāsibī illustrates God's commitment to give aid to anyone on this tier:

Oh son of Adam! If you draw near to me the span of a finger (*fitran*) I will draw near to you the span of a hand (*shibran*). And if you draw near to me the span of a hand, I will draw near to you the span of an arm (*dhirā'an*). And if you draw near to me the span of an arm, I will draw near to you the span of [your] outstretched arms (*bā'an*). If you come to me at a walk, I will come to you at a fast gait (*harwalatan*).³⁷

His entrance into the 'path of salvation' begins with a permeable heart that has not been cut off from God's guidance. 'And those who are guided aright—He increases them in guidance and gives them their fear of God (*taqwā-hum*)',³⁸ quotes Muḥāsibī. They begin adulthood with a latent fear of God and the Day of Judgement. Once active, this fear of God and his judgement overcomes the residual tendencies

37. *Al-Ri'āya*, 56 = ed. Smith, 20. Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* 97, *al-tawḥīd* 50, *bāb dhikr al-nabī wa-riwāyati-hi 'an rabbi-hi*, no 7536/7; Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* 48, *al-dhikr wa-l-du'ā* 2/3/20; Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* 45, *da'awāt* 131.

38. *Muḥammad* 47:17, Jones trans.

of their heart so that they repent.³⁹ This penitent beginning may even lead to their being regarded by God as among the righteous (*ṣāliḥūn*).

Table 3.2: The Ranks of the Repentant

Rank	
1	God's friends have no need of repentance.
2	Their hearts regularly receive God's guidance and they are quick to repent.
3	Fear occasionally produces repentance.

3.1.5 The Occasionally Repentant

The lowest tier among the ranks of the repentant only fears God intermittently. Their reflection on the Hereafter never has a lasting effect upon their behaviour. Though they have the resolve of faith to abandon sin, their hearts are bound with persistent sins and weakened by worldly occupations. These thoughts of the world and the imbedded enticement of their lower nature have created a hardening (*qaswa*) of their hearts. It now has a film (*rīn*) that prevents sustained reflection upon God or the Day of Judgement. Their condition is very close to that of the obdurate except that the firm belief in their own resurrection and the certainty of facing God's judgement does produce some degree of fear. Yet this fear repeatedly fails to overcome the hardness of their hearts or drive their thoughts away from its occupation with the world.⁴⁰

This lowest tier of the repentant is nearly identical to those mired in the ranks of the obdurate. Muḥāsibī uses the same word to describe both of them, *muṣirrūn*. In terms of starting points, the occasional repenter is not much better off than the temporarily obdurate sinner. Muḥāsibī gives those of this tier little hope that their occasional fancy for repentance outweighs God's wrath against their addiction to the world.

39. *Al-Ri'āya*, 56-57 = ed. Smith, 20.

40. *Al-Ri'āya*, 57 = ed. Smith, 20.

3.1.6 Summary

Muḥāsibī's description of the ranks of those who are repentant and of those who are obdurate yields valuable insights into his perception of the initial conditions of those who would progress along the path of obedience. The person who embarks on this path will have reached maturity and come to realise that his surrender to youthful desires requires not only repentance, but a life-long struggle to undo the effects of those transgressions upon his heart. Those unwilling or unable to begin the journey that Muḥāsibī prescribes have become hosts to diseases of the heart which cloud their vision from the dire consequences of their state. Disobedience after maturity grants opportunity for his heart to become encrusted with a self-absorption that hinders his return to God. He is at the mercy of his untamed agent of desire (*nafs*), who works in tandem with his enemy, *al-shayṭān*.⁴¹ In contrast, those who emerge from youth as God's friends have avoided both the encrustation of the heart and any residual tendencies for evil within their lower nature. God's selection and love of them prevents even their lapses from introducing any debasement into their hearts. Their repentance has been made, and remains complete.

Who is it that begins Muḥāsibī's path of obedience and salvation? Through God's favour, his friends awaken from their childhood upon that path, having always been preoccupied with God. The obdurate are on a path headed toward God's final wrath against them in Hell. Muḥāsibī's ranking of them suggests that only fear will awaken them from their stupor. The diseases of their hearts are virulent and require prolonged and potent treatment. They are the people of enmity. It is those who fear God and repent that stand at the beginning of this journey. It would appear that there is an indeterminable period of time between their becoming accountable before God and their realisation that a journey of obedience lies before them. This interval is potent enough to allow the youthful indulgences of the *nafs* to infect the heart with tendencies and urges. Some awaken to a steady reflection on the fearful consequences of their sins. A struggle against the residual effects of

41. *Al-Ri'āya*, 75 = ed. Smith, 36.

their disobedience lies before them. For others, fear has checked momentum toward obduracy and the encrustation of their hearts. But their fear of God and his judgement is not consistent enough to ensure a steady response to God's guidance.

These two tiers of the repentant are the target audience of *al-Ri'āya*. Muḥāsibī does not promise to engage them with a path of renunciation, but to awaken their hearts to the incumbency of repentance and obedience. They are not Shaqīq's renunciant aspirants, but rather ordinary Muslims sensitive to God's claim on their lives (*ḥuqūq Allāh*).⁴² Muḥāsibī also acknowledges and even addresses those who are insensitive to these claims, pressing upon them their need to awaken within themselves the fear of God's judgement. Finally there are some whose false confidence prevents them from realising the extent of their transgression against God—the second tier of the obdurate. These may well be renunciants whose ascetic devotion distracts them from God's revealed commands.

3.2 The Vision of Devoted Obedience

Muḥāsibī speaks of religious devotion as a path of obedience that leads to salvation. In simplest terms, this means that obedience to God grants one security in the Hereafter. Though this is the ultimate vision of Muḥāsibī's piety, his teaching also promises a progressive experience of God's grace, leading to joyful blessings. When the disciple acquires this maturity, described by Muḥāsibī as the 'highest rank', what can he expect to experience? How will he know that he has been successful on this journey? Shaqīq's renunciant path promises to grant the aspirant the status of a renunciant befriended by God. *Al-Ri'āya* also gives descriptions that suggest friendship with God, but without the renunciant lifestyle.

From Muḥāsibī's point of view, the ultimate goal of religious devotion is that mankind fulfil the purpose for which God created him.

42. 'Es kam Muḥāsibī viel mehr darauf an, die 'Novizen' zu erziehen als die 'Heiligen' zu verherrlichen.' van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī*, 225.

Why were you placed in this transient realm? You should learn that you were not created in vain nor left [here] without purpose. Rather you were created and placed in this realm for testing (*li-l-balwā*) and appraisal (*ikhtibār*): either you will obey God or disobey Him. Then you will be transferred from this realm to either everlasting punishment or everlasting bliss (*naʿīm*).⁴³

As God's subjects, obedience to Him is man's ultimate purpose.

Circumspect devotion to obedience is labelled *taqwā* by Muḥāsibī. The term denotes a complex concept that has no satisfying English equivalent. At least in *al-Riʿāya* its meaning comes closest to the category I am labelling 'pious circumspection' or 'circumspect devotion'. I hesitate to assert this categorically because I am uncertain whether Muḥāsibī would have considered virtues, beliefs and practices as constituents of *taqwā*, as I do for 'religious devotion' in this thesis.

What I want to emphasise here is that Muḥāsibī's strong connection of circumspect devotion (*taqwā*) with security in the Hereafter does not neutralise his descriptions of the benefits of devoted obedience in this life. Those benefits are tempered by the trials God places on individuals to test them, but they are nonetheless acknowledged and promoted by Muḥāsibī. This is important because it connects an increase of blessing in this world with the progression of virtues and practices that bring one toward God's pleasure along the path of obedience. Practically, for both Muḥāsibī and Shaqīq, this means promising the devotee that he will be successful in his struggle against the evil desires of his *nafs*. And with both of them there is the promise that the nature of their fear of God will change once desire's influence (*al-nafs*) upon the heart is diminished. More importantly, both of them envision a state of blessing that includes the perception of God's loving selection of them.⁴⁴

Though it is paramount for Muḥāsibī that 'obedience is the path of salvation',⁴⁵

43. *Al-Riʿāya*, 47 = ed. Smith, 11–12.

44. Discussion in 6.2.5, p. 230, will clarify that Muḥāsibī's descriptions of love and intimacy appear to be connected with pleasing Him and being chosen by Him for perfected obedience, and not with an awareness of God's proximity (*qurb*) or love as reciprocal intimacy.

45. '*Li-ʾanna al-ṭāʿa sabīl al-naǧā*', *al-Riʿāya*, 47 = ed. Smith, 12.

the ‘path of obedience’⁴⁶ as a ‘path of salvation’ does not prevent the devotee from experiencing God’s blessing in this life. ‘He will transfer (*naqala-hum*)⁴⁷ them from endurance in obeying Him to pleasure and joy in it.’⁴⁸

3.2.1 Against the Renunciants

Muḥāsibī’s conviction that the purpose of mankind is devoted obedience to God (*taqwā*) challenged the renunciant path when it led to the disregard of sharia commands.⁴⁹ They practised austerities which Muḥāsibī considered to be innovations (*bidaʿ*)⁵⁰ that led to the compromise of clear legal obligations, like caring for one’s family. Of greater importance in *al-Riʿāya*, however, is Muḥāsibī’s argument that their acts of outward devotion obscure their disregard of the inner dimension of worship and obedience. He considered this error widespread among society, even among those who display religious devotion:

Generally speaking, I am afraid that the people of our time are misled, duped worshippers. And how many there are who lead an ascetic life by way of their dress (*mutaqashshif fī-libāsi-hi*);⁵¹ who appear to subdue their *nafs* and take only insignificant things from the vanities of the world; who pray and fast. They are Ghazis (holy warriors) and Hajjis, who weep and evangelise and demonstrate their strong disapprobation (*zahāda*) of the world and rejection of it, but without having integrity within themselves (*min al-ḍamīr*) to the Lord of the worlds, high and exalted is He. He feigns worship with what appears to be obedience. He appears to be someone who is sincere because his outer behaviour (*al-jawāriḥ*) broadcasts that [image].⁵²

46. *Al-Riʿāya*, 56 = ed. Smith, 20.

47. This is an interesting example in which *naqala* might mean ‘transform’. See 2.4.3, p. 42.

48. *Al-Riʿāya*, 41 = ed. Smith, 7.

49. Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: a Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 46; Fritz Meier, ‘Ein wichtiger Handschriftenfund zur Sufik’, *Oriens* 20 (January 1967): 103. I use ‘sharia’ loosely in the sense of basing Islamic ethics on the interpretation of the Quran and Sunna. I have not located an instance where Muḥāsibī uses this label. See also, *al-Riʿāya*, 38, 45, 88, 90 = ed. Smith, 5, 11, 47, 49.

50. *Al-Riʿāya*, 87–88 = ed. Smith, 47.

51. Often translated simply as ‘ascetics’. According to Fīrūzābādī they are satisfied with physical discomforts in general, while the root itself indicates disregard for cleanliness, *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, ed. Naṣr al-Hūrīnī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1978), s.v. ‘*al-qashaf*’, by Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Fīrūzābādī.

52. *Al-Riʿāya*, 44 = ed. Smith, 9.

In this context Muḥāsibī specifically links this censure with Quran reciters (*qur-rāʾ*, sing. *qārīʾ*).⁵³ Earlier analysis of Muḥāsibī’s rebuke of Shaqīq’s followers highlighted his concern that ascetic tendencies could lead to the neglect of legal obligations, for example, promoting hunger at the risk of starvation. Here Muḥāsibī’s emphasis is that security in renunciant accoutrements may obscure the obligation to obey God in one’s inner thoughts. Muḥāsibī’s interlocutor expresses concern that these reciters would never suspect such a problem among themselves. ‘How will they realise the extent of their deception?’⁵⁴ Though Muḥāsibī gives vague indication that their outward acts are blameworthy, his chief complaint is with inner sins (*dhunūb al-ḍamīr*) such as envy, pretension, and bad thoughts—all diseases of the heart. He summarises his basis for such harsh criticism: ‘God will not accept a good deed unless His face is desired with it’.⁵⁵ He is quite convinced that many who practise common ascetic acts lack this sincerity (*ikhhlās*).

Al-Riʿāya’s opening censure of the assumed advantage of ascetic practices and virtues indicates another important dimension to Muḥāsibī’s vision of devoted obedience. The progressive ascent toward God through the attainment of praiseworthy virtues is not just commendable, but required if forbidden inner vices are to be treated and eradicated. Muḥāsibī expresses these vices through the metaphor VICES ARE A DISEASE. ‘This disease [of the heart] resembles similar examples in the world: if it proves difficult to cure the one who suffers from it can only be cured through prolonged treatment.’⁵⁶ The importance of this metaphor for Muḥāsibī’s approach to religious devotion is indicated by the centrality of diagnosing and treating these ‘diseases of the heart’ (*marad/ṣaqam al-qalb*) within *al-Riʿāya*.

Though Muḥāsibī avoids the direct association of his polemic with ‘renunciants’ (*zuhhād*), he clearly condemns ascetic virtues and practices that are common

53. Muḥāsibī could easily have specific social movements in mind with this list. More research is needed.

54. ‘*Fa-kayfa li-hādhā al-mughtarr bi-zāhir ṭāʿati-hi, an yaʿrifā nafsa-hu wa-ṭūl ghirrati-hi, fi ʿayyām al-dunya, bi-qirāʿati-hi?*’, *al-Riʿāya*, 45 = ed. Smith, 10.

55. *Al-Riʿāya*, 44 = ed. Smith, 9.

56. *Al-Riʿāya*, 70 = ed. Smith, 30.

among them.⁵⁷ Like the second tier of the obdurate (see Table 3.1), they remain deceived about aspects of their religious devotion that are contrary to God's guidance in the Quran and in the Sunna. Because of this, he calls them the People of Innovation (*ahl al-bid'a*). He denounces their disapprobation of the world (*zuhd*), their impassive contentment (*riḍā*) and their exaggerated trust of God (*tawakkul*) because they deviate from the model of the earliest Muslim community. Their exaggeration of these virtues has led to the elevation of unsanctioned acts of piety: abandoning medicine, refusing gainful occupation, the desertion of family obligations, and rejecting any provisions for traveling.

Muḥāsibī's condemnation of ascetic virtues and practices challenges Shaqīq's commendation of the heroic pursuit of these virtues and practices. His critique is not directed simply at Shaqīq, but at the late antique value of denying the world in demonstration of religious devotion. Earlier collections of ascetic traditions⁵⁸ highlight the popularity of this approach. These collections also challenged renunciants to examine the motives behind ascetic practices, but without casting doubt on their value. As in Shaqīq's treatise, ascetic practices within these sayings were closely associated with the 'diminution of the ego'.⁵⁹ In their view, without the subjugation of the will, these ascetic acts are meaningless.⁶⁰

Muḥāsibī's critique is not important because it questions the sincerity of renunciants, but because it questions whether renunciants are the true paragons of religious devotion. Devoted obedience (*taqwā*) is not idealised with heroic acts of ascetic piety, but with perfected obedience to God's commands. Muḥāsibī's negligence of disapprobation of the world (*zuhd*) as an important indicator of religious devotion is important.⁶¹ Though he is careful to outline the duty which Muslims have to obey God through informed practice of Islamic fundamentals like fasting

57. Reinert, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, 245.

58. *Kitāb al-Zuhd* and *Kitāb al-Jihād* of Ibn al-Mubārak (118–9/736–7 to 181/797).

59. Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 180.

60. *Ibid.*, 184.

61. See 5.0.2, p. 163. The most extensive discussion in the secondary literature is by van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī*, 99–107.

and ritual prayers, *zuhd* is never mentioned in *al-Ri'āya* as a means toward obedience, nor as the mark of God's friends. He never mentions it in connection with treating the diseases of the heart or taming the passions of the *nafs*. Though Shaqīq and Kharrāz consider *zuhd* an important virtue in their religious devotion, Muḥāsibī never includes it in his lists of stations or ranks.

Muḥāsibī's censure provides evidence of the widespread association of *zuhd* with the ascetic virtues and practices of elite renunciants. This contradicts Kinberg's suggestion that *zuhd* is simply the Muslim equivalent of 'ethics'. Kinberg promotes a conflated understanding of *zuhd* based on an undifferentiated overview of its definition within various traditions found in later sources. Reinert's success in drawing historically based conclusions about *tawakkul*⁶² suggests that the assumptions behind her approach are suspect.⁶³ In contrast to Muḥāsibī's suspicion of exaggerated *zuhd*, *riḍā*, and *tawakkul*, Kinberg conflates traditions about these to conclude that the *zāhid* (renunciant) must make a compromise 'between the fact that he lives a spiritual life and is supposed to annihilate himself and the whole world in which he lives, and the fact that he cannot escape his existence and physical needs in this world'.⁶⁴ This attitude, she concludes, is a central question of any Muslim's faith. In fact, 'practicing *Islām* is parallel to practicing *zuhd*'.⁶⁵

Without addressing here if Kinberg's understanding of *zuhd* is correct (see below, 5.0.2, page 163), I suggest that she underestimates the diversity of Islamic religious devotion. Muḥāsibī does in fact affirm *zuhd*, but not as the unifying virtue of an ascetic approach to religious devotion. The ubiquity of *zuhd* in the Islamic tradi-

62. Reinert, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*. Reinert discusses the complex historical development of *tawakkul*, whose earliest usage is located in entrusting one's sustenance (*rizq*) to God's eternal decree. Practices include shunning any intermediate means (*asbāb*) of sustenance, especially employment. By the ninth century, a critique of extremist applications of *tawakkul* pressured a redefinition of the term to include internal emotions of trust and dependency, without the complete rejection of the intermediate means of provision.

63. 'This question can be answered only if we have the actual writings of the specific personage, if such writings exist. Thus, since in most cases we cannot know definitely when a definition actually originated, the chronological order has no meaning. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept we must analyze the definitions according to content without regard to their chronological order.' Leah Kinberg, 'What Is Meant by *Zuhd*', *Studia Islamica*, no. 61 (1985): 29.

64. *Ibid.*, 40.

65. *Ibid.*, 41.

tion does suggest the central place of an inherent suspicion of the world's pleasures within Islam. It is probably more significant, however, that *zuhd* is the eponymous virtue of the *zāhid*, who was universally respected within the late antique milieu. Even Muḥāsibī seems reluctant to direct any of his polemic specifically against the *zuhhād*, preferring instead to use synonyms or descriptions.⁶⁶ Kinberg quotes what was probably Muḥāsibī's position on *zuhd*, '[it] is merely following the *hadīth* and the *sunnah*,'⁶⁷ but draws the wrong conclusion. A significant current within early Islam *did* consider *zuhd* to be 'something destined for a select limited group of people',⁶⁸ and that current had an awareness that it was promoting an ideal beyond what was legally incumbent (*farḍ*). There were then at least two approaches to *zuhd*: one that anchored it in the Quran and Sunna, like Muḥāsibī; and another that considered it the basis for ascetic practices that disciplined the *nafs*.

The biographical traditions contain a complex amalgamation of various approaches and traditions. But careful attention to other kinds of sources provides convincing evidence that variegated traditions should not be conflated. Though disapprobation of the world and suspicion of finding pleasure in it is universally affirmed within Islamic tradition, reading that tradition in light of other genres indicates that Muslim scholars did not agree on its nature or even role within religious devotion.

Muḥāsibī's critique of ascetic virtues and practices suggests a more complicated picture than Kinberg acknowledges. Early traditionists⁶⁹ like Sufyān ibn 'Uyayna (d. 198/814) were careful to clarify that world-denying acts were of no value without world-denying attitudes.⁷⁰ Further research may provide tangible evidence that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (110/728) is the earliest known promoter of this concern. Both their

66. He does reproach the 'reciters' (*qurrā'*) and the 'ascetics' (*nussāk*).

67. Kinberg, 'What Is Meant by Zuhd', 40. From Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb*.

68. Ibid.

69. See Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th-10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 2.

70. Reinert, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, 245, 322; Christopher Melchert, 'Baṣran Origins of Classical Sufism', *Der Islam* 82, no. 2 (2005): 230.

names and traditions appear in *al-Ri'āya*,⁷¹ suggesting their influence on Muḥāsibī. Melchert suggests that Sufyān ibn 'Uyayna went beyond Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to express skepticism of ascetic practices like hunger. Perhaps, but the tradition Melchert cites may simply be clarification that *zuhd* is disapproval of the world, a necessary prerequisite of authentic ascetic practices: 'Renunciation means shortness of hope, not eating poorly.'⁷² It is also unclear whether earlier Islamic tradition was aware of the competing visions of religious devotion seen in the disagreement between Muḥāsibī and Shaqīq. Perhaps earlier traditionists like Sufyān ibn 'Uyayna had not developed an alternative to the renunciant path's mortification of the *nafs* for controlling sinful desires. They may have been suspicious of ascetic practices not sanctioned by the emerging standard of prophetic Sunna, but not yet have verbalised Muḥāsibī's shift to the alternative strategy of strengthening the heart against the desires God uses to test Muslims. Shaqīq's approach was to deaden the source of those desires through an ascetic distancing of the world.

Muḥāsibī's critique of ascetic virtues and practices common among the renunciants of his day further clarifies the goal of his religious devotion. Against the widespread belief that asceticism epitomised the highest devotion to God, Muḥāsibī insisted on the primacy of God's commands in the Quran and Sunna, including a clarification of God's expectations of the believer's heart.

3.2.2 The Place of Law in Muḥāsibī's Vision of Devoted Obedience

The centrality of obeying God's commands in Muḥāsibī's vision of devoted obedience warrants a brief overview of Muḥāsibī's approach to determining the commands God has given. Since the purpose of mankind in this realm is to obey God, it is incumbent that one understands God's requirements. Knowing God's requirements is central to *al-Ri'āya* and is what he has in mind with the term '*ḥuqūq*'—the claims which God has made on mankind. Muḥāsibī prefers the term *fiqh* to denote

71. e.g. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), *al-Ri'āya*, 49 = ed. Smith, 13; and Sufyān ibn 'Uyayna (d. 198/814), *al-Ri'āya*, 35 = ed. Smith, 8.

72. Melchert, 'Baṣran Origins of Classical Sufism', 230.

the comprehensive knowledge of what God requires.⁷³ The term generally means ‘understanding’ or ‘comprehension’, but in this context denotes Islamic jurisprudence.

The source of this understanding is knowledge (*‘ilm*) from the Quran and the Sunna.⁷⁴ Knowledge means deductions about what God loves and what he hates. Though Satan can work together with man’s desire centre (*nafs*) to deceive God’s servant, any believer should be able to discern what is right and wrong, that is, what God loves or hates. He can do this by ‘looking with his heart’, or by asking the scholars (*al-‘ulamā’*). If his heart seems to lead him in a direction controverted by the consensus of the scholars, then he knows he is in error. This process of discovering what is right and wrong is not simply a question of theoretical principles, but requires careful reflection when an uncertain circumstance presents itself. Muḥāsibī’s examples include determining if one should turn away from a voice that might be hateful to God. That is to say, knowledge is not simply knowing God’s commands in a general sense, but includes knowing what God might love or hate in an *ad hoc* situation.

For those who have begun the path of repentance, Muḥāsibī provides ample method for escaping the deception of desires. The greater danger is for those who don’t consider that their actions might be deviant. Their callous hearts prevent an awareness that their actions are contrary to the Sunna, even though ‘they make use of traditions, God’s book, and tools of analogy (*al-maqāyīs*)’.⁷⁵ If they are unable to find accurate knowledge (*‘ilm*) about man’s duties then they cannot find goodness: ‘whoever is not in correspondence with the truth, is not in correspondence with what is virtuous (*khayr*)’.⁷⁶ Without realising it, even the *ahl al-sunna* can be seduced by the *nafs* to introduce innovations (*bida‘*) in their religion during their moments of carelessness (*ghafla*).⁷⁷ Knowledge, obtained from the Quran and the Sunna, is

73. e.g. *al-Ri‘āya*, 359–361 = ed. Smith, 284–86.

74. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 87, 90 = ed. Smith, 46, 49.

75. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 88 = ed. Smith, 47.

76. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 89 = ed. Smith, 48.

77. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 87 = ed. Smith, 47.

the only guide for those who would follow the path of obedience. Moreover, that knowledge can be evasive without proper attention to keep the heart soft and attentive to God's guidance.

Discovering this knowledge requires not only spiritual alertness, but also the exercise of reason. The dynamic nature of moral choices requires not just specific rules, but also understanding their occasions (*asbāb*), their times (*awqāt*), their reasons (*ʿilal*), their motives (*irāda*), their incumbencies (*wujūb*), and their essence (*fi-ma hiya*).⁷⁸ For example, the ritual prayers must be performed at their proper times if they are to be valid. Muḥāsibī introduces these concepts, but not with sufficient details to consider *al-Riʿāya* to be in the genre of Islamic jurisprudence. He does give extensive discussion of competing legal obligations. For example, perhaps one wants to perform the Hajj, but cannot do so without neglecting support of his parents. Because it is possible to delay the performance of Hajj, one must not neglect his parents. This is in contradistinction to the ritual prayers, which should be performed even when in conflict with an immediate request from parents. His examples establish that knowledge of God's requirements includes understanding a hierarchy of obligations. This is important because Muḥāsibī demonstrates throughout *al-Riʿāya* that commendable (*nāfila*) ascetic practices are low on this hierarchy. One cannot neglect his parents in their pursuit.

Within Muḥāsibī's framework of jurisprudence is the concept that their essence (*fi-ma hiya*) consists of internal and external acts, *aʿmāl al-qulūb wa-l-jawāriḥ*. Obedience to God's commands must begin with the heart.⁷⁹ These actions of the heart begin with faith in God and the rejection of unbelief (*kufr*). Next is belief in the Sunna and the rejection of any innovation that undermines the Sunna. The third element, more relevant in this discussion, is the commitment to obey God and to reject persisting in anything he hates. In *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd* he repeats the same list (see 5.2.1, page 180) and continues on to explain that these actions of the heart

78. *Al-Riʿāya*, 47, 82, 87, 106 = ed. Smith, 12, 43, 46, 66.

79. *Al-Riʿāya*, 82–83 = ed. Smith, 43.

branch out to build a foundation for all external acts of obedience. Without compromising the seriousness of external regulations, Muḥāsibī is insistent that God's expectations upon mankind are not fulfilled by rote or mechanical performance of the exoteric commands and prohibitions found in the Quran and Sunna. Muḥāsibī's path of devoted obedience is built on a theory of jurisprudence that acknowledges the centrality of the Quran and the Sunna, and establishes the primacy of heart actions.

3.2.3 Blessings of Obedience

Obedience to God is the purpose of human existence and it alone promises eschatological security (*amn*). One's starting place on the path of devoted obedience is influenced by the clarity of one's vision of the Hereafter. The dulling of the heart's sense of what is to come begins the process of hardening and encrustation that leads to obduracy and the diseases of the heart. The later investigation of Muḥāsibī's prescription for devoted obedience will highlight the importance of the Hereafter in its relationship to fear (*khawf*) and hope (*rajā'*), key waypoints. Muḥāsibī recognises eschatological security as a key component in the blessings which God promises to those who guard their obedience to Him. This security brings joy (*surūr*) and even rapture (*ghibṭa*), even though this life tests the God-fearer with both its delights and tribulations.⁸⁰

Though Muḥāsibī devotes ample attention to descriptions of the Hereafter, both positive and negative, he reserves his most eloquent descriptions of God's blessings for those promises God gives in this present life.

The Kind One (*al-Laṭīf*) will not abandon them in the world, despite what He will give them in the Hereafter. Thus will He illuminate their hearts (for them), and strengthen themselves, and suffice them from [needing] His creation, and make obedience to Him a delight. He will compel their hearts not only to fear, but to an excellent view of Him and to fellowship (*uns*) with His hope. And beyond this He grants them pleasure with longing (*shawq*) for Him, Mighty and Exalted is He, and

80. *Al-Ri'āya*, 41 = ed. Smith, 7.

His Paradise. And He shifts them from endurance in obeying Him to pleasure and joy in it. He provides them with ease in this life through the insignificance of the world so that their life in it is pleasant. His support and help in the world are unsurpassed. This is what he has promised them.⁸¹

This passage is critical because it challenges any analysis of Muḥāsibī's method of personal development as an other-worldly preoccupation with austerity in this life in pursuit of bliss in the next. As stated, there is a role for eschatological reflection in Muḥāsibī's thought, but it is not the only goal of devoted obedience nor the sole motivation for its pursuit. Though fear of the Hereafter dominates the initial stage of Muḥāsibī's path, this gives way to joy as obedience is perfected.

Rather there are pleasures and delights in this world, even if finding those pleasures requires denying one's *nafs* any pleasures forbidden by God. In the paragraph quoted above Muḥāsibī describes a 'shift' or 'transfer' (*naqala*) which transforms the experience of the devotee from a life of patient endurance (*mukābada*) in obedience to one of pleasure and joy (*na'im wa-surūr*).⁸² This shift is not simply a result of the new confidence and security he has in the completeness of his obedience, but entails his reception of significant benefits he may have lacked formerly: inner enlightenment and strength, a new-found appreciation and respect for God—beyond fear, an ascent into a higher experience of longing for God and apprehension of Him in Paradise,⁸³ a contentment with obedience to God in this life even in simplicity. Rather than enticing his heart and lower nature into an entangled relationship with self-destructive desires⁸⁴, God's creation, the world, will make him independent of other people (*aghnā-hum bi-hi 'an khalqi-hi*) so that his need for worldly pleasures decreases.

For Muḥāsibī, the person for whom obedience becomes joy has elements of a higher level of awareness—a new state of mind. He sees the world differently than

81. *Al-Ri'āya*, 41 = ed. Smith, 7.

82. *Al-Ri'āya*, 41 = ed. Smith, 7.

83. *Al-Ri'āya*, 77 = ed. Smith, 38.

84. *Al-Ri'āya*, 106–7 = ed. Smith, 66–67. Muḥāsibī outlines in detail the backsliding of a believer so that his heart and soul are entangled with sinful desires: 'so his heart is stirred up with the occupation of the world,' *al-Ri'āya*, 57 = ed. Smith, 21.

he had seen it formerly. There is no indication in this description that this new outlook comes from an ecstatic encounter. Its focus is not preoccupation with rapture in the manifestation of a formerly unseen reality, but rather in a new-found aptitude and success in obedience to God. Though this higher level of maturity celebrates a new awareness of God, even an intimacy with Him, there is no suggestion of prolonged or even momentary escape from a lower, more earthly kind of reality. This successful aspirant succeeds in abandoning the forbidden pleasures of the world—even in those that might be questionable (*al-shubuhāt*)⁸⁵—but not in escaping a baser mode of existence altogether. Though he longs for God, he does not hate the world,⁸⁶ but rather hates what God hates with newfound resolve.

Muḥāsibī's path of devoted obedience includes the progressive attainment of blessings in this life. Though God might grant material blessings, the path of obedience is linked to the transformation of one's outlook on life and an awareness of God's support of him in its trials. A commitment to devoted obedience is strengthened by an awareness of the blessings God's reserves for those who seek friendship with him.

3.2.4 Friendship with God

Muḥāsibī's path of devoted obedience (*taqwā*) progresses toward perfected compliance with the commands God revealed in the Quran and Sunna. If God's servant reaches this state of purity, it is because God has chosen him for friendship (*al-wilāya*).⁸⁷ He is God's friend because he has reached proficiency in observing God's expectations. As Muḥāsibī's discussion continues, it becomes clear that the blessings of obedience are in fact the marks of those who are God's friends, who no longer have any fear or grief in their thoughts of the judgement to come.⁸⁸

85. van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī*, 96–97.

86. *Al-Ri'āya*, 75 = ed. Smith, 36.

87. *Al-Ri'āya*, 38 = ed. Smith, 5.

88. *Al-Ri'āya*, 38 = ed. Smith, 5. Muḥāsibī links the concepts of *taqwā* and *wilāya* with *Yūnus* 10:62–63.

For some, friendship with God becomes apparent at the time of physical maturity (see 3.1.3, page 53). Such as these have no experience of transitioning to a higher spiritual status because they have been favoured with a heart compelled to obey God from childhood. Despite lapses, his heart had been protected from disobedience. They are characterised by circumspect devotion (*taqwā*) from the moment they left innocence.⁸⁹ Though not explicit, it may be that Muḥāsibī's description of those born into *wilāya* refers to prophets.

Unlike those whose friendship with God was never in question, others may apply themselves to a programme of progressive obedience and thereby discover that God means to grant them this higher spiritual status despite their disobedient past. As the servant progresses along the path of discovering and repenting of all of his sins and vices, he can begin to hope that he might in fact be one of those for whom God has reserved his friendship. This moment is not reached through any form of ecstatic experience, but as a result of long perseverance in submitting to a thorough accounting of his soul, and deep commitment to giving God his every due. 'And hope awakens that in God's foreknowledge and election he might be a *walī* to his Lord and that this very moment [of his resolve]⁹⁰ is the attestation (*hukm*) of his friendship (*wilāya*) [to God].'⁹¹

Muḥāsibī's vision for those who pursue progressive obedience is that they become God's beloved, His friends. Though rooted in God's foreknowledge (*sābiq 'ilmihi*) and election (*qadar*),⁹² he describes a path whose goal, perfected obedience, is available for any who would follow it. Muḥāsibī is careful to clarify that this rank is not the achievement of personal effort, but rather an act of grace for the one who is diligent in its pursuit.⁹³ This explains Muḥāsibī's description of this moment of transition as a kind of 'hope' that wells up within the devotee. Nonetheless, this

89. *Al-Ri'āya*, 55 = ed. Smith, 19.

90. He means that moment when he has repented of all his sins and completed his determination to never return to them.

91. *Al-Ri'āya*, 71–72 = ed. Smith, 33.

92. *Al-Ri'āya*, 72 = ed. Smith, 33.

93. *Al-Ri'āya*, 73–74 = ed. Smith, 34.

act of God's grace is not unpredictable, but is available to any who would take up Muḥāsibī's admonition to give God His every due.

The ordinary person departs the innocence of childhood and soon establishes whether he belongs to the ranks of the obdurate or the ranks of the repentant. God's expectation of him in this life is perfected obedience; and this is the goal of Muḥāsibī's programme. Muḥāsibī's compelling vision of the life of perfected obedience is the possibility he extends that such a servant might join the ranks of the friends of God.

3.3 Perfecting the Devotion of Obedience

Muḥāsibī exhorts his followers to embark upon a spiritual journey that starts with inattention and ends in perfected repentance and obedience. He skilfully encourages his followers with descriptions of bliss and security, especially for those whose dedication leads to God's pronouncement of their status as His friends. Though Muḥāsibī clearly describes the starting point and final destination of the journey of devoted obedience, the path of that journey is not a straightforward presentation. Unlike Shaqīq's pedagogical description of the path toward God as a series of interlocking waypoints, Muḥāsibī presents progress in devotion to God by describing how one virtue or practice leads to the next. Conversely, hardening of the heart is described as a series of reversals that are linked to one another. He does not present a single chain of virtues or vices. This section will analyse these causal chains to demonstrate the progressive nature of Muḥāsibī's religious devotion as well as the downhill path of an obdurate heart.

3.3.1 Escaping Obduracy

The purpose of mankind is obedience to its Master and Owner, exemplified in the model which the friends of God present to the world. This model of life seems unobtainable and perhaps undesirable for those who stumble from puberty into the unbridled pursuit of pleasures. Through persistent disobedience their hearts have

become impervious to God's guidance. They are heedless of the punishment that awaits them in the Hereafter, and their hearts are unable to respond to influences that might awaken them to obedience as the only path of salvation.

Escaping this obduracy requires an awakening that eventually leads to fear. Muḥāsibī provides an overview of this process in one of his progress chains, though expressed in reverse order:

It is an understanding (*maʿrifa*) of the great severity (*ʿaẓīm*) of punishment that bestows fear. It is self-imposed fear (*takhwīf*) that bestows understanding of the great severity of suffering. It is reflection (*fikr*) on the Hereafter (*maʿād*) that bestows self-imposed fear. And an awakening from neglect [bestows] this reflection.⁹⁴

The obdurate must be awakened from apathy about God's commands (see Table 3.3). Reflection on the Hereafter will lead them to self-imposed fear and then to an understanding of the eschatological suffering of those who disobey God. From the final step of fear, the obdurate are in a position to pursue genuine repentance. This chain provides a general outline of Muḥāsibī's course for the obdurate, though he does not adhere to it strictly.

Table 3.3: The Progression to God-given Fear

Virtue	
1	Awakening from apathy about the Hereafter
2	Reflection on one's return to God (death and what follows)
3	Self-imposed fear (<i>takhwīf</i>)
4	Personal conviction (<i>maʿrifa</i>) of the severity of suffering
5	God-given fear that provokes repentance

The lowest tier of the obdurate belongs to the worst sort of Muslims, 'villains' (*shurūr*) and 'profligates' (*fussāq*).⁹⁵ They give mental ascent to the reality of future judgement, but God's punishment of sins never enters into their thoughts.

94. *Al-Riʿāya*, 62 = ed. Smith, 25.

95. *Al-Riʿāya*, 110 = ed. Smith, 69.

Whether their persistence in disobedience is a conscious effort to escape God or the result of unfortunate ignorance, the obdurate delight in the enjoyment of their sins.⁹⁶ Repentance is impossible for them unless they awaken some concern of the Hereafter within themselves. For Muḥāsibī, even the briefest reflection about the possibility of being judged by God in the Hereafter will provoke thoughts that could lead to repentance.

Unless the lowest tier of the obdurate develops a lingering awareness of their calamitous fate, there is little hope for change. Though God created the terrors of Hellfire as a deterrent to disobedience,⁹⁷ the lowest tier of the obdurate give no thought to future punishment. Muḥāsibī's only prescription for them is that they subject themselves to frightening thoughts (*fikr bi-l-takhwīf*) of the Hereafter. He utilises such techniques himself,⁹⁸ and often exhorts his listener to consider his true condition by reflection upon eschatological imagery.⁹⁹ His *Kitāb al-tawahhum* (*The Vision [of the final state]*) exemplifies this practice.¹⁰⁰

Such frightening thoughts are also prescribed for the less profligate ranks of the obdurate, and even for the ranks of the repentant when their resolve wavers. This self-imposed fear, labeled by Muḥāsibī as *takhwīf*, is meant to stir up true fear (*khawf*) of God in the heart of the believer. Muḥāsibī likens this process to feeding firewood to a fire beneath a pot of boiling water. As self-imposed thoughts of future judgement increase, the person will come to the point that he cannot contain his fear (the boiling water) and he will be driven to leave his obdurate sinning and repent.¹⁰¹ Using a play on words, Muḥāsibī says that at this moment he will restrain himself from his sins and repent.¹⁰² The main verb, *sakhā*, also has the meaning of arranging or venting coals under a pot.¹⁰³

96. *Al-Ri'āya*, 109 = ed. Smith, 69.

97. *Al-Ri'āya*, 58 = ed. Smith, 22.

98. *Al-Ri'āya*, 70 = ed. Smith, 30–31.

99. *Al-Ri'āya*, 40 = ed. Smith, 6.

100. Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Une Vision humaine des fins dernières: Le Kitāb al-tawahhum*, ed. André Roman (Paris: Klincksieck, 1978).

101. *Al-Ri'āya*, 67–68 = ed. Smith, 29.

102. 'Wa-sakhā 'an-hā nafsan fa-nadama wa-tāba wa-khasha'a wa-anāba,' *al-Ri'āya*, 67 = ed. Smith, 29.

103. *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, s.v. 'al-sakhīy'.

The one who submits himself to frightening thoughts of the judgement to come, even briefly, is on a higher tier than the profligate. He is better off because he occasionally repents of a few of his sins and his heart may one day be awakened to a higher station. The treatment for his condition is not different from that of the profligate, except that his occasional consent to the treatment keeps his heart from absolute hardening. Muḥāsibī suggests that the need for this treatment is felt most strongly in moments of regret after enjoying the pleasures of sins. They are on a higher tier than the profligate because the hardness of their hearts is no longer of such severity that the Hereafter is hidden from them.¹⁰⁴

The indication that these brief moments of self-imposed fear are successfully treating the obduracy of the non-repentant is their conscious decision to put off their repentance (*taswīf*). An example would be a person who is engaged in unlawful business practices, but promises God that he will desist once his livelihood is established. Or he promises repentance once he leaves his current city, citing his inability to avoid mixing with sinful people until then. From the point of view of the repentant this is a step backward. For the obdurate, however, this postponement is actually a step forward and opens up the possibility of two new courses of treatment (*mu‘ālaja*) for his heart: consideration of the suddenness of death, and consideration of the possibility that a future reversion might prevent him from carrying through with his promised repentance.¹⁰⁵

Muḥāsibī supposes that someone whose heart has been stirred to promises of repentance may stop to ponder the precarious position in which his plans for delayed repentance place him. Because he is putting off obedience, his disobedience continues to accrue judgement against him so that God’s forbearance in prolonging his life may in fact increase his punishment in the Hereafter.¹⁰⁶ Muḥāsibī believes that any intelligent man will recognise the incongruence of admitting to

104. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 69, 109–10 = ed. Smith, 30, 69.

105. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 110 = ed. Smith, 70.

106. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 69 = ed. Smith, 30–31.

the need of salvation from the terrors of future judgement, yet postponing the repentance and obedience required to attain it.¹⁰⁷

The highest tier of obduracy is the postponement of repentance stirred up by fleeting thoughts of punishment in the life to come. Reflection on the impending judgement, self-imposed fear of the consequences of that judgement, and postponed repentance are key prescriptions for the removal of the encrustation of the heart. Under careful consideration this segment of the path toward obedience involves very little actual change for the obdurate. The obdurate has desisted from few (if any) sins. Though fear may briefly linger during the moments of his greatest pleasure in sins, he has at best only distant plans of quitting those sins. In terms of character, there is no indication of any change at all. Yet Muḥāsibī offers hope that even these smallest stirrings may lead to repentance and salvation.

3.3.2 Focusing Concerns

Muḥāsibī recognises that habitual exposure to alarming thoughts of self-imposed fear (*takhwīf*) is disturbing and heavy.¹⁰⁸ Though necessary, the burden of these thoughts may impose a barrier that prevents the development of a firm commitment to the path of repentance.¹⁰⁹ Aware of this, Muḥāsibī explains not only its causes, but its treatment with a kind of reflection (*dhikr*) which he calls collecting (in the sense of focusing) one's concerns (*ijtimā' al-hamm*).¹¹⁰

A person whose heart is entangled in the enjoyment of the world (*rāḥa al-qalb fī al-dunyā*) finds that thoughts of the Hereafter imprison his mind from the things he enjoys. His pleasure in them is cut off because of the gravity of the danger he faces in the Hereafter.¹¹¹ Further, these grave thoughts cause the *nafs* to experience grief and discomfort as it recognises that it is to blame for the future judgement its companion faces. As the servant sets his mind on this alarming reflection of the

107. *Al-Ri'āya*, 53, 112 = ed. Smith, 17, 72.

108. *Al-Ri'āya*, 63 = ed. Smith, 26.

109. *Al-Ri'āya*, 63 = ed. Smith, 26.

110. *Al-Ri'āya*, 65 = ed. Smith, 27.

111. *Al-Ri'āya*, 63 = ed. Smith, 26.

Hereafter, a battle ensues within the person between this resolve and the *nafs*. With the help of the enemy the desire centre itself burdens the thoughts of the servant because it realises that continued reflection in the Hereafter will cut off its pleasure of the world. As the servant turns away from the disobedience that prevents its approach to God, it will seek to impede such thoughts. Moreover, the enemy realises that this self-alarming reflection will destroy the ploys it uses against him. Through the interference of these three—the entangled heart, the centre of desire, and the enemy—the alarming thoughts that might lead to repentance become so burdensome to the servant that his focus shifts away from cathartic reflection to the burden they impose on him.¹¹²

In an extended example of imagined inner-dialogue, Muḥāsibī models how a person should respond to the burdensome thoughts which arise when one devotes increasing energy to reflection on the Hereafter. One should suggest to his desires, personified as the *nafs*, that though he worries that his thoughts of the Hereafter may imprison him from the pleasures of the world, such thoughts are far better than eternal imprisonment in Hellfire. Bearing the temporary loss of pleasure now is better than the eternal loss of all pleasure in the Hereafter. As an example of this self-address: ‘But if your escape [addressing the *nafs*] from the contemplation of what will save you from God’s torment is in fact a hatred of spoiling your pleasure in your [enjoyment of] the world (*dunyā*), then what will it be like to have your pleasure in the Hereafter spoiled, with its delights forbidden to you?’¹¹³

As the servant internalises and applies this self-dialogue to specific instances of temptation, he will develop an internal history of self-dialogue that affirms the eternal pleasures that will be gained through the temporary discomfort of obedience in this life. Through this, subduing enticing pleasures that confront the mind will no longer require burdensome threats and warnings of eternal punishment. Instead, they will become sources of a new, higher kind of joy in the eternal pleasures he will receive in the Hereafter. Utilising a phrase that will later become an

112. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 63 = ed. Smith, 26.

113. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 64 = ed. Smith, 27.

important part of the Sufi path to self-purification and spiritual bliss, his disciple asks, ‘The [burdensome] thought [of the Hereafter] has become lighter, but I don’t know its path (*ṭarīqa-hā*). What is it that inspired this (*yaftaḥu-hā*)?’¹¹⁴ Muḥāsibī believes that concentrated self-talk about the merits of obedience will lead one to a new perspective on this inner struggle, one in which the contemplation of obedience is no longer burdensome.

Muḥāsibī calls this culmination of concentrated self-talk *ijtimā‘ al-hamm*, the focusing of concerns. This new perspective favours contemplation on future blessings instead of obsessing on missed pleasures. The one seeking repentance chooses to trust in God so that his mind becomes filled with thoughts that God loves. This causes a separation (*tafriq*) of one’s concerns from the affairs of the world. Perhaps later Sufis could find precedent in this description for their experience of *fanā*¹¹⁵ or passing away, and its loss of connection to the world. It would seem that in this discussion Muḥāsibī is not elaborating a flight from the world, but a reorientation toward the *delights* of the world which transforms their juxtaposition with the Hereafter into joy rather than oppression, despite denying them to oneself.

Muḥāsibī’s description of focusing concerns includes a practical method consisting of two parts: quieting the limbs and quieting the heart. He recognises a connection between the human body and inner thoughts: ‘looking with the eyes distracts the heart and occupies it’.¹¹⁶ So also the ears and the hands. This is in fact the same advice which he gives in the opening of *al-Ri‘āya*, including the Quranic justification for listening.¹¹⁷ There his advice is supplemented with a list describing the proper etiquette for listening, such as lowering the gaze, paying attention to what is heard, and resolving to act upon what one hears.¹¹⁸ From the correlation of these two passages, it would appear that Muḥāsibī is describing how an aspirant should listen *while* he is being taught, or while the Quran is being read. If he wants

114. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 65 = ed. Smith, 27.

115. See 6.3.4, p. 249.

116. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 66 = ed. Smith, 28.

117. *Al-Isrā’* 17:47 and *Al-Aḥqāf* 46:29.

118. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 34 = ed. Smith, 2.

to focus his concerns and separate them from the concerns of the world, he must be still.

This method involves not only a stilling of the body, but also the focus of one's inner thoughts. The servant leaves off excessive thoughts within his inner self (*bāṭin*). What Muḥāsibī is describing is a kind of concentration, which is clear from his comparison of this to the concentration a person uses in his worldly affairs when he is making an account of his money.

At this point Muḥāsibī describes a moment of illumination (*fataḥat la-hu al-fikr*) when this ordering provokes trust (*tawakkul*)¹¹⁹ within a person. This moment is critical; the disciple must avoid trusting in his own intellect when he reaches this moment of stillness. If he is not on guard the enemy will instigate a carelessness that overlooks God's role in this shift. The most obvious interpretation of this carelessness is that it is a kind of pride that maroons the believer's thoughts within his own concerns, despite the stillness he has achieved by restricting his thoughts.¹²⁰ This threat is similar to Muḥāsibī's warning to avoid attributing success on the path to one's own cleverness—a ruse of the enemy.¹²¹

More subtle is the suggestion that Muḥāsibī intends a higher level of awareness after this process of focusing one's concerns. Once this state of external and internal stillness is achieved, a critical moment of reflection presents itself. Certainly Muḥāsibī's description underscores that this illumination (lit., opening) is given by God, even if it is the predictable result of achieving inner stillness. The focus of one's mental awareness shifts away from the world not only because one stops thinking of those things—that he stills his mind—but also because he is given a trust in God that renders worldly concerns unimportant to him. This forms a subtle but profound shift away from an ascetic reliance (*tawwakul*) that abandons the world, to an inner trust that maintains a disapproval of its pleasures.

119. Reinert, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, 44–45, 77–78.

120. *Al-Ri'āya*, 67 = ed. Smith, 28.

121. *Al-Ri'āya*, 73 = ed. Smith, 35.

Muḥāsibī's descriptions disallow an interpretation of this transition to trust-filled stillness as a complete emptying of the mind. He states, 'the mind is present in the reordering of [one's] concerns'.¹²² His description in the introduction of *al-Ri'āya* suggests that his thoughts at this moment are focused on the oral presentation he is hearing. His mind receives this and no other input, physical or mental. Muḥāsibī culminates this with a description of reflecting on the words of God's book, the Quran, along with its promises and warnings. In all of these instances, the mind, though stilled, still maintains an object of reflection. Focusing one's concerns is practised by the aspirant in the grey zone between obduracy and repentance, between self-imposed alarm and God-given productive fear.

3.3.3 Perfecting Repentance

Once efficacious fear begins to stir in the heart of the believer he may join the ranks of the repentant (*al-tā'ibūn*). His fear has become strong enough that he finally acts upon his plans for repentance and begins quitting some of his sins. There are several challenges that he now faces. His occasional repentance must become regular. Forgiveness for past sins requires an acknowledgment of those sins and a commitment to avoid them in the future. Because their hearts are infected with diseases like envy and arrogance, aspirants must submit themselves to a programme of inner convalescence in pursuit of their vision to become one of God's friends. This convalescence requires uncovering not only past sins, but also the tricks of their *nafs* to keep them entangled in the world and its pleasures. Inseparable from this reflection is guidance (*dalīl*) from a correct understanding of the Quran and the Sunna. They must shun ignorance of God's requirements. This introspection must also be on guard against a regression back into forbidden pleasures that would hide the Hereafter from them and cause a relapse. He realises that he must struggle against his passions if he is to please God.¹²³ In all of this he seeks the resolve to

122. 'Fa-ḥuḍūr al-ʿaql bi-ijtimāʿ al-hamm,' *al-Ri'āya*, 65 = ed. Smith, 27.

123. 'Wa-huwa mujāhid li-nafsi-hi mukābid li-hawā-hu,' *al-Ri'āya*, 56, 80 = ed. Smith, 19–20, 31. See also van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī*, 85; Gavin Picken, 'The Concept of *Tazkiyat al-Nafs* in Islam in the Light of the Works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī' (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2005),

know God's claims upon him and to fulfil those claims.

Each of these challenges is intertwined so that no single progression of virtues or practices can guarantee success. Muḥāsibī leads his disciples toward devoted obedience by describing these challenges and providing chains of practice and virtue that lead toward the complete repentance of all sins and the solid resolve to avoid future sins.¹²⁴ Also helpful is his ranking of those who observe what God requires of them according to their response to the temptations of sin.¹²⁵ Though these different presentations do not fit together into one unified sequence, a programme for the heart's convalescence emerges as Muḥāsibī exhorts his disciple to progress toward perfected obedience.

3.3.3.1 Repentance

Understanding Muḥāsibī's concept of repentance is crucial for an analysis of his programme for the heart's convalescence.¹²⁶ Though repentance is primary for those on the path of obedience (*al-tā'ibūn*), Muḥāsibī does not formally introduce the concept in *al-Ri'āya*. His first reference occurs in a Quranic quotation within his demonstration that reflection on past actions is obligatory: 'O believers, all of you turn in repentance so that you may prosper.'¹²⁷ Repentance requires reflection upon past actions and the regret (*nadam*) of sins.

In his explanation of the ranks of the repentant, Muḥāsibī begins his classification without a formal explanation of its essence. Details begin to emerge as he explains the second rank of the repentant—those who repent of the sins they committed when they gave in to youthful passions. Besides the need for regret of past sins, the aspirant must also resolve that he not repeat past transgressions nor neglect God's requirements which he had formerly forsaken. He makes this resolve

290–295.

124. *Al-Ri'āya*, 47, 54, 62, 65, 76, 77 = ed. Smith, 12, 18, 25, 27, 37, 38.

125. *Al-Ri'āya*, 106–107 = ed. Smith, 66–67.

126. Picken, 'The Concept of *Tazkiyat al-Nafs* in Islam in the Light of the Works of al-Hārith al-Muḥāsibī', 283; 303–306. Picken dismisses repentance as important to Muḥāsibī's process of purification. Though Picken's discussion of Muḥāsibī's less known works is helpful, his interpretation of Muḥāsibī through the rubric of *tazkiya* is historically problematic.

127. *Al-Nūr* 24: 31, Jones trans.

even though he knows that his organ of desire (*nafs*) will be inclined to fall back into disobedience as it misses the pleasures of sin. Muḥāsibī makes it clear that the one who repents has committed himself to a struggle against his centre of desire.¹²⁸ Further, in this struggle he may sometimes fall back into sin—Muḥāsibī’s vision is not perfectionism—after which his repentant heart will quickly return to God with renewed repentance.¹²⁹

From this point forward repentance becomes an assumed and understated *sine qua non* of Muḥāsibī’s path of devoted obedience. For Muḥāsibī, comprehensive obedience entails complete repentance of every sin committed from the time of maturity. Complete repentance is an indispensable component of his vision for the one who becomes God’s friend. That moment when the devotee is hopeful of his friendship to God (*wilāya*) is a moment when he suspects his repentance of past sins might be perfected and his resolve toward future obedience might be firm.¹³⁰ When this emerging hope of *wilāya* attributes this comprehensive repentance and obedience to God alone, pride disappears and is replaced with hope (*rajāʾ*), thankfulness (*shukr*) and exalted admiration of God (*ḥusn al-ẓann*). At that moment,

when the resolve of the repentance in his heart has become sincere, after having opposed the sins of his past life, pride is eliminated from his heart, and it becomes compelled to noble thoughts about his Lord; then, in that moment he has become a repentant, one who has turned away [from his sins], repentant (*munīb*), one who has admitted [his sins], who acknowledges that his repentance has been by the grace of God, his Lord, not by his strength.¹³¹

3.3.3.2 Fear and hope

This maturity of repentance toward complete obedience is presented in one of Muḥāsibī’s chains as a progression from fear to obedience.

128. *Al-Riʿāya*, 56 = ed. Smith, 19–20.

129. *Al-Riʿāya*, 57 = ed. Smith, 20–21.

130. *Al-Riʿāya*, 72 = ed. Smith, 33.

131. *Al-Riʿāya*, 71–72 = ed. Smith, 33.

Obedience is the path of security, and knowledge is the guide to that path. So the source of obedience is wariness (*waraʿ*) [of wrongdoing] and the source of wariness is pious circumspection (*taqwā*) and the source of pious circumspection is self-accounting, and the source of self accounting is fear and hope'.¹³²

Table 3.4: The Progression from Fear and Hope

	Virtue
1	Fear and hope
2	Self-examination (<i>muḥāsaba</i>)
3	Pious circumspection (<i>taqwā</i>)
4	Wariness of wrongdoing (<i>waraʿ</i>)
5	Obedience guided by knowledge

This fear, coupled here and elsewhere with hope (*rajāʿ*), is not the same as self-imposed fear or alarm (*takhwīf*). Self-imposed fear is restricted to fleeting thoughts of future distress, akin to anxiety or worry, with occasional moments of terror. Though it plays a key role in igniting true fear, as Muḥāsibī describes in his fire-wood analogy, its results are not permanent and it makes no lasting impression on the heart. Obedience does not result from terrorising oneself. Further, self-imposed fear is the characteristic activity of those trapped in obduracy and only recommended to the repentant as a means of last resort, when true fear is vanishing from the soul because of a lapse into obduracy.¹³³

Muḥāsibī considers fear of such importance because those things which God has commanded of his servants are wearisome and tiring to the heart and body.¹³⁴ He cites a Hadith that indicates God has surrounded the torments of Hellfire with things that delight man's desires. Around Paradise he has placed burdensome commands that deter man's desires.¹³⁵ Without fear and hope the passions will subdue a man's inclinations for the pleasures of the world and dissuade him from the difficulty of obedience. Only punishments and rewards can motivate a weak and ignor-

132. *Al-Riʿāya*, 47 = ed. Smith, 12.

133. *Al-Riʿāya*, 61 = ed. Smith, 24.

134. 'Al-a'māl allatī amara Allāh ʿazza wa-jalla bi-hā wa-nadaba ilay-hā aktharu-hā mumill l-l-qalb, mutaʿib li-l-jawāriḥ.' *Al-Riʿāya*, 58 = ed. Smith, 22.

135. *Al-Riʿāya*, 58 = ed. Smith, 22.

ant person to abandon these passions. Thus God promises rewards to the obedient and threatens the unrepentant with punishment.¹³⁶ God did not create Paradise and the Hellfire simply as a place of reward for his friends and abasement for his enemies. Rather, he created them to stimulate fear and hope within man so that he would obey Him.

While *takhwīf* is self-imposed fear through reflection on the Hereafter (*ma'ād*), fear is a result of God's grace and mercy, and not the result of human agency. God places true fear in the heart of the servant whom he favours without that servant needing to constrain himself to fear.

On the basis of [his] self-imposed fear, fear is stimulated in him without his being responsible for it. God will stimulate [fear] in the heart which imposes fear upon itself, as God has commanded. Certainly God introduces fear into the heart of the believing servant without constraint.¹³⁷

Since fear is the beginning step of Muḥāsibī's method, this distinction between *takhwīf* and *khawf* is especially significant. Only God can grant fear, and without it repentance is unlikely because only fear (together with hope) can cut short the passionate impulses which distract the soul from the Hereafter.

Though mentioned much less, Muḥāsibī always mentions hope (*raǧā'*) together with fear. Reflection upon the Hereafter includes not only fear, but hope as well; not only Hellfire, but Paradise. A distinction between self-imposed hope and hope inspired by God is not mentioned in *al-Ri'āya*, but one imagines that as with fear, Muḥāsibī would suggest that a believer only possesses hope if it actually stirs him up to action.

3.3.3.3 Self-Examination

Muḥāsibī's hallmark practice is self-examination (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*).¹³⁸ Reaching the final station of complete repentance¹³⁹ and perfected obedience requires com-

136. *Al-Ri'āya*, 59 = ed. Smith, 22.

137. *Al-Ri'āya*, 62 = ed. Smith, 25.

138. See van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī*, 139–143.

139. *Al-Ri'āya*, 79 = ed. Smith, 40. Muḥāsibī speaks of repentance as a covenant with God which requires faithfulness.

mitment to its stringent practice. In one of his more extensive interactions with the Quran, Muḥāsibī demonstrates that self-examination is incumbent because repentance requires it. Note that in this context it is unlikely Muḥāsibī means examining the centre of desire, but rather a person's thoughts and actions in general. Sometimes this distinction between *nafs* as a self-designation; that is, 'oneself', and *nafs* as man's centre or organ of desire, can be difficult to establish. In this context, it seems clear that Muḥāsibī intends a person's mental review of his own thoughts and actions.

This self-examination or self-accounting has two distinct applications. Fear begins the process of repentance first by initiating the examination of past actions and thoughts for instances of disobedience. This is critical because God's forgiveness is contingent upon the acknowledgement and repentance of those past sins. If a person had lingered in his state of obduracy then his need for thorough review of past transgressions is acute. As he makes progress toward complete repentance, the *nafs* colludes with Satan to hide sins from the devotee so that he remains unaware of them.¹⁴⁰ Without complete repentance, his love of these remaining sins, though hidden, may result in a gradual slide into obduracy. Thus Muḥāsibī insists on a thorough investigation of all one's past actions.

This is like a man who has great wealth locked up in a chest. Then someone steals what he put there and locks the chest back again, the way it was. Nevertheless, the man remains strong of heart, pleased with what he thinks he has in his chest. When he opens the chest and doesn't see his money, he finds out that he has been plundered without even realising it. So his heart is defeated and he becomes certain of his poverty.¹⁴¹

Muḥāsibī's interpretation: 'He thought that he had been obedient to God, but when he examines himself and reflects on his condition, he realises that his religion had been spoiled without his even knowing about it.'¹⁴²

140. *Al-Ri'āya*, 70 = ed. Smith, 31.

141. *Al-Ri'āya*, 71 = ed. Smith, 33.

142. *Al-Ri'āya*, 71 = ed. Smith, 33.

Another application of self-examination is toward future acts. In simplest terms this means making sure that any acts of obedience are undertaken with the sincere intention of obeying God. Once a person's centre of desire¹⁴³ realises that his master's commitment to abandoning sin is thorough, he resorts to infusing future acts of obedience with self-interest. In order to prevent impulses of self-interest from spoiling a person's path of obedience, he must examine his heart for signs of envy, and pride, ostentation and hypocrisy—the primary diseases of the heart.¹⁴⁴ Even if a person reaches the place of complete repentance from all past wrongdoing, he must never relax his guard against the deceptive ways of his centre of desire.

Despite Muḥāsibī's elaborate argument to ground self-examination in the Quran and Sunna, not all scholars were convinced. According to Ibn Kathīr (*apud* Melchert), Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal censured Muḥāsibī's protracted self-examination, which he considered to be excessive and innovative.¹⁴⁵

3.3.3.4 *taqwā*

Within the chain (see Table 3.4, page 83) that leads from fear to obedience, self-examination leads to circumspect devotion (*taqwā*). This virtue is perhaps as important to Muḥāsibī as self-examination. Though listed as the third step in this progress chain toward obedience and understanding, Muḥāsibī's exposition of *taqwā* suggests that it may be the practical resting place from which God's friend maintains his state of obedience.

After a brief introduction about the importance of listening,¹⁴⁶ Muḥāsibī promises to address the primary concern of his interlocutor: 'the charge of keeping God's

143. This usage of *nafs* concentrates a person's desires into a single source and personifies their effect as a semi-independent agent within the human psyche. Capturing this is one challenge of translating '*nafs*'.

144. *Al-Ri'āya*, 71 = ed. Smith, 33.

145. 'Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya fi-l-tārīkh* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Sa'āda, 1932), vol. 10, p. 330; Christopher Melchert, 'The Piety of the Hadith Folk', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 430.

146. '*Wa-qad aḥbabtu qabla jawābī iyāka 'an-mā sa'alta 'an-hu an aḥaḍḍaka 'alā ḥusn al-istimā'*', *al-Ri'āya*, 33 = ed. Smith, 1.

obligations and their fulfilment'. This is the translation of the full title given to *al-Ri'āya*. The phrase is built upon a Hadith that compares obedience to God to caring for sheep: 'All of you are shepherds (*rā'in*) and will be questioned about your charge (*ri'āya*).'¹⁴⁷ Muḥāsibī's concern to expose the exaggerations of some renunciants is linked to this phrase through a Quranic quotation:

We gave him (Jesus) the *Gospel* and We placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. But monasticism (*rahbāniyya*) they invented (*ibtada'ū-hā*). We did not prescribe it for them [but it arose] through desire for God's satisfaction; and they did not observe it as they should have done (*fa-mā ra'aw-hā ḥaqq ri'āyati-hā*).¹⁴⁸

Muḥāsibī's interpretation is that God censures them for abandoning practices that he did not require. How much more will God judge Muslims who abandon what God has made incumbent, 'his obligations' (*ḥaqq*)! The full quotation demonstrates the crucial link between the title of this book and *taqwā*:

So what will happen (lit., *kayfa*) to anyone who neglects the charge of his incumbent obligations (*ri'āyat ḥuqūqi-hi al-wājiba*), which necessitates his wrath and punishment when they are neglected? He has made their fulfilment (*al-qiyām bi-hā*) the key to blessing (*khayr*) in [this] world and in the Hereafter. And this is vigilance (*taqwā*).¹⁴⁹

The essential ingredient missing from those groups of renunciants that he castigates is *taqwā*.¹⁵⁰ Through their display of outward religious devotion, they have introduced innovative practices that are not grounded in the Quran and the Sunna. Like pre-Islamic monasticism, they incur God's wrath because they abandon God's express commands in favour of self-imposed deprivations. Further, they pursue ascetic practices without scrutinising thoughts of their hearts that might indicate corruption. God placed mankind into this present realm so that they would obey His commands. Those who practise *taqwā* focus their lives on this pursuit, and

147. *Al-Ri'āya*, 37 = ed. Smith, 4.

148. *Al-Ḥadīd* 57:27, Jones trans.

149. *Al-Ri'āya*, 38 = ed. Smith, 5.

150. *Al-Ri'āya*, 41–46 = ed. Smith, 7–11.

guard against infringing God's obligation to obedience. These groups practise an incomplete form of devotion because they ignore God's commands in pursuit of their self-imposed ascetic virtues and practices. Further, their programme neglects an earnest desire to please God through inner uprightness of heart. These two defects in their piety betray their lack of *taqwā* in that they do not live as those aware of God's ever present evaluation of their inner and outer actions.

What then is *taqwā* and how should it be translated in the works of Muḥāsibī? Muḥāsibī's introductory definition is this:

To be on one's guard against partnership (*shirk*) with anything other than God, against sin, and against everything which God has forbidden; or against neglect of the duties which God has obligated upon him.¹⁵¹

This definition is based on Quranic usage that ties *taqwā* to fear and caution.¹⁵² As God's servant examines himself for past transgression and proceeds toward perfected obedience by repenting of them, he must become increasingly vigilant to guard against infringements that would endanger his progress. Throughout the discussion in this section, the translations I have suggested, circumspect devotion and pious circumspection, are adequate equivalents to Muḥāsibī's usage.

Yūnus 10:62–63, a pivotal reference for the identification of God's friends, clearly links pious circumspection (*taqwā*) with God's friends (*awliyā'*). Muḥāsibī makes this connection explicit:

[God] prepares Paradise for those who possess [pious circumspection]. He grants security in the Hereafter for those who practise it and promises to accept their good works. He calls them His friends and lifts fear and grief from them on the day of dread and woe.¹⁵³

This pious circumspection is not simply a means to devoted obedience, but is also an abiding characteristic of those who have perfected their repentance. Through its practice the friend of God is immune to fleeting thoughts (*al-khāṭirāt*)

151. *Al-Ri'āya*, 39 = ed. Smith, 4.

152. *Al-Nisā'* 4:131; Yūnus 10:62–63; *Al-Dukhān* 44:51; *Al-Raḥmān* 55:46.

153. *Al-Ri'āya*, 38 = ed. Smith, 5.

that might lead his heart toward those diseases and actions that God hates.¹⁵⁴ Some exit childhood already endowed with this virtue. Others undergo the therapy prescribed by Muḥāsibī until God grants them this station and the awareness of their state.

3.3.3.5 Waraʿ

Though pious caution (*waraʿ*) is listed as a separate fourth virtue in Muḥāsibī's progression of fear to obedience (see Table 3.4, page 83), *al-Riʿāya* explains only that it is considered to be part of devoted circumspection (*taqwā*). Muḥāsibī's discussion in his book *al-Makāsib*¹⁵⁵ suggests that the nuance of pious caution (*waraʿ*) is its concern for questionable acts whose legal status is unknown. When in doubt, it would be better to postpone an action until one becomes convinced of the requirements of Sunna, or is able to consult a scholar.¹⁵⁶

3.3.3.6 Obedience guided by knowledge

The destination of this progress of fear through self-examination to circumspect devotion and pious caution is a state of obedience that is guided by an understanding of God's commands. The close association of these virtues makes it difficult to suggest that they are discrete steps. Rather the progression suggests a gradual intensification of these virtues toward obedience. One step is not finished so that the next can be undertaken. There is some sense of causality, nonetheless, especially from fear to self-examination, and from self-examination to vigilance. Though obedience is the goal of this progression, circumspect devotion to God's commands stands out as the chief focus of *al-Riʿāya* and as the virtue that characterises the persistence of God's friends. Without it their complete repentance from past wrongdoing and perfected obedience would slide back into error and deception—the *walī*'s locked treasure box would turn out to be empty.

154. *Al-Riʿāya*, 106 = ed. Smith, 66.

155. Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, in *al-Masāʾil fī aʿmāl al-qulūb wa-l-jawāriḥ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Cairo: The World of Books, 1969), 171–234 (hereafter cited as *al-Makāsib*).

156. *Al-Riʿāya*, 89 = ed. Smith, 48.

3.3.4 Attentiveness

Muḥāsibī's discussion presents circumspect devotion as a complex virtue that commits one to examining past and future actions for any transgression of God's commands. In a separate progress chain (see Table 3.5, page 92), he brings the focus of this commitment to the prevention of future acts of disobedience. Despite the firm resolve of his repentance, and his success and progress on the path of obedience, the aspirant faces a future struggle if he is to continue toward the goal of friendship with God. Muḥāsibī warns his disciple of the challenges he will face:

He should know that God has trials [in store] that a person will encounter in his life; that his enemy will not perish; that his basic nature (*ṭabʿ*) is established and will not be altered (*lam yanqalib*) nor be dissolved (*lam yuḥalli*); and that the world, with its pleasantries and loathsome things, will not pass away. In the midst of these conditions, that cause lapses and trials, he will not acquire the state of fulfilling his obligations to God unless he is on guard against carelessness (*ghafla*), with reminders against forgetfulness. This will not be obtained except with concerned attention (*ihtimām*) and wariness (*hidhr*).¹⁵⁷

The disciple faces three challenges to his continuation on the path toward friendship with God: an inner constitution inclined to self-gratification, an enemy determined to trick him, and physical presence in a world filled with temptation to disobedience.

Muḥāsibī provides a categorisation of the kinds of temptations that these negative forces will use to spoil the trajectory of his pursuit of friendship with God. Intrinsic to this present life are certain realities which will arise to threaten the resolve he has made toward absolute repentance of past and future sins. Muḥāsibī lists six of these:¹⁵⁸

1. Though abandoned in this transition toward obedience, there are patterns of sin which the *naḥs* can reignite if the devotee is not diligent. The bad habits and desires of the *naḥs* may re-emerge at any time.

157. *Al-Riʿāya*, 75 = ed. Smith, 36.

158. *Al-Riʿāya*, 75–76 = ed. Smith, 36.

2. Vigilance is also required to recognise new passions and desires of which the servant remains ignorant. These desires lie in wait for moments of negligence, when the organ of desire will be drawn to their seductions as it seeks gratification.
3. Because the *nafs* seeks pleasure, even sins which have never tempted the servant in the past can become problematic.
4. As for the future, the disciple must be on guard against delinquency in obligations which he had neglected in the past. Muḥāsibī provides several examples including the neglect of ‘forbidding the evil and promoting the good’.¹⁵⁹
5. There are also legal requirements of which the servant is unaware. Muḥāsibī’s warning is that the centre of desire will actually hide these obligations because of its aversion to their performance. Muḥāsibī’s quote above seems to indicate that the *nafs* cannot be wholly trusted, at least not at this stage of the journey.
6. Finally, the servant must be aware that God will test him in the future with new duties which formerly had not been applicable to him. As a continued commentary on the ascetic movements whose simplicity came at the cost of family responsibility, Muḥāsibī gives ‘supporting dependents’ as his example of future obligations for which the servant must be prepared.¹⁶⁰

Muḥāsibī warns his disciple that these six imperfections are ever present threats to the maintenance of one’s station of repentance. Their chief target is the servant’s resolve to stay the course of repentance. Muḥāsibī’s prophylaxis for the prevention of this loss of resolve is to discern how these six imperfections might rob the disciple of his repentance. Maintaining the internal posture which this list develops is the only way that he can guard himself from carelessness.

159. ‘... *ka-l-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf wa-l-nahī ‘an al-munkar*,’ *al-Ri‘āya*, 76 = ed. Smith, 36.

160. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 76 = ed. Smith, 36. Also, Reinert, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, 264–65.

Table 3.5: The Progression of Concerned Attention

	Virtue
1	Concerned Attention (<i>al-ihtimām</i>)
2	Wakefulness (<i>al-tayaqquḡ</i>)
3	Reflection (<i>al-dhikr</i>)
4	Concentration/deliberation (<i>tathabbut</i>)
5	Review (<i>tafaqqud</i>)
6	Discernment (<i>al-tabayyun</i>)

Muḥāsibī's explanation of this list is abbreviated. Of these, only concerned attention and concentration have sufficient discussion to warrant clear definitions. Inferences can be made about the others, but without exactness.

The clearest exposition of this progression is an analogy that Muḥāsibī makes with a person whose latent concerns allow him to take care of a prior commitment despite lying down to sleep. If one knows that he should awaken while asleep to take care of 'worldly concerns' (*ḥāja min ḥawā'ij al-dunyā*) his sleep may be fitful and interrupted. His concern and wariness are able to prevent him from sleeping so soundly that he misses this need, even though his self-awareness is absent. How much more compelling should his concern and wariness against these six imperfections protect him from spoiling his Hereafter?

In this context of being able to awaken from sleep, Muḥāsibī repeats this progression:

And if concerned attention for something that will pass away, [though] spoiled and disturbing, awakens the sleeper after he has lost the awareness of his surroundings, then [what of] concerned attention for what will remain (*al-baqī*), for what is wholesome and secure, and caution against its loss and his descent into suffering and pain? First he will rouse his awareness, and [not allow himself to] fall sound asleep—if he maintains concerned attention and caution, he will remain wakeful. And if he remains wakeful, he will reflect (*dhakara*). And if he reflects, he will concentrate (that is, he will persist in reflection). And if he concentrates, he will make a review. And if he reviews his circumstances, he will see (*al-naẓara*). And if he sees with light, which is knowledge, he will perceive (*abṣara*). And if he perceives, he will discern (*tabayy-*

ana).¹⁶¹

Concerned attention provides the readiness to awaken when these six realities of life threaten a disciple's commitment to obedience. In terms of process, this circumspect devotion prevents carelessness from spoiling the devotee's escape from obduracy in the midst of the challenges he faces on his journey of obedience.

3.3.4.1 Reflection

The repentant who practises vigilance (*ih̥timām* and *tayaqquḥ*) has the state of mind to struggle against threats to his state of repentance. Muḥāsibī lists reflection or recollection (*dhikr*) as the next element of the repentant's progression toward discerning God's commands when his *nafs* obscures his path. His usage of *dhikr* for this point is enigmatic because the term itself is ubiquitous in the Islamic traditions with a range of meanings from reflection to remembrance to meditation. In devotional literature it most often refers to the practice of repeating a name of God as a meditative practice—even Muḥāsibī does this in a later section. 'But ostentation (*riyā'*) in speaking is this: to deliver wise sayings with eloquence; to furnish proofs during a debate; to memorise Hadith, statements of proof and the understanding of knowledge; and to display one's *dhikr* out loud...'.¹⁶²

This is clearly not its usage in this progression. Instead, Muḥāsibī has in mind the self-talk to which one awakens. 'If he awakens, he reflects'.¹⁶³ Within his discussion of the next element, *tathabbūt*, he will provide an illustration of the alert walker who relies on a lamp to illuminate the path for his eyes.¹⁶⁴ Muḥāsibī likens the man's sight—the correct function of his eyes—to the mind (*ʿaql*). The man who can see is not only alert, but also has the faculty to process the situation around him. In this interpretation, his mental processes are at work to recall what he knows of

161. *Al-Riʿāya*, 77 = ed. Smith, 37.

162. *Al-Riʿāya*, 147 = ed. Smith, 102.

163. *Al-Riʿāya*, 77 = ed. Smith, 38.

164. *Al-Riʿāya*, 85–86 = ed. Smith, 45–46.

God's commands and prohibitions. In the broadest sense he reflects and remembers; he addresses himself. His concern and consideration (*ihitimām*) for the Hereafter have made him aware (*tayaqquḡ*) of the situation he is in, with its dangers. Reflection (*dhikr*) describes one step beyond this, when the repentant is able to reflect on his situation and recall God's commands.

This practice of reflection is widely promoted throughout *al-Ri'āya* through first person monologues.¹⁶⁵ One of those well illustrates the reflection to which one awakens:

He repeats to himself reminders (*dhikr*) of hope, that even if [I] had not deserved to ever be comforted when when He stirred my heart with hope and He was not acting generously in [giving] repentance to my heart, still hope and fear are stirring in my heart. So he scrutinises God's obligations upon him one after another. And he brings to mind (*tadhakkara*) his sins one after another.¹⁶⁶

In the context of this progression Muḥāsibī intends that this kind of reflection be directed toward the tricks that one's desire might be using to spoil obedience.

3.3.4.2 Concentration

If this interpretation is correct, reflection in this progression is primarily a description of the state of mind required for Muḥāsibī's next method: *tathabbut* or concentration. If *dhikr* is that mental activity that comes when a person's vigilance awakens him to risks inherent in this realm of tribulation, *tathabbut* is persisting in this state with focused attention.

Muḥāsibī's concern in *tathabbut* is the thoughts (*khāṭirāt*) of the mind and how the devotee processes those thoughts. He explains that thoughts are what urge the heart to any form of evil or goodness.¹⁶⁷ The sources of these thoughts are either God, the *nafs*, or the enemy (*ʿadūw*). If the repentant has not practised Muḥāsibī's initial programme of *ihitimām*, *tayaqquḡ*, and *dhikr* he will remain in a stupor which

165. *Al-Ri'āya*, 64, 71, 85, 111 = ed. Smith, 26–27, 32, 45, 71.

166. *Al-Ri'āya*, 71 = ed. Smith, 32.

167. 'Hiya dawā'ī al-qulūb ilā kull khayr wa-sharr', *al-Ri'āya*, 84 = ed. Smith, 44.

impedes his perception of the inherent risks in his streaming thoughts. Invariably, some of these thoughts will be invitations to consider actions that threaten his resolve to obedience according to the six challenges of life.¹⁶⁸

If the disciple is alert and aware, he must carefully weigh these thoughts and test them. This evaluation is urgent because both the *nafs* and the enemy are actively seeking to trick him and deter him from the path of the *ṣāliḥūn*, the righteous. Though fear of the Hereafter may curb the greed of the desire centre so that it does not oppose the eternal destiny of the repentant, its attachments to worldly pleasure render it unreliable as a source of thoughts aimed at good. This is especially true of the passions (*al-hawā*).

With this awareness, the disciple begins to concentrate (*tathabbut*) on this stream of thoughts in his mind. He recognises that they may contain invitations to evil which are hidden from him, and he is cautious that he not slip into any sins he has known formerly. More than this, when he does suspect foul play and notices the passions of his *nafs* rising to urge him into what might be illicit activity, he is prepared to struggle with it. In another instance of reported self-dialogue, Muḥāsibī urges his disciple to address the *nafs* and reason with it. 'God is watching you. Don't hurry. Stop! You will be caught tomorrow'.¹⁶⁹ The *murīd* considers the invitations to action in his thoughts and proceeds cautiously, exercising a kind of pre-meditation and deliberation lest he fall into sin.

As with self-alarm (*al-takhwīf*) and vigilance (*ih̥timām*), Muḥāsibī provides an illustration, this time bringing several elements he has described into one picture. He describes a man on a night journey while rain is falling. He is aware that the way is treacherous and fears that he might fall into a well. If he is to make his way safely, he must make use of three things: a lamp, his eyesight, and his focused concentration. Without the lamp, he remains in darkness. Without his sense of sight, his lamp will not avail him. And if he does not focus his attention on the path before him, neither his lamp nor his faculty of sight are of any use. In this analogy,

168. *Al-Ri'āya*, 84–85 = ed. Smith, 44.

169. *Al-Ri'āya*, 85 = ed. Smith, 45.

the man's lamp is his knowledge (*ilm*). He must know what God requires of him. Muḥāsibī equates his capacity for sight with the intellect (*ʿaql*), which is tentatively equated with the element of *dhikr* (reflection) in the progression Muḥāsibī has described elsewhere. Lastly, this man's careful focus upon the path before him as it is revealed by his lamp, equates with deliberation (*tathabbut*).¹⁷⁰

3.3.4.3 Discernment

A disciple progresses through these virtues and practices so that he is able to discern how his thoughts and desires might be leading him away from the path of obedience. The only way that Muḥāsibī's sojourner can make it through the blinding storm of testing is to use the lamp (*ilm*) he holds to concentrate (*tathabbut*) his sight (*ʿaql*) upon the path of obedience (*sabīl al-ṭāʿa*). Each of these is a key element in Muḥāsibī's religious devotion. Through the cultivation of complete repentance, the first progression (Table 3.4, page 83) places one upon the right path. God's testing in this life requires that the disciple be able to properly discern the path before him. The second progression provides the concentration necessary for this (Table 3.5, page 92). The only reliable source of guidance for this path is the revelation of God's commands in the Quran and Sunna. Though one may be mistaken about these commands,¹⁷¹ inattention poses the gravest threat to obedience, not ignorance. Discernment brings both of these two elements together—that one concentrate on the path before him through the knowledge of God's commands. Reason (*ʿaql*) receives less attention in *al-Riʿāya*,¹⁷² though it is surely assumed that Muḥāsibī's recommendations require exercising the mind.

3.3.5 Slipping Backwards

Positively, Muḥāsibī's path for restoring the heart to health can be summarised as the persistent review of past and potential actions with the resolve to abandon

170. *Al-Riʿāya*, 85–86 = ed. Smith, 45–46.

171. *Al-Riʿāya*, 88 = ed. Smith, 47.

172. For a complete study, Yolande de Crussol, 'Le rôle de la raison dans la réflexion éthique d'Al-Muḥāsibī: *ʿAql* et conversion chez al-Muḥāsibī (165–243/782–857)' (PhD diss., l'Université Lyon, 2001).

past sins and embrace obedience to God's commands in the future. Understanding the process by which a Muslim lapses into persistent sin and obduracy provides a deeper understanding of his path of devoted obedience.

If repentance, self-examination and vigilance are key concepts in the journey toward perfected obedience, negligence and carelessness are key to slipping backwards. Muḥāsibī provides a progression to this effect (Table 3.6, page 97): inattention (*sahw*) → forgetfulness (*nisyān*) → carelessness (*ghafla*) → neglect of God's commands (*taḍyī li-'amr Allāh*) → inheritance of evil from an encrusted heart (*mawārith al-sū' min al-rayn*).¹⁷³ Though Muḥāsibī provides no explanation for this process, the general movement of the sequence is apparent. We can speculate that the first two steps might not reckon against a person as sin.

Table 3.6: The Lapse into Obduracy

Vice	
1	Inattention (<i>sahw</i>)
2	Forgetfulness (<i>nisyān</i>)
3	Carelessness (<i>ghafla</i>)
4	Neglect of God's commands (<i>taḍyī'</i>)
5	The evil outcome of a hard heart

This progression corresponds roughly to ranks of those who observe God's obligations (Table 3.7, page 98). Those of the highest tier observe God's claims on their lives with legal competence; that is, according to their reasons (*'ilal*), their occasions (*asbāb*), their times (*awqāt*), their motives (*irādāt*), and their incumbency (*wujūb*). They know and understand what God requires in the Quran and Sunna, and they observe it in its entirety. Not only this, but unlike the lower six ranks, they never neglect this pursuit.

Each of the lower ranks 'neglects' (*aghfala*) what God has required of them. Each of these ranks is confronted with invasive thoughts (*khāṭirāt*) which God detests. Muḥāsibī intends here those thoughts that reflect the intention of the enemy to infect God's servant with diseases of the heart. The first three abandon these

173. *Al-Ri'āya*, 54 = ed. Smith, 18.

thoughts before any action takes place, though the last of these actually intends to sin but changes his mind before beginning the act. The fourth actually begins to ‘look with the eyes, listen with the ears, stretch out a hand or step with the feet’,¹⁷⁴ but stops himself before carrying through with a disobedient act. The fifth tier actually commits the sinful act instigated by the stray thought, but repents immediately and does not persist in disobedience. The lowest level of those characterised as ‘people who observe God’s claims’ yield to thoughts of temptation, commit the act, and repent, but not consistently. They abandon some sins yet persist in others. In this entire descent toward obduracy, neglect of what God requires and of His awareness of transgression is the cause.

Table 3.7: The Ranks of the Observant

Tier	Link to the progression toward obduracy
1 Observe God’s charge	Attentive to God’s commands
2 Brief awareness of evil thoughts	Inattentive to the ploys of the enemy
3 Entertain evil thoughts	Forgetful and careless of God’s ‘inner’ commands
4 Entertain acts of disobedience	Forgetful and careless of God’s ‘outer’ commands
5 Initiate disobedience, but quickly repent	Neglectful of God’s commands
6 Complete an act, but later repent	Completely neglectful of God’s commands
7 Acts of disobedience, incomplete repentance	Heart becomes infected

In this progression the lower three tiers have taken a further step along the progression to obduracy. They are not only careless, but have actually neglected God’s commands and disobeyed him. The lowest tier is for those whose carelessness and neglect has made them susceptible to evil because their hearts are being covered with a ‘film and encrustation that conceals the Hereafter’.¹⁷⁵ Though no explanation is given in this passage, Muḥāsibī is using the same Quranic vocabulary he uses in his much longer treatments of the diseases of the heart. Even if a level of spiritual wholeness is attained through diligent repentance and reflection,

174. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 106 = ed. Smith, 66.

175. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 54 = ed. Smith, 18.

negligence will eventually lead back to a condition of obduracy and diseases of the heart.

3.3.6 Ranks and Chains

Within the exhortations of *al-Ri'āya*, Muḥāsibī presents his model of religious devotion by intertwining various ranks of believers with chains of progressive virtues and practices. The beginning of this process is dominated by the need to awaken the believer to the incumbency of obeying God's revealed commands. The believer should reflect on God's certain punishment of his sins in the Hereafter so that fear might emerge that compels him toward the resolve and practice of repentance. Once ignited, the perfection of this repentance in complete obedience requires focused examination of his thoughts and motives in light of the commands of the Quran and Sunna. Through practical advice Muḥāsibī directs the believer toward the actualisation of absolute devotion to God's commands. As the disciple progresses toward this absolute devotion he must remain vigilant against lapses into the neglect of God's commands. This vigilance requires a focused effort to remain wakeful and discerning of Satan's plots to trap him again in worldly desires. God overwhelms the advanced disciple with the security of his election by God and the capacity to maintain this state through vigilance and concentration. A shift in his perspective grants joy and pleasure in his absolute devotion to God's commands as he yearns for the fulfilment of God's promise that he will behold His face in the Hereafter.¹⁷⁶

3.4 Conclusion

Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī's primary purpose in *al-Ri'āya* is to exhort Muslims to repent of all past offences and strive toward perfected obedience in all that God requires. He challenges the idealisation of ascetic practices common in late antiquity and

176. *Al-Ri'āya*, 77 = ed. Smith, 38.

projects a model of devotion whose highest success is the product of divine foreordination and mercy. Such a person obeys the inner and outer requirements of God's law, revealed in the Quran and Sunna. Unlike those still struggling toward perfected repentance, he has a confidence and security in God's election of him to the highest blessings of Paradise. God has made obedience easy for this friend of His and granted him the capacity to avoid deceptive thoughts.

Muḥāsibī does not restrict this vision to the perfection of prophets, but skilfully admonishes even the profligate to awaken to God's claims and abandon obduracy. He recognises that intercourse with the world has deadened the obdurate heart so that it forgets God and ignores his commands. He offers examples of inner dialogue that would expose such a person to the danger he faces in the Hereafter, and frighten him toward an awareness of God and a desire to obey him. At some point the one fleeing obduracy must subordinate his fear of punishment to the hope of Paradise and closeness to God. God is ready to respond to any sustained reflection on the Hereafter by granting a fear that will produce repentance.

Once the disciple is on this path of repentance and obedience, only thorough self-examination can lead him through the convalescence necessary to diagnose and treat the lingering effects of his enthrallment to the world. Moreover, an unseen agent of his desires resists this treatment and actively conspires with Satan to misdirect his commitment to a compromised state of corrupted acts of outer obedience. Muḥāsibī seems confident that those who maintain their diligence can make their election as friends of God evident. He motivates this repentant person toward diligence with visions of future bliss in the life to come and joy in this life. Though his exhortation *al-Ri'āya* is not a systematic manual, he offers practical means to reach this vision such as reflection, vigilance and deliberation about future acts. All of these are based upon a nuanced understanding of the relationship between outer actions and inner thoughts and tendencies.

Muḥāsibī's model for practising complete obedience to God and his vision for its culmination in potential friendship with God not only distinguish him from ascetic

devotion common in the formative period of Islam, but also establish his thought as foundational for later schools of Islamic piety.

Chapter 4

Kharrāz's Path to Primordial Fidelity

This chapter will explore Kharrāz's path of salvation within the same framework that I suggested for Shaqīq al-Balkhī and al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī. Discrete starting points for his path are inferable from *Kitāb al-ṣīdq*, the ascetic manual that contains his more public teaching. Indicating important advances, Kharrāz's esoteric writings reveal his conviction that these starting points are influenced by each person's status in a primordial staging area before his appearance on the earth. This primordial status determines where each person begins his journey of salvation, as well as the ending point of that journey. The culmination of this path is idealised in the experience of the friends of God and the closeness they experience with Him. Kharrāz's descriptions of this path do not focus on obedience to the revealed commands of God, but on ridding oneself of the love of the world. Kharrāz leads the disciple into an absolute abandonment of the world so that he can experience a closeness to God that reflects the absolute devotion of his primordial state. Those who reach this final waypoint are enthralled by God's proximity to them and experience moments of incomparable rapture and bliss.

4.0.1 Background

Abū Sa'īd Aḥmad ibn 'Īsā al-Kharrāz (d. 277/890–91 or 286/899) belonged to a circle of Muslim scholars who identified themselves as Sufis. Though many were trained in the customary Islamic disciplines, they shared an approach toward religious knowledge and experience that they believed would grant them a unique and

close relationship with God. Though this group did not neglect accepted Islamic practices, they were convinced that careful devotion to ascetic practices and virtues would unfold into a noble experience of God's grace and love. This renunciant path did not originate within their circles, but represented ongoing systemisation and expansion of earlier ascetic thinking and practice.

Kharrāz's association with Baghdad Sufis seems demonstrated by his association with Sarī ibn Mughallis al-Saqatī (d. 251/865–6), who was considered to be the imam and *shaykh* of the Baghdad network in his time. Among Sufi precursors, he is the earliest figure associated with teaching on *tawhīd* and the 'realities of states'.¹ These themes are addressed in the esoteric writings of Kharrāz so that the reported association between Sarī al-Saqatī and Kharrāz is credible.² Al-Sulamī notes that Saqatī has connections to many of the entries in his second generation of Sufis, including Abū Ḥamza al-Bazzāz³ (289/901–2), Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd⁴ (d. 297/910), and Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī⁵ (d. 295/907–8). There is some indication that Kharrāz was a slightly older associate within this network.

A connection can be made between Kharrāz and Shaqīq al-Balkhī. Sarrāj provides an anecdote that affirms a relationship between Kharrāz and Abū Ḥātim al-ʿAṭṭār al-Baṣrī al-Sīrīn (260's/874–884).⁶ He was said to be an associate of Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī (d. 245/859–60), a well known renunciant whose commitment to extreme trust in God (*tawakkul*) included poverty, peregrination, and fearlessness before wild beasts.⁷ These renunciant commitments seem likely to come from Ḥātim al-Aṣamm al-Balkhī (d. 237/851–2), who was taught by Shaqīq al-Balkhī.⁸ Abū Nuʿaym provides sayings of Shaqīq transmitted from Ḥātim al-Aṣamm to Abū

1. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 41, 5.

2. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 223, 5.

3. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 294, 4.

4. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 260, 5–6.

5. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 10, p. 239.

6. Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *The Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fi al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson, E. J. W. Gibbs Memorial Ser. 12 (London: Luzac, 1914), 180. The connection is also affirmed by Melchert, 'Baṣran Origins of Classical Sufism', 234ff.

7. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 137, 5. For details on Abū Turāb, Richard Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums / 1. Teil: Scheiche des Westens* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 325–344.

8. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 54, 6.

Turāb al Nakhsābī.⁹

Though Sarraj's anecdote is widely known for connecting Kharrāz to Abū Ḥātim al-ʿAṭṭār and thus to Kharrāz, Abū Turāb seems the more likely connection between Kharrāz and Shaqīq's renunciant path. Even if the biographers present Abū Ḥātim al-ʿAṭṭār as Abū Turāb's teacher, descriptions of his itinerant lifestyle suggest that he was the more experienced renunciant.¹⁰ As many as 120 'companions' associated with him, presumably wandering with him for periods of time—both Kharrāz and Junayd joined him at one point. He seems to have been a paragon of ascetic values and none matched his poverty. Al-Sulamī reports that Abū Turāb was famous for his teaching on *tawakkul*, *zuhd*, and *waraʿ*—all themes that were important to Kharrāz. In *Kitāb al-ṣidq* Kharrāz defends those who stand fearless before beasts,¹¹ perhaps another indication of his association with Abū Turāb, who is reported to have been eaten by a wild beast. This defence comes alongside Kharrāz's admission that extreme trust in God does not always result in provision—again reminiscent of Abū Turāb's example.¹² Abū Turāb seems the most likely candidate for Kharrāz's reception of Shaqīq's renunciant path, especially given the subdued character of Abū Ḥātim al-ʿAṭṭār's renunciation in *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* and Dhahabī's *Tārīkh al-Islām*.¹³

Though it seems likely that Kharrāz's association with Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd¹⁴ gave him reliable access to the opinions of Muḥāsibī, there are no clear links between Kharrāz and Muḥāsibī. Muḥāsibī relies on Abū Jaʿfar al-Farajī (d. 271/884–85), a student of Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī, for information about renunciant teaching on pious caution (*waraʿ*).¹⁵ Though this does not suggest a link between Kharrāz and Muḥāsibī, it does suggest that the renunciant path which Muḥāsibī's criticised was part of the legacy that Kharrāz inherited from Abū Turāb.

9. e.g. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 10, pp. 220, 4–6.

10. 'Maʿrūf... bi-siyāḥa', *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 10, p. 220. Only two who carried water skins with him in the desert were known to have died, Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums / 1. Teil*, 327.

11. Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz, *al-Ṭarīq ilā Allāh: aw Kitāb al-ṣidq*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Ḥaditha, 1975), 51 (hereafter cited as *al-ṣidq*).

12. See 4.1.2, p. 108.

13. Melchert, 'Baṣran Origins of Classical Sufism', 234–240.

14. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 260, 5–6.

15. See 5.4.4, p. 202.

4.0.2 His Works

There are several sources for our knowledge of the teaching of Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz. The first are the entries contained in the standard Sufi biographical dictionaries. These provide quotations attributed to him by his students and followers. Alongside these are fragments of his writing within al-Sulamī's commentary on the Quran, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*.

Directly attributed to al-Kharrāz is the important treatise *Kitāb al-ṣidq*, edited and translated by Arberry in 1937. This is an exposition of thirteen stages (*maqāmāt*) which a disciple can expect to traverse on his path toward nearness with God. The treatise introduces this spiritual path to a new disciple, and would guide him as he grew in his understanding and practice of the Sufi path. The treatise only hints at ecstatic dimensions of this path, while its description of love and fellowship with God are vivid.

The *Rasāʾil* of Kharrāz provide a more challenging source for an understanding of his religious devotion.¹⁶ These essays are written for more advanced students, and the internal coherence of their presentations is sometimes difficult to follow. From these essays it becomes clear that Kharrāz differs from Muḥāsibī not only in his approach to ascetic virtues, but also in his ideological treatment of the primordial state and the insight (*maʿrifa*) associated with that state. The implications of this idea are thoroughly reflected in Kharrāz's approach to progressive purification, though this dependence is not realised without the *Rasāʾil*.

4.1 Beginning the Journey

Kharrāz's presentation of religious devotion relies heavily upon the metaphor DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH. What was implicit in *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* and in Muḥāsibī's

16. Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz, *Rasāʾil al-Kharrāz*, ed. Qāsim al-Sāmarrāʾī (Baghdad: Maṭbūʿāt al-Majmaʿ al-ʿilmī al-ʿIrāqī, 1967).

works is fully explained in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*. As perhaps ‘the earliest systematic presentation of the theory of Ṣūfī experience’,¹⁷ this presentation demonstrates that this metaphor is essential to Sufi self-understanding and to their pedagogical strategy. An aspirant or disciple (*murīd*) is one who ‘seeks to travel (*li-sulūk*) upon the path of salvation (*sabīl al-naǧā*)’.¹⁸ This ‘journeying’ was recognised very early within oriental studies as a technical term within Sufism.¹⁹ *Sabīl* (‘path’), on the other hand, seems not to develop into a pedagogical category for Sufis, while the term *ṭarīqa* (also ‘path’) becomes associated with the teaching of a particular master or school. In *Kitāb al-ṣidq* Sufi categories and technical terms begin to resemble the usage characteristic of later, established Sufism.

This journeying of Kharrāz presents Sufi devotion as a progression through various virtues and states, clearly labelled as waypoints or stations (*maqāmāt*). *Kitāb al-ṣidq* expands the basic four waypoints of Shaqīq to thirteen. Though the expectation of experiencing these waypoints one after another is present, their order seems not as absolute as Shaqīq’s simpler four. Specific practices of devotion (for example, solitude²⁰) are scattered throughout. His manual suggests that the aspirant must seek a deeper understanding of these virtues, one that relies on experience. Kharrāz will clarify in his esoteric treatises that this deeper level of understanding is the result of timeless insight (*maʿrifa*), which is allotted by God in mankind’s primordial condition.

4.1.1 Ordinary Believers

Kharrāz recognises that not every believer will be interested in the renunciant path. Because they prefer the world over God, ordinary believers (*al-ʿamma min al-nās*) will remain confused and uncertain about their relationship to God, especially in

17. Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz, *The Book of Truthfulness (Kitāb al-ṣidq)*, ed. Arthur John Arberry (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), vi.

18. *Al-Ṣidq*, 12. I do not recommend the Arabic text of the Arberry edition.

19. Edward Henry Palmer and Arthur John Arberry, *Oriental mysticism: a treatise on the Sufiistic and Unitarian theosophy of the Persians*, 2nd (London: Luzac, 1938), 65–66, first edition published in 1867.

20. *Al-Ṣidq*, 68.

the face of trials and tribulations. Their hope in God is weak and their religious devotion is limited to what God has expressly commanded or forbidden.²¹

In the initial section of *Kitāb al-ṣidq* Kharrāz presents three elements that are essential for every believer: sincerity (*ikhhlās*), patience (*ṣabr*) and faithfulness (*ṣidq*). These three elements have both plain (*zāhira*) and concealed (*bāṭin*) aspects, and every believer is responsible to know and practise the plain aspects of these three essentials.²² In its most evident sense, ‘sincerity’ entails believing, knowing, affirming and bearing witness to five doctrinal essentials concerning God, Muḥammad, the prophets, Paradise, and the resurrection.²³ In its plain sense, ‘patience’ means the performance of God’s requirements (*farāʾiḍ*) despite difficult circumstances.²⁴ And ‘fidelity’ (*ṣidq*), often translated as simply faithfulness or truthfulness, refers in this plain sense to the integrity of repentance, with the necessary elements of regret, rightful recompense, and the genuine resolve to leave sin.²⁵

Kharrāz further clarifies that there are plain (*zāhir*) and concealed (*bāṭin*) aspects of every waypoint along the path of salvation. We can conclude from *Kitāb al-ṣidq* that the starting point for those who would strive toward ‘more noble ranks’ (*ilā al-manzila al-sharīfa*) is rudimentary faith and practice without the deeper truths and experience of these stations. Ordinary believers only possesses obvious or external knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-zāhir*) of Islam and may lack a yearning to ‘sojourn upon the path of salvation’.²⁶ Nonetheless, their compliance to God’s requirements bestows upon them His mercy and reward.

Kharrāz’s usage of ‘waypoint’ (*maqām* or *manzila*) lacks the refined connotations and specificity of later Sufi theorists,²⁷ and refers broadly to any identifiable stage

21. *Al-Ṣidq*, 70.

22. *Al-Ṣidq*, 73.

23. *Al-Ṣidq*, 16.

24. *Al-Ṣidq*, 19.

25. *Al-Ṣidq*, 22–23.

26. ‘...*al-tālibīn li-sulūk sabīl al-naǧā*’, *al-Ṣidq*, 73.

27. Al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf al-mahjūb; the oldest Persian treatise on Súfiism*, 373; ‘Abd-al-Karīm ibn-Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayrī’s Epistle on Sufism: al-Risāla al-qushayrīya fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf*, trans. Alexander Knysh (Reading: Garnet, 2007), 77–79. ‘*Maqām*’ acquires a very specialised meaning by later Sufis, referring to stages brought about by effort, as opposed to a state (*ḥāl*), which is not intended or earned. I see no indication of this distinction in Kharrāz. As a technical term, ‘*manzila*’ does not seem to describe ‘stages’ in later Sufi theory, but only ‘ranks’.

on the renunciant path. This reference might be to an experience of a particular practice or virtue, like fear (*khawf*) or love (*maḥabba*),²⁸ or to a spiritual rank.²⁹

This most basic faith is also addressed in a didactic apophthegm in *Disengagement* (*Kitāb al-farāgh*), which mentions the three ‘foundations of religion’. A believer must abstain from what God has forbidden in both thought and deed, perform prescribed acts of worship, and accept the decrees of Islam.³⁰ Though lacking any explanation, this short statement rounds out the description of those at the lowest rank of belief: they acknowledge the essential doctrines of Islam and perform its basic duties. Though Kharrāz gives no indication that such as these are at risk of punishment, all of his extant writings instruct those not satisfied with this lower station about the path that leads toward a nobler experience.

4.1.2 Unbelievers

Kharrāz does not address the unrepentant sinner, nor give any warning to the unbeliever in his known works. He is aware that those who refuse to repent may develop a hard heart,³¹ but offers no advice on how to treat it. Kharrāz mentions unbelievers in one passage in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*:

A servant [of God] may be given something even when he does not trust [Him]. And he may be denied [something] even though he does trust [Him]. One can observe Magians (*majūs*), unbelievers (*kāfir*), renouncers (*jāḥid*), and profligates squandering [the provision] God has decreed for them. These neither trust [God] nor have assurance of [His provision]. One notices that [even though] they mock [God] and deny [Him], yet [provision] for their needs has been decreed for them. Nonetheless, a person may rely [upon God], trust [Him] and be certain [of His decree], and yet receive nothing—even to the point that he dies emaciated and in distress.³²

28. *Al-Ṣidq*, 70, 86.

29. *Al-Ṣidq*, 73. Both words occur synonymously within the same paragraph.

30. Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz, *Kitāb al-farāgh*, in *Rasāʾil al-Kharrāz*, ed. Qāsim al-Sāmarrāʾī (Baghdad: Maṭbūʿāt al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī, 1967), 45–46 (hereafter cited as *al-Farāgh*).

31. *Al-Ṣidq*, 24.

32. *Al-Ṣidq*, 53.

Kharrāz's esoteric treatises do not solve the conundrum of unbelief. Though ultimately the spirits of unbelievers betray dark origins in God's decree, that decree may also grant them prosperity in their life on earth as a merciful acknowledgment that they are drawn to the world rather than to God. Any taste of tribulation will drive them further into unbelief because their souls are oriented toward the world.

4.1.3 The Place of Trials

Similarly, ordinary believers are also limited to mundane faith because they are deeply invested in the concerns of the world. In prosperity they scarcely remember God, though they remain believers, and in their hardships they are overwhelmed and remain attached to what they have been denied. Initially, the hope of eternal rewards and the fear of punishment grants every believer joy in obeying God's commands. Their pursuit of essential sincerity, patience, and faithfulness establishes true faith in their hearts. But after this beginning success, trials and calamities turn that obedience into a chore.

Then the sweetness which he had found is taken from him along with his zeal for godly devotion (*birr*). Obedience becomes a burden for him, though it had been light. He discovers bitterness after his initial sweetness, and negligence after zeal, and distress after cheerfulness (alt., clarity).³³

The common believer succumbs to this frustration and is never able to accept the suffering that he experiences in the world. God disappoints him to test his faith; to determine if he will respond to hardship by pursuing the enchantments of this world, or if he would rather remain disillusioned, yearning for God's nearness.³⁴

Those who embark upon Kharraz's journey of salvation recognise their need of God in the face of tribulation and are prepared to expel the love of the world

33. *Al-Ṣidq*, 82.

34. *Al-Ṣidq*, 82.

from their hearts by learning to be satisfied with God's decree for them.³⁵ Kharrāz's summons is not to experience joy in this world, but to find repose in God that celebrates despair of life in this world in the journey toward God. Toward the end of *Kitāb al-ṣidq*, Kharrāz promises to his aspirant an increase of distress in this life for those who take refuge in God:

Summon your understanding. Prioritise your concerns. Don't listen to [any additional] knowledge and allow your understanding of what has been presented to you to escape [your mind]. Now you have no excuse, after the knowledge and eloquence [of this presentation]. Rather you have become convinced of the evidence. So get to work in finding refuge with God (alt., in sincerity to God), perhaps you will be saved. Find refreshment (lit., settle your eyes) in His knowledge (*bi-ma'rifati-hi*) in this realm here and now, before the life to come. Yes. Then your sorrow will continue and your distress will increase. Every condition (*ḥāl*) [of distress] which you experienced before *ma'rifa* and arrival (*wuṣūl*) will be magnified.³⁶

4.1.4 God's Substitutes

There are some who begin their journey, presumably upon reaching maturity, with 'fidelity, righteous works and a truthful character'.³⁷ God grants them his grace (*karāma*)³⁸ and they receive more than they had ever hoped for. Most don't realise that God has chosen to grant them His 'signs' until after they have exerted themselves in obedience to Him. Kharrāz identifies these as God's 'substitutes' (*budalā'*, sing. *badīl*), who remain unrecognised by the general public.³⁹ Some never realise their status until someone 'who observes people' discloses this to him. Perhaps there is an inference here that Sufi circles in the ninth century envisioned a hierarchy of God's friends (*awliyā'*). The 'anonymous' nature of this hierarchy contrasts with the public image that Shaqīq promotes in *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*,⁴⁰ and may reflect Sufi

35. *Al-Ṣidq*, 89.

36. *Al-Ṣidq*, 88.

37. *Al-Ṣidq*, 83.

38. Perhaps implying miracles, but this is not clear from this passage.

39. For discussion of the *abdāl*, see Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, 92.

40. See 2.2.2, p. 12.

adaptation to potential persecution, for example by Ghulām Khalīl in 888 CE.

Muḥāsibī also recognised that the friends of God begin the journey of devotion to God from a different place than other believers. Muḥāsibī's description highlights the resistance of the friends of God to youthful passions, while Kharrāz focuses on the disappointment with the world that commitment to God brings. This difference is subtle, but does align with Kharrāz's ultimate rejection of any contented participation in the world.

4.2 The Primordial Staging Area

In *Kitāb al-ṣidq* believers take their starting place on the path of salvation according to their assessment of the world at puberty. Those whose preference of the world manifests itself as distress in the face of trials are bound to the outer dimension of worshipping God. Over time, others find their way to the renunciant path because of their disappointment with the world and its pleasures. This path does not lead to God's proximity without first abandoning the world. A select group find themselves naturally inclined toward the renunciant lifestyle and must only discover their privileged relationship with God. Though each of these groups begins their life with God in this world from a different starting place, all stood together before God on the Day of Summons, before their earthly sojourn began.

The details of this primordial saga are found in two of Kharrāz's esoteric treatises: *Disengagement* (*Kitāb al-farāgh*) and *Descriptions of Proximity* (*Kitāb al-ṣifāt*). There is some confusion on the title of the latter. I follow Nwyia, who bases his reading on the initial question posed by the interlocutor: 'describe for me the foremost waypoint of the waypoints of proximity (*qurb*)'.⁴¹ The manuscript itself clearly designates the treatise as *Kitāb al-ṣifāt* in a note describing the contents of the second section (*juz'*) of the manuscript.⁴²

41. Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz, *Kitāb al-ṣafā'*, in *Rasā'il al-Kharrāz*, ed. Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'ī (Baghdad: Maṭbū'āt al-Majma' al-'ilmī al-'Irāqī, 1967), 23 (hereafter cited as *al-ṣifāt*). Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 252.

42. The note is on the verso before the treatise. MSS 2713. For further discussion, Mohammed Rus-tom, 'Approaches to Proximity and Distance in early Sufism', *Mystics Quarterly* 33, nos. 1/2 (March

The introduction of the *Descriptions of Proximity* develops the categorisation of humanity into three categories: unbelievers (*kāfirūn*); the ordinary believer whose worship of God focuses on exterior obedience; and the ‘elect’ (*al-khāṣṣa min al-khalq*). The latter are journeying toward God through waypoints like those described in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*. Most of these (*aktharu-hum*) are so occupied with their journey apart from God’s presence (*‘an al-Ḥaqq*) that they are unable to reach the ‘waypoints of proximity’ and experience God’s direct ‘gaze’ upon them.⁴³ Whether they arrive at these waypoints of proximity or not, this third group consists of those who have embarked upon the renunciant path, suggesting that Kharrāz might expect them to be active within Sufi circles.

Table 4.1: Primordial Orientation

Group	of the spirit	of the <i>nafs</i>	of earthly life
God’s elect	from light	God Himself	Adam’s attentiveness
Ordinary believers	from light	God’s blessings	
Unbelievers	from darkness	the world	Adam’s neglect

Disengagement articulates a description of mankind’s primordial status that informs the division of humanity in *Descriptions of Nearness*. Because Kharrāz is not giving a narration of events, trying to establish a ‘timeline’ from his description expects too much of the text. Rather Kharrāz is interacting with *Al-A‘rāf* 7:172–173 to establish a metaphysical framework for the ‘nearness’ (*qurb*) experienced by the friends of God:

And when your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify concerning themselves, [saying] ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Of Course. We testify’ — lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘We were unaware of this.’ Or lest you say, ‘Our forefathers associated others with God previously, and we were [their] seed after them. Will you destroy us because of what was done by those who wrought vanity?’⁴⁴

2007): 15n9.

43. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

44. *Al-A‘rāf* 7:172–73, Jones trans.

These verses are the basis for the *yawm a-last* or the Day of Summons. Commentary of early Sufis like Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), Abū Qāsim al-Junayd and Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz suggests that Sufi circles interpreted the time frame of mankind's submission—their covenant (*ʿahd al-mīthāq*)⁴⁵ with God—to be prior to Adam's descent from the Garden to earth. Al-Ṭabarī in both his *History* and in his *Commentary* cites traditions that suggest this covenant happened after Adam's creation.⁴⁶ It is unclear whether these support the Sufi interpretation because none clearly states that God summoned them to this covenant while Adam was in the Garden. Traditions locating this covenant after man's descent to the earth are more numerous and unambiguous.⁴⁷

4.2.1 The Origin of Spirits

Kharrāz believes that God holds the world in low esteem because it will perish, along with everything on it: 'everything on it perishes, but the face of your Lord, which is full of glory and honour, remains (*yabqā*)' (*Al-Raḥmān* 55:26–27).⁴⁸ Kharrāz balances this ascetic appraisal of the world with the elaboration of a primordial phase of human existence that establishes every permanent aspect of human endeavour. This permanence he calls *al-baqāʾ*. In order for the activities of God's friends in this life to escape the ultimate destruction of everything on the earth, they must be connected to the permanence of the primordial state. The primordial saga elaborated by Kharrāz granted timeless insight (*maʿrifa*) to the spirits of God's friends so that they are able to transcend the limitations of this perishing realm. Thus it is the spirits of mankind that are extracted from Adam's loins on

45. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 39.

46. Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, ed. Maḥmūd. Shākir and ʿAlī. ʿAshūr, vol. 9 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2011), vol. 9, s.v. 7:172; Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: Vol 1, General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. 1 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 304–307.

47. Richard Gramlich, 'Der Urvertrag in der Koranauslegung (zu Sure 7, 172–173)', *Der Islam* 60, no. 2 (1983): 205–230; Cornelia Schöck, *Adam im Islam : ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Sunna* (Berlin: K. Schwarz, 1993), 166–169; Wadad Kadi, 'The Primordial Covenant and Human History in the Qurʾān', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 147, no. 4 (December 2003): 332–338.

48. Alan trans.

the Day of Summons, because like *maʿrifa*, they also belong to *al-baqāʾ*. Gramlich reports traditions in the Quranic commentaries of al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī that support this Sufi idea that it was mankind's spirits that were extracted from Adam.⁴⁹ These traditions are ambiguous and few in number and at odds with the standard interpretation that the Day of Summons was a historical event.

Kharrāz does, however, follow the standard Islamic interpretation in shifting the source of these summoned spirits from 'their' loins to the loins of 'Adam' (see quote above). As Gramlich demonstrates, this shift is based on a dominant Hadith:

I heard the messenger of God say, 'God created Adam and then rubbed his loins with his right hand. His descendants were expelled from him and God said, 'I created these for Paradise and they will perform the deeds of those who belong to Paradise'. Then He rubbed his loins [again] so that his descendants were expelled from him. God said, 'I have created these for the Fire and they will perform the deeds of those who belong to the fire.'⁵⁰

That it is Adam's loins from which the spirits are taken seems to be the only idea that Kharrāz takes from Hadiths like this one. He never discusses those destined for the fire.

In his interpretation of *Al-Aʿrāf* 7:172 Kharrāz insists that these spirits are all responsive (*mujība*) to God: 'At the time when the spirits of God's friends and enemies were free from souls and temperaments, they were responsive.'⁵¹ Despite what appears from the Quranic verse to be a universal submission to God's summons, many traditions in the commentaries follow the example above to divide mankind into believers and unbelievers on the Day of Summons. Rather Kharrāz affirms that this verse defines mankind's universal acknowledgement of God's lordship over them. In his discussion it is an earlier state that initially differentiates the spirits of unbelievers from the spirits of believers.

49. Gramlich, 'Der Urvertrag in der Koranauslegung (zu Sure 7, 172-173)', 227. I was unable to find unambiguous traditions suggesting this in either.

50. Ibid., 206. My translation is from Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 9:7,172. Gramlich provides a full description of the Hadith.

51. *Al-Farāgh*, 40. Samarrāʿī's reading *mujtamiʿa*, followed by Saab, is not supported by the MSS. See Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 246.

Indirectly, *Disengagement* asserts that every person has a spirit (*rūḥ*) that was created prior to Adam, perhaps even prior to the creation of the world. Though God ‘created them [all the spirits] well’,⁵² some were created from a place of light (*mawḍi‘ al-nūr*) while others were created from a place of darkness (*mawḍi‘ al-ẓulma*):

As for the spirits of all mankind, because they are created from a place of permanence (*baqā’*), they are tranquil and responsive to their Lord. The spirits of believers (*al-mu‘minūn*) are created from a place of light, while the spirits of the unbelievers are created from a place of darkness, according to the words of God, may He be high and exalted, ‘I only created mankind and the jinn that they might serve [me].’⁵³

Though this pre-temporal realm of spirits, light, and darkness is puzzling, it affirms that God’s predestining sovereignty is linked with His foreknowledge. Kharrāz may have found Quranic precedent in *Al-Baqara* 2:257:

God is the protector (*walī*) of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light. Those who do not believe—their protectors are idols. They bring them out of the light into the darkness.⁵⁴

Nwyia is not as generous with the disparate origins of mankind’s spirits in the face of Kharrāz’s insistence that all spirits are responsive to God. He concludes that the ‘*incohérence*’ of this pre-temporal state with Kharrāz’s interpretation of the Day of Summoning reflects his desire to assimilate too many different approaches. Perhaps Nwyia overreacts to Samarrā’ī’s reading ‘*mujībah*’ (responsive) as ‘*mujtam-i‘a*’ (assembled) and cannot reconcile mankind’s universal responsiveness with the dark origins of unbelievers. In addition, Nwyia cannot reconcile Kharrāz’s differentiation of spirits in this pre-temporal state with the differentiation that occurs when God grants each person their intrinsic nature.⁵⁵ I suggest that Kharrāz firmly places the origins of any differentiation between believers and unbelievers in God’s decree, even if he softens this by linking their mysterious dark origins with God’s

52. ‘*Fa-aḥsana khalqa-hum*’, *al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

53. *Al-Farāgh*, 41.

54. Jones trans.

55. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 247. See 4.2.3, p. 118.

foreknowledge of a defective character that will love the world. As *Disengagement* unfolds, allusions to this prior state seem to inform the contrast that Kharrāz develops between the enemies of God and His friends. But like *Al-Baqara* 2:257, this contrast seems always to find its way to the error of rejecting God.

To return to the import of these pre-temporal origins, Kharrāz anchors the origin of *tawḥīd* (the affirmation of God's singularity) in the timeless expanse that preceded mankind's general covenant with God, before they were placed in Adam's loins. The substance of these spirits can be distinguished from that of the created world because the spirits of mankind originate from a place of permanence or subsistence (*baqā'*). This suggests that the spirits of mankind will survive the final destruction of the created world and thus also qualify as belonging to 'the end'.

4.2.2 The Day of Summons

On the Day of Summons God calls the spirits of mankind from their place in Adam and takes from them a commitment to His lordship over them. This pledge is universal and every spirit is responsive (*mujība*) to God, even if it originated from a dark place in God's decree. By correlating *Al-A'raf* 7:172 with *Al-Dhāriyāt* 51:56, Kharrāz teaches that every spirit had pledged worshipful service (*'ubūdiyya*) to God before Adam's descent to earth from the Garden: 'I created Jinn and men only so that they might serve Me.'⁵⁶ Not only is every creature obligated to worship God, but on the Day of Summons all pledged to worship Him.

In the initial lines of *Descriptions of Proximity* Kharrāz briefly narrates the Day of Summons. His description suggests that when the spirits of mankind were taken from their place in Adam, they were not simply asked to pledge their loyalty to Him, but were also invited to gain understanding and instruction from Him.

Then He [God] summoned them to understand Him and instructed them until they understand about Him what He had announced to

⁵⁶. Jones trans.

them. So they responded as He desired,⁵⁷ according to [the state] they had with Him before.⁵⁸

While it is clear that every spirit responds affirmatively to God's simple question, 'Am I not your Lord?', it is not clear if every spirit was also willing to heed what appears to be additional instruction. This uncertainty complicates the interpretation of the next sentence in *Descriptions of Proximity*:

He [God] has proof against them because they lagged behind the reality of their response [to his summons].⁵⁹ People preferred the world and settled into it, so God veiled their hearts from the Hereafter.⁶⁰

Is their 'lagging' (*takhalluf*) connected with the additional instruction God gives on the Day of Summons? Read thus, the spirits who would later prefer the world chose not to listen to God's instruction after their initial pledge.

Yet other statements in *Disengagement* and in *Descriptions of Proximity* suggest that Kharrāz has no intention of locating the culpability of disbelievers in the Day of Summons. It seems rather that an unbeliever's preference of the world is thought of as a truancy from his primordial pledge. The choice of *takhalluf* here remains puzzling, even mysterious, but inserting a culpable act just moments after the primordial covenant strains Kharrāz's insistence that 'all the spirits were responsive'.

Kharrāz connects the response of the spirits with 'what they had with Him before.' It seems doubtful that Kharrāz means to suggest that some responded improperly because of their dark origins. Rather, this statement affirms God's sovereignty; their response is according to God's decree. This explanation is not entirely satisfying, but other alternatives would challenge Kharrāz's insistence of the

57. 'Li-mā arāda'. This anchors God's actions in His sovereignty, despite the volition of the spirits.
58. *Al-Şifāt*, 22.

59. 'Wa-lahu al-ḥujja 'alay-him fī al-takhalluf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-ijāba.' This translation is based on definitions from al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf al-mahjūb; the oldest Persian treatise on Sūfism*, 384 and Al-Qushayrī's *Epistle on Sufism: al-Risāla al-qushayrīya fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*, 104. Saab translates: 'He has the justification to call on them their failure in answering to the realities of the call', Nada Saab, 'Sufi Theory and Language in the Writings of al-Kharrāz' (PhD diss., Yale University, 2003), 133.

60. *Al-Şifāt*, 22.

universal obligation of mankind to remain loyal to their pledge on the Day of Summons.

4.2.3 Acquiring a Human Nature

I have focused this discussion of mankind's primordial state on the connection between the origin of each man's spirit and its placement in Adam's loins, from whence it is extracted to respond to God's call to fealty. That is the focus of Kharrāz's discussion because the enduring spirit of God's friend allows him to possess insight (*ma'rifa*) about God. In *Disengagement* Kharrāz also discusses the creation of each person's *nafs* and its basic nature (*ṭabī'a*), along with its operation in the course of life in this world.

In the context of this discussion it seems that Kharrāz describes the *nafs* as something more than mankind's centre of desire. In this esoteric treatise he argues that God's friends are able to abandon the world because they have a link to what remains (*al-baqā'*) through their possession of lasting insight (*ma'rifa*). Their spirits also remain and are contrasted with the *nafs*, which faces destruction. 'Every soul (*nafs*) will taste death' (*Āl 'Imrān* 3:185). Within *Ādāb al-ibādāt*, *al-Ri'āya*, and *Kitāb al-ṣidq* the *nafs* is primarily the origin of mankind's desires with no discussion of its relationship to the spirit. In these works Shaqīq, Muḥāsibī, and Kharrāz seek to explain how the *nafs* must be resisted or tamed without defining what it is. *Disengagement* is concerned instead with explaining why the nature (*ṭabī'a*) of the *nufūs* of God's friends is different from that of His enemies. Rather than focusing on the *nafs* as the origin of desire (as I do within ethical discourse), using the broader translation 'soul' is perhaps the better strategy. This translation does little to clarify what Kharrāz intends to communicate with *nafs* in these passages, but at least allows the reader to consider broader possibilities.

Kharrāz's understanding of the Day of Summons makes it impossible to distinguish between believers and unbelievers by their initial response to God's primordial summons. Though significant, the pre-temporal origin of each person from light or darkness fails to predict the lifestyle that a person will adopt once he is

born. Instead Kharrāz suggests that God's foreknowledge of each person's deeds conditions the nature (*ṭabīʿa*) of his soul (*naḥs*). The difference between an unbeliever and one of God's friends is most evident in the corresponding human nature of each:

But when God created the souls (*nufūs*) of mankind and the natures (*ṭibāʿa-ha*) [of their souls], the spirits of God's friends, along with their souls and the natures [of their souls] differed from the spirits of God's enemies, along with their souls and the natures [of their souls]. [This is] according to His [knowledge] about their error and sin. So the spirits [of God's enemies] renounced their [former] response to God (*al-Ḥaqq*).⁶¹

The defective human nature of unbelievers is connected with God's foreknowledge. Though unbelievers' spirits had responded affirmatively to God's primordial summons, God's creation of their souls (*nufūs*) is shaped by their inescapable inclination to the world. God's friends receive a heavenly nature (*ṭibāʿ samāwīya*) that finds no satisfaction in the world. His enemies, on the other hand, are given a nature which is misguided (*ḍalāla*) and in error (*ghayy*). They do not recall the primordial pledge given by their spirits, but rather respond to the prophets from their embodied state:

Those from among mankind and the jinn who are opposed [to God] have a basic nature that is baser than their spirits. [Though] the response of [their] spirits was to God, they respond to the prophets according to their souls (*bi-nufūs*).⁶²

Their rejection of the prophets is a denial of the pledge they gave Him in their disembodied state. This would seem to be the import of *Al-Aʿrāf* 7:173—on judgment day unbelievers cannot claim that they are victims of their fathers' fancies. Though they will claim that they cannot be blamed for believing what they were told by their fathers, they will be reminded that the spirit of every child of Adam acknowledged God's lordship.

61. *Al-Farāgh*, 40.

62. *Al-Farāgh*, 41.

Kharrāz's descriptions suggest that God gives each person his soul in the womb or at birth—that is when He creates it. The disposition of each man's soul takes into account the origins of his spirit as well as his essential posture toward the world and its pleasures. Just as Adam lived in the garden both in consultation⁶³ with God and (then?) in negligence of Him, so every person is born following his footsteps, either as a friend of God or as His enemy.⁶⁴ The nature or disposition of the souls and their physical creation are appropriate to their prior proximity to God in their primordial state. The luminous origins of God's friends predispose them to hate the world they are born into.

Though God created them from a heavenly place of nobility, he sends them down and establishes them in a place of shame, in places that are shameful and vile. So they are expecting God's summons [of the Last Day], longing for their removal from this place of transience (*fanā'*) to a place of permanence (*baqā'*).⁶⁵

Likewise the dark origins of God's enemies have a relationship to the disposition of the souls that God gives them. God's foreknowledge and decree of their disobedience is behind the dark origins of their spirits and the deficient nature of their souls. Thus they are able to forget their primordial pledge and find themselves at home within the created realm—this world has become their paradise. They find themselves adverse to the prophets and messengers of God, and fear the day when God will address them in judgement.⁶⁶

The end result is that God prevents the unbeliever from perceiving the gravity of the Hereafter, perhaps because he is cut off from permanence, *al-baqā'*. According to the primordial saga of Kharrāz, the unbeliever has no starting place for the journey toward nearness (*qurb*) to God. His dark origins influenced his spirit to decline further instruction from God on the Day of summons. God knows his deeds

63. Al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf al-mahjūb; the oldest Persian treatise on Sūfism*, 385. 'Disclosure' might also be appropriate. 'State of alluding' (Saab) is doubtful. Saab, 'Sufi Theory and Language in the Writings of al-Kharrāz', 163.

64. *Al-Farāgh*, 45.

65. *Al-Farāgh*, 41.

66. *Al-Farāgh*, 41.

and creates a soul for him that cherishes the world and its pleasures. The seed of his physical existence originates from the careless disobedience of Adam, and he can have no regard for the Hereafter.

4.3 The Primordial Saga and the Earthly Journey

The esoteric treatises of Kharrāz provide a backstory to the extended metaphor of DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH that Kharrāz develops in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*. Unbelievers, ordinary believers, and God's elect all prepare for life's journey in the primordial state.

Unbelievers receive scant attention in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*. God judges them wholly by their works, with no regard for the pledge that they made.⁶⁷ The origins of their spirits is dark; they neglected God's primordial instruction; their souls incline toward the world; and they embark on life in this world following Adam's path of negligence. This pattern of rejection aligns with God's decree: 'Whomsoever God wishes to guide, He expands his breast to Submission; and whomsoever He wishes to send astray, He makes his breast tight and narrow, as though he were engaged in climbing to the sky' (*Al-An'ām* 6:125).⁶⁸ Perhaps this leaves open the possibility that an unbeliever might become a Muslim—by God's will, but there is no place for them in a practical manual of devotion.

The primordial saga of al-Kharrāz also clarifies his picture of the beginning of the path of salvation for the ordinary believer. As discussed above, *Kitāb al-ṣidq* distinguishes two levels of knowledge available to the believer: *al-bāṭina* and *al-zāhira*, the evident and the hidden. Ordinary believers have practices and beliefs that follow the Quran and the Sunna, but they do not understand their deeper meanings. Based on Kharrāz's description of primordial origins, believing spirits are sent to their earthly existence having understood and responded to God's first summons. Yet believers who focus upon the exteriors of religious devotion are veiled from

67. *Al-Farāgh*, 42.

68. Jones trans.

lasting insight (*maʿrifa*) and cannot discover the deeper realities of nearness to God.⁶⁹ In fact it is the blessings of God that create this veil:

Others [believers] understood the commands of God and his prohibition. They desire what God has permitted in this world. They took only what was pleasant (*mā ṭāba*) from it and they avoided what He prohibited. And they desired (*rāghibūn*) God's rewards which He promised. So they acquired⁷⁰ good deeds and fled from evil acts. But God's rewards conceal them from God Himself. Their spirits⁷¹ do not rise to God's love and they depart from this world regretting what they lost in their lives by seeking the world.⁷²

Kharrāz gives no indication that they will be punished for lesser faith.

Ordinary believers responded to God's primordial summons and live with an awareness of God's reward and punishments in the Hereafter. They strive to obey Him in the foundational requirements of religion—what is obvious and visible—and they will be rewarded accordingly. 'As for the common people, they act only according to what they know of God's commands and prohibitions: their hope is weak, they are confused, and they have no certain realisation'.⁷³ Perhaps these believers lacked a closeness to God in their primordial state so that they are inclined to receive some satisfaction from their journey in the Here and Now. They are veiled from closer intimacy with God in this life. Kharrāz does not present this condition in absolute terms, but beckons the ordinary believer to consider the higher levels of belief that await him.

The friends of God are distinguished by the special relationship their spirits shared with God before their physical creation. In that state they lived in a luminous place and responded fully to God's summons of them. God created their human nature from a 'heavenly (*al-samāwīya*) essence', and they have an inheritance in this life from Adam's state of consultation with God. The world does not veil their

69. *Al-Farāgh*, 44.

70. Samarrāʿī's edition skips a line in the manuscript.

71. Saab translates with 'souls', which loses the connection with the primordial saga of *Disengagement*.

72. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

73. *Al-Ṣidq*, 47.

spirits or souls from God's presence, and it is instead like a prison to them. Their longing for God causes them to neglect what the world offers, even its permissible pleasures.

It is unclear how the path toward salvation begins for the friend of God. Though his primordial covenant (*'ahd al-mīthāq*)⁷⁴ assures his closeness to God in this life, Kharrāz's exposition would suggest that he must strive in order to reach more advanced levels of friendship. His journey is not defined by the purification from sins, but by the reestablishment of that primordial relationship his spirit had with God. This would suggest that his journey also has a beginning (in this life), not because he must rid himself of misguidance and sins, but because he is ignorant of his true relationship with God. If his initial condition can be differentiated from that of the ordinary believer, it is that he yearns for God and finds himself obeying God not for the sake of reward or out of fear, but because of a growing love for God—God has made it easy for him.⁷⁵

4.4 The Destination of the Journey

The previous section demonstrated that according to Kharrāz each person's primordial encounter with God determines how he will begin the journey of salvation in this life. From his extant writings we are able to identify three kinds of people, each with a substantially different starting place. This section will address the vision which Kharrāz has for each of these kinds of people.

The previous section made it clear that Kharrāz exhibits scarce concern for the fate of those who face punishment in the Hereafter. There is simply no path of salvation available to the unbeliever.

Though Kharrāz speaks of God's threat of punishment for the believer, its scarce mention suggests that escape from future judgement and punishment does not factor as a significant aspect of his vision for the conclusion of the spiritual journey. Fear (*khawf*) is a station of this journey, but fear of eschatological punishment as

74. *Al-Farāgh*, 39.

75. *Al-Ṣidq*, 56–57.

such is more properly a means of salvation. He does not recommend descriptions of Hellfire and punishment to enhance the bliss of Paradise as an exhortation to pursue the path of salvation.

Further reflection suggests that Kharrāz scarcely paints a vision of victory or success for the ordinary believer. The ordinary believer's ambiguous connection to God in his primordial state offers no clear prediction of his success or failure in the trial this life offers. What is clear is that he will receive God's mercy in Paradise if he adheres to his foundational practice and faith. It would appear that those who 'seek to journey along the path of salvation'⁷⁶ already exhibit a desire which differentiates them from the ordinary. Though not explained by Kharrāz, perhaps his vision for the ordinary believer is that the apprehension of such a desire indicates that he belongs on the renunciant path and is in fact one of the lesser friends of God.

In fact the extant writings of Kharrāz are not addressed to the ordinary believer. One might reasonably conclude that his preference for the world's pleasures prevents the ordinary believer from seeking more than an external adherence to Islamic faith and practice. Apparently, Kharrāz is not concerned that their apathy toward a closer relationship with God entails eschatological risk—it is simply a reflection of their vague primordial state. Until their desires manifest something more than this, he has little to say.

Rather the extant writings of Kharrāz have much to say about the future of the friends of God who were drawn near to Him in their primordial state. Their chief characteristic, regardless of their rank, is that they experience a nearness to God as they had experienced it before. 'The true reality of every waypoint emerges from God's nearness'.⁷⁷ Though the waypoint of 'nearness' (*qurb*) suggests the highest stations of the friends of God in *Descriptions of Proximity*, its usage in *Kitāb al-ṣidq* is a more general reference to the primordial source and present goal of spiritual

76. '... *al-muṭālib li-sulūk sabil al-najā*', *al-Ṣidq*, 12, 73.

77. *Al-Ṣidq*, 70.

advancement. ‘To Kharrāz, being in proximity with God, *qurb*, is the ultimate goal of existence.’⁷⁸

While the fullness of the experience of nearness is reserved for the few who are selected by God for the highest ranks of *wilāya*, each of the stations mentioned in *Kitāb al-ṣidq* has as its source the same primordial proximity to God. Thus, for those who move beyond foundational belief and practice, some degree of nearness is available even if they never reach its fullest experience. The ambiguity of Kharrāz’s description of the ordinary believer makes it difficult to determine ‘how much’ nearness is required before one is God’s friend.

The degree of one’s proximity to God cannot be considered apart from the experience of lasting insight (*maʿrifa*). As early as Nicholson’s *The Mystics of Islam* (1914), *maʿrifa* has been translated into English as ‘gnosis’ within the field of Sufi studies. The difficulties of this approach are pointed out by Arnaldez (*EI*²) and are consistent with the discussion of mysticism in the introduction to this thesis. A full discussion is outside the scope of this thesis, though a few comments are in order.

The term itself occurs extensively in *Kitāb al-ṣidq* and *Disengagement*, and there are statements containing the term in *Descriptions of Proximity* and the *Book of Realities* (*Kitāb al-ḥaqāʾiq*). In *Descriptions of Proximity* *maʿrifa* occurs together with *ʿilm* in the same passage and to some extent they are contrasted with one another.

Know that there is no limit to knowledge (*ilm*), just as there is no limit to insight (*maʿrifa*). Among nobility, knowledge (*ilm*) of God always increases because they are sought (*maṭlūbūn*) and they always claim an increase [of knowledge] because God desires that they be distinguished. So they seek the increase [of knowledge] in the greatest secrecy without being consumed in their quest—this is how their knowledge (*ʿilm*) of God increases. Because of this their knowledge of God becomes more hidden and more subtle than their insight (*maʿrifa*) into God. Thus the knowledge of God brings them to complete insight (*maʿrifat al-maʿrifa*).⁷⁹

This passage makes it clear that *ilm* and *maʿrifa* are different, but little else.

78. Saab, ‘Sufi Theory and Language in the Writings of al-Kharrāz’, 125.

79. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 26.

I translate *maʿrifa* as ‘insight’, or ‘lasting insight’ because *Disengagement* establishes it as the vital link between God’s friend and his permanence outside the created realm. In some sense *maʿrifa* is knowledge or understanding, but Kharrāz clearly distinguishes it from *ʿilm*. Generally speaking, insight (*maʿrifa*) is not gained by experience of the created world or reflection upon it. Its presence throughout *Kitāb al-ʿilm* demonstrates that it cannot be knowledge gained through ecstatic experience, at least not exclusively. There Kharrāz seems also to associate it with what is hidden or internal (*al-bātin*), implying that it is not obvious and requires some kind of training. Both rudimentary waypoints like patience and lofty ones like intimacy (*uns*) have both outward and inward aspects, the latter being linked with *maʿrifa*. Kharrāz links the possession of any degree of *maʿrifa* with one’s standing in the primordial state. The object of *maʿrifa* seems not to be facts or information, but, as I have translated, insight. Moreover, that insight is not gained because of intelligence or through learning in the ordinary sense, but in one’s connection to the knowledge God gave his spirit in the primordial state. ‘Insight’ seems to capture this without requiring the believer to experience ecstasy or even an epiphany. Within the esoteric treatises of Kharrāz the adjective ‘lasting’ or ‘timeless’ can almost always be assumed.

What is most significant in Kharrāz’s use of insight (*maʿrifa*) is its close association with nearness to God:

Some people [in contrast to ordinary believers] are loyal in the stations we have mentioned, and even in others [we have not mentioned]. In this fleeting world these will bring him to a high station, to a knowledge (*ʿilm*) of God, and to a noble station, so that he arrives at joy, ease, and bliss in insight (*maʿrifa*) about God, since he has attained nearness (*qurb*) to God, and reached a noble rank (*al-manzila al-sharifa*) [that is] too fine to be described.⁸⁰

Kharrāz’s vision of the path of salvation is that the servant of God acquire the insight (*maʿrifa*) and closeness (*qurb*) which he had experienced with God in his

80. *Al-Ṣidq*, 73.

primordial state. Closeness to God does not appear to be beyond the reach of the ordinary believer, though any search on his part for the deeper realities of this journey toward God would indicate that his primordial past was in fact not ordinary. In *Kitāb al-ṣidq*, his work most suitable for the public,⁸¹ Kharrāz describes this vision of nearness and insight without exclusive reference to the friends of God. In his more theoretical treatises, however, this closeness is unambiguously attributed only to the friends of God. It would appear that while Kharrāz reserves the ranks of the *awliyā'* for the heroes of faith, he presents their closeness to God and insight about Him as the goal and vision for any who would strive 'along the path of salvation'.

4.5 Waypoints of Progress

Kharrāz's path to salvation progresses toward a rediscovery and experience of insight (*ma'rifa*) that draws aspirants (*murīdūn*) into an intimate relationship with God's nearness (*qurb*). The manual *Kitāb al-ṣidq* leads the aspirant toward a discovery of this timeless knowledge by challenging him to abandon his connection to the world and its pleasures. Discussion of his method will suggest that Kharrāz is guiding wayfarers on the renunciant path. His treatise *Disengagement* clearly links this renunciant path with the primordial status of God's friends.

4.5.1 Fidelity to the Primordial Covenant

Kharrāz uses the term *ṣidq*, translated by Arberry as 'truthfulness', to connect his understanding of the primordial covenant with his renunciant path of salvation. It not only appears in the title of his manual, *Kitāb al-ṣidq*, but is also prominent in each of its waypoints as an important cohesion marker. This naturally leads to including the term in the title of its subsections; for example, *ṣidq fī al-zuhd*, '*ṣidq fī al-khawf*', '*ṣidq fī al-maḥabba*'. Despite the centrality of this concept throughout the manual, its connection to the primordial covenant of the Day of Summons is not explicit. In fact, only within a Quranic quote is a passing allusion made to the 'coven-

81. Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam : An Introduction to Sufism* (London: Tauris, 1989), 41.

ant' (*ahd*) in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*⁸²—not enough to establish the centrality of the primordial covenant in his methodology without consulting his other works.

Kharrāz states clearly that the terms he uses can have both a hidden (*al-bāṭina*) and an obvious (*al-ẓāhira*) meaning.⁸³ 'The term *ṣidq* has many meanings'.⁸⁴ The plain meaning of *ṣidq* in *Kitāb al-ṣidq* is faithfulness or truthfulness. 'The first [meaning] of *ṣidq* is this: the truthfulness (*ṣidq*) of the servant in turning to God in true (*naṣūh*) repentance.'⁸⁵ Its application to subsequent waypoints suggests the same: Kharrāz is giving a 'true' or 'reliable' exposition of each of these waypoints.

Yet Kharrāz beckons the reader to consider something deeper and more profound. He begins an extended epilogue after his description of the waypoints:

Whoever inquires about *ṣidq* and its explanation, recognise this: Everything that I have explained to you, this is only the outward aspect (*ẓāhir*) of *ṣidq* and patience and sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*)—it is not possible for anyone to be ignorant of it, nor to stop performing it.⁸⁶

This outward observance can give way to a state in which the toil and labour of that observance fall away.

But if [God's] servant reflects on God and understands what He summons him to—to an aversion for this perishing (*al-fāniya*) realm and a longing for the realm that endures (*al-bāqiya*)—he braces himself to endure loathsome things [in the world]; [he summons him to] embark upon the path of *ṣidq*.⁸⁷

This 'path of *ṣidq*' is more than the outward performance that is expected of every believer:

Then his character (*akhlāq*) changes and his nature (*ṭab'*) is transformed (*intaqala*). He calms his organ of desire (*nafs*) and his intelligence is stimulated. The light of God (*al-Ḥaqq*) comes to dwell in him

82. *Al-Ṣidq*, 14.

83. *Al-Ṣidq*, 19. Here about patience.

84. 'Wa-*al-ṣidq ism li-ma'ānā kathīra*', *al-Ṣidq*, 22.

85. *Al-Ṣidq*, 22.

86. *Al-Ṣidq*, 73.

87. *Al-Ṣidq*, 75.

and accompanies (*allafa*) him. His passions (*hawá*) shun him and their darkness is extinguished. At that point, *ṣidq* and its characteristics (*akhlāqa-hu*) become part of his nature.⁸⁸

This series of citations demonstrates that a deeper meaning of *ṣidq* lies underneath Kharrāz's manual. On the surface he does encourage the aspirant to understand what it means to be outwardly devoted to each of these waypoints—to have 'truthfulness' in their pursuit. Yet further on the disciple moves from what is required of him to find nearness to God in the deeper meaning of these waypoints.

The deeper understanding of *ṣidq* in these waypoints is their association with the nearness that the spirits of God's friends experienced in their primordial state. What has been veiled in *Kitāb al-ṣidq* is disclosed in *Descriptions of Proximity*:

Some people [God's friends] responded with fidelity (*ṣidq*) [in] their hearts to God's choice of them in His grace and to His guidance (of them) to His singularity (*tawḥīd*). He bestowed His blessings upon them, so they rose to him with their spirits. They preferred Him and loved Him and chose what he had bestowed specially upon them and chosen for them. So their spirits roamed in the spiritual world and he acquainted them with certainty, truthfulness (*ṣidq*), reliance, enrichment, and disapprobation.⁸⁹

This passage demonstrates both levels of meaning for *ṣidq* that were only alluded to in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*. The first instance demonstrates my translation choice of 'fidelity' in contexts whose esoteric reference is prominent. The second instance follows the plain understanding of *ṣidq* as 'truthfulness', especially when encountered as a single waypoint. This passage further demonstrates how waypoints like disapprobation (*zuhd*) and abandonment (*tawakkul*) proceed from a link in the friend's heart to his election by God, expressed here as 'fidelity'. The esoteric nature of Kharrāz's treatises encumbers attempts to specify the exact primordial anchor point of this fidelity. In some instances, this correspondence seems to be with God's pre-eternal 'knowing' and 'choosing' of them. More emphasised is its

88. *Al-Ṣidq*, 76.

89. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

connection to the positive response of the spirits of God's friends to His primordial summons and their longing for nearness to Him.

As discussed earlier, there is a measure of tension in the text of *Disengagement*. On the one hand the text indicates that there is a primordial distinction between the spirits of God's friends and those of unbelievers. 'The spirits of believers (*al-mu'minūn*) are created from a place of light, while the spirits of the unbelievers are created from a place of darkness.'⁹⁰ Nevertheless, all these spirits, both believing and unbelieving, 'were at peace and responsive to their Lord because the spirits are created from an abiding location (*mawḍi' al-baqā'*)'.⁹¹ Perhaps Kharrāz locates the unanimous submission to God's summons at this point. Whatever the resolution of this tension, Kharrāz suggests that the source of disobedience among men and jinn is not their spirits, but the souls (*nufūs*) God created for them. The obedient or disobedient state of their souls owes to God's knowledge of their spirits and subsequent extraction of their newly created souls from either the obedient or disobedient loins of Adam. He goes on to explain that the spirits of believers are never at home in their physical existence, while the spirits of unbelievers submit themselves to their bodies and find physical existence a paradisiacal garden (*basātīn, janna*).

There is pressure from the evident interpretation of *Al-A'raf* 7:172 to affirm the unanimous submission of mankind to a primordial summons of God. Yet Kharrāz insists that there was a distinction between believing and unbelieving spirits *before* they were given a human nature from the loins of Adam, as shown in the prior paragraph.

What is significant in this discussion is that Kharrāz locates the source of the *walī*'s relationship to God in a primordial closeness to Him, one prior to the creation of his earthly nature: 'So they responded as He desired, according to [the state] they had with Him before.'⁹² Further, the friends of God (and prophets) *experienced*

90. *Al-Farāgh*, 41.

91. *Al-Farāgh*, 41.

92. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

a closeness to Him in this primordial state, where they seem to have also learned certain fundamentals about the waypoints they would traverse. By ‘experience’, I mean that they were aware and cognisant: ‘Then He [God] summoned them to understand Him and instructed them until they understand about Him what He had announced to them.’⁹³

Kharrāz expresses the same idea more clearly: ‘He [God], who is high and exalted, adorns every group with the character and deeds which resemble what they had with him previously.’⁹⁴ Kharrāz can characterise his ‘path of salvation’ as one of fidelity because the nobility of the friend of God is limited only by his acquisition of the timeless insight he had with God in his pre-temporal state. That path of increasing awareness entails being faithful to what he had previously with God.

4.5.2 The Structure of the Waypoints

Kharrāz wrote *Kitāb al-ṣidq* to introduce aspirants to a process that would rid their souls of affection for the world and restore them to closeness with God. He presents thirteen waypoints (*maqāmat*) through which the aspirant should progress if he wants to experience intimacy (*uns*) with God in this life. He explains the true definition of each of these waypoints,⁹⁵ yet continuously holds out an invitation to a deeper experience of ‘truthfulness’ in them—a deeper experience which turns out to be ‘fidelity’ to the primordial covenant:

If you have learned everything I have mentioned to you about fidelity, and occupied yourself with these waypoints, and broken your journey at these way stations and journeyed down the paths⁹⁶ I have mentioned to you and by that [path] arrived at ease, repose, and tranquility, then you are surrounded by [God’s] protection and have reached the upright path, the white road that will bring you to God.⁹⁷

93. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

94. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 27.

95. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: a Short History*, 57.

96. Alt., ‘severed the means [of livelihood]’. This phrase can be used by ascetics to indicate the rejection of ‘secondary sources’ of God’s provision. The active domain of ‘journeying’ in this passage makes this less likely.

97. *Al-Ṣidq*, 83.

Kharrāz considers fidelity (*ṣidq*) to be more than simply an individual station or even an attribute of individual stations. Instead, without disallowing these ‘plain’ (*zāhira*) definitions, he is subtly pointing to the more advanced connection between the primordial covenant and this renunciant path of salvation. The clear exposition of that connection is found only in more advanced works like *Descriptions of Proximity* and *Disengagement*.

In *Kitab al-ṣidq* Kharrāz presents thirteen stations within clearly designated sections, with several others briefly mentioned within these discussions. Kharrāz locates these stations within his overall approach:

Realise, oh aspirant, that pious caution (*waraʿ*), disapprobation (*zuhd*) [of the world], patience, reliance [upon God’s provision], fear, hope, awareness of God’s oversight (*murāqaba*), shame, love, longing, intimacy, truthfulness (*ṣidq*), and sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), every good and beautiful virtue—all of these are waypoints along which your works traverse toward God. Then you will depart from these toward other waypoints until you arrive at your destination, where you will be near your Master.⁹⁸

Kharrāz divides these waypoints into three sets, though two of these are apparent only in comparison with *Descriptions of Proximity*. The first set is sincerity, patience and truthfulness. These stations are unique in that they are enjoined for every subsequent station and are a required part of rudimentary faith and practice. The second set comprise ‘the stations away from God’⁹⁹ and include: repentance (*tawba*), pious caution (*waraʿ*), disapprobation of the world (*zuhd*), reliance on God’s provision (*tawakkul*), fear (*khawf*), shame (*ḥayāʾ*), and insight into God’s blessings (*maʿrifat niʿam Allāh*). These stations are pursued by those who had closeness to God in their primordial condition, though their occupation with these stations in this present life veils them from the highest stations.¹⁰⁰ The last set are called the stations of nearness (*maqām fī al-qurb*)¹⁰¹ in *Descriptions of Proximity* and are reserved for

98. *Al-Ṣidq*, 86–87.

99. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

100. ‘*Fa-hāʾulāʾī al-khāṣṣa min al-khalq, ghayr anna akthara-hum mahjūbūn bi-hādhihi al-maqāmat ʿan al-ḥaqq*’, *al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

101. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 23.

God's friends, the *awliyā*. *Kitāb al-ṣidq* presents four of these: love (*maḥabba*), satisfaction (*riḍā*), longing (*shawq*), and intimacy (*uns*). *Descriptions of Proximity* presents a description that begins with enthrallment (*wajd*),¹⁰² progressing to an unnamed state of exuberance,¹⁰³ and finally ending with rapture (*ṭarab*).¹⁰⁴

4.5.3 Stations away from God

Believers can be divided into three groups.¹⁰⁵ The first group complies with God's commands and prohibitions, and focuses upon his punishments and rewards. Though outwardly focused, their religious devotion must also exhibit sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), patience (*ṣabr*) and truthfulness (*ṣidq*). As mentioned earlier, Kharrāz applies sincerity to the basic doctrines of faith. Patience requires a steadfast commitment to this basic belief and to essential practices of religious devotion. When trial and testing come, God expects even the common believer to keep the faith. *Kitāb al-ṣidq* moves quickly from a sentence about truthfulness to an exposition of repentance, appearing to even equate the two. Kharrāz quotes the standard Quranic citations on repentance—that believers will prosper if they repent—suggesting that obeying the command to repent is not essential for common belief. Muḥāsibī as well had granted a place for the obdurate sinner who was not repentant, albeit unstable. So perhaps Kharrāz requires truthfulness in the basic sense that a believer's faith and practice must reflect a desire for God's reward, and not be the product of unmixed hypocrisy.

The absence or at least scarcity of repentance suggests that their contentment with the permitted pleasures of the world inhibits their consideration of 'the path of salvation', whereby the pursuit of the waypoints 'away from God' brings them to experience discomfort with their place in the world. It is fear that maintains their rudimentary adherence to Islam as they think only of receiving God's reward

102. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 23. Saab translates this as 'love', which does not distinguish *maḥabba*, nor take into account Sufi connotations or the context here.

103. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 23–24.

104. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 24–26. The term '*ṭarab*' is taken from page 26.

105. It is unclear if Kharrāz considers the last two as sub-groups of a larger group. *Kitāb al-ṣifāt* would suggest this.

for their obedience.¹⁰⁶ Their infatuation with the permitted pleasures of the world and their pursuit of God's reward prevent them from journeying toward nearness to God.¹⁰⁷ 'They are veiled by the reward of God.'¹⁰⁸

Kharrāz expects that suffering and tribulation can influence the first kind of believer to progress beyond his minimal compliance to God's commands. Even the person who is finding joy in his legalism can expect God to bring discontent into his practice: 'God commissions Gabriel and says to him, "Seize the sweetness of obedience from the heart of my servant. If he becomes distressed, then return it to him and increase it. If not, then leave him be."'"¹⁰⁹ The idea seems not that the believer is saddened because he has lost possessions or happiness in the world; but that he becomes dissatisfied with dutiful obedience. The world itself becomes a source of grief for those on the renunciant path because they loathe it as a distraction. Until a believer becomes dissatisfied with his place in the world, he seems destined to lifeless, external obedience.

4.5.3.1 Repentance

The transition point for the second group of believers seems to be the convergence of this discontentment with repentance (*tawba*). For Muḥāsibī it is the believer's unwillingness to submit to programmatic repentance that keeps him from 'fulfilling God's expectations' (*ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*). While fear seems to be the primary means of motivating repentance in the paradigm of Muḥāsibī, regret is the essential ingredient for Kharrāz. The development of this regret into repentance builds upon dissatisfaction with the pleasures of the world. As well, the believer who is on the verge of joining the second group becomes dissatisfied with his hollow, perfunctory obedience. The first stage of the renunciant path entails a programmatic reorientation away from the world. Muḥāsibī also recognised that outward compliance had its limits, and required surpassing it because of the incumbency of certain

106. *Al-Farāgh*, 43.

107. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

108. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

109. *Al-Ṣidq*, 82.

inward states: avoiding hypocrisy (*riyāʿ*), conceit (*ʿujb*), arrogance (*kibr*), and envy (*ḥasad*).

In its basic practice, regret for sinful actions leads the aspirant to turn from committing sins. Further, he makes restitution for any harm he may have caused other Muslims, and resolves that he will not return to that sin again. Kharrāz does not mention Muḥāsibī's namesake, 'self-examination', but describes the ever stricter repentance of the one who increases his knowledge of God. Like Muḥāsibī, Kharrāz promises that God will illuminate the heart of the believer who achieves scrupulous repentance:

The one whose heart is cleansed from sins and blemishes such that [God's] light calms him (*wa-sakkana-hu al-nūr*), will no longer remain unaware of any hidden defects that might enter his heart, nor will he persist in the hardness [of heart] that accompanies the intention to lapse before an [evil] deed. Then, [before this hardness of heart], he will repent.¹¹⁰

4.5.3.2 The Two Enemies

Echoing Muḥāsibī, this scrupulous repentance requires a thorough understanding of the two enemies that resist the disciple's progress: his centre of earthly desires (*nafs*)¹¹¹ and the Devil (*iblis*). Kharrāz offers no definition of the *nafs*, but clarifies that it is inclined toward evil and seeks pleasure in this world, both lawful and unlawful, that would thwart the disciple's progress. He repeats an anonymous quote, 'One thing I have learned about the probity (*ṣalāḥ*) of my soul is my knowledge of its corruption (*fasādu-hā*).'¹¹² The aspirant must struggle against it and amend it. This centre of desire must be addressed directly and challenged to obey God. For most, it seems, there is little hope that its suggestions can ever be trusted:

If your centre of desire urges you toward one of your passions, or fills your heart with thoughts of seizing something that is forbidden, or

110. *Al-Ṣidq*, 24.

111. Not the shift in translation for *nafs* in the context of *Kitāb al-ṣidq*.

112. *Al-Ṣidq*, 26.

even something that is permitted for you, then accuse it, as one who desires to remedy it; and dissuade it from its desires, as one who wants to subjugate it.¹¹³

The believer must not only struggle against unruly desires, but also against thoughts (*al-khawāṭir*) that are directed into the mind by the enemy, the Devil. In all those moments, when a believer wavers in the face of negligence, the enemy increases the internal resistance to preferring God above the world.

He will spare no effort to weaken your resolve, to slacken your intention, and to delay your repentance. He will delay your piety time and again, and bid you to rush into matters whose delay causes no harm. He wants to cut you off from what is good. Then in the moment when you are engaged in piety and obedience, he will remind you of the thing you desire in order to cut you off from the good you are involved in.¹¹⁴

4.5.3.3 Pious Caution and Circumspection

After repentance and its resistance by the ‘two enemies’, Kharrāz recommends the waypoints of pious caution (*waraʿ*) and circumspection (*al-taqīya*). His description of pious caution adds nothing to the presentation of Muḥāsibī: anything whose permissibility is doubted must be abandoned. Numerous prophetic Hadith cited by Kharrāz suggest the strong support for this arguably ascetic virtue of devotion and its acceptance across the spectrum of Islamic piety. Muḥāsibī incorporates pious caution into his religious devotion by emphasising the need to have certainty about one’s compliance with the requirements of God. Though Kharrāz surely supports this, pious caution as presented in *Kitāb al-ṣidq* is part of a developing argument that aspirants on the renunciant path must learn to avoid even permitted pleasures in the world—not because those acts might inadvertently include disobedience, but because they have no place in the life of God’s friends.

It is also interesting that Kharrāz avoids mention of the term *taqwā* for pious circumspection. Rather in passing he labels it *al-taqīya*. It is noteworthy that pious

113. *Al-Ṣidq*, 26.

114. *Al-Ṣidq*, 28–29.

circumspection (*taqwā*) appears only once in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*¹¹⁵ and is not discussed by Kharrāz. Similar to Muḥāsibī's avoidance of the term 'disapprobation' (*zuhd*) in *al-Ri'āya*, perhaps Kharrāz avoids *taqwā* within his waypoints because of its association with Muḥāsibī's restriction of religious devotion to law-based obedience.

4.5.3.4 Avoiding Permitted Pleasures

In the next section Kharrāz establishes an important theoretical foundation for his views on disapprobation (*zuhd*) and reliance (*tawakkul*). While pious caution (*wara'*) is linked to doubtful situations (*shubuhāt*), *zuhd* and *tawakkul* entail attitudes toward what is lawful. His underlying principle is that the aspirant only take as much as is necessary from lawful things in the world. He speaks of the weak man who holds on (*ḥabasa*) to something good (*al-shay' al-ṭayyib*) for himself or for those he supports. That man fears losing what he has, and while he has it, he despises himself for hoarding it. This passage is very similar to Muḥāsibī's discussion of disapprobation (*zuhd*): 'In situations of excess (*mawḍi' al-faḍl*), God rewards (alt., commends) those who disapprove the storage of what he permits (what is *halāl*).'¹¹⁶ Both Muḥāsibī and Kharrāz seem to agree that hoarding or reliance upon possessions is problematic. The solution for Kharrāz is to eschew what goes beyond subsistence.

The interlocutor in *Kitāb al-ṣidq* picks up on the same issue noticed by Muḥāsibī: 'Then why did the prophets have possessions and estates?'¹¹⁷ In fact this is the climax of Muḥāsibī's argument that renunciants (*zāhid*) go too far in their suspicion of worldly possessions. 'Some scholars saw in the wisdom of Jesus that there are poor people who have love for the world, and rich people who don't have love for the world, like the chosen ones: Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon'.¹¹⁸ Muḥāsibī argues that believers, like the prophets, may spend their possessions or hold on to them, depending on the circumstances. With a string of Quranic quotations, Kharrāz affirms the noble station of the prophets, who were able to act as treasurers of

115. 'Ahl al-*taqwā*' for righteous men, though probably not renunciants, *al-Ṣidq*, 49.

116. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 43. See 2.2.2, p. 12.

117. *Al-Ṣidq*, 31.

118. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 45.

God's wealth. But this is only because they recognised that this blessing of wealth was in fact an affliction upon them.

As for the prophets and the upright men after them, God made them aware that He had afflicted them with abundance and with their property. It was upon God that they relied, and not upon any [created] thing. They were God's treasurers in the things which they possessed. They expended those things in [fulfilling] their obligations to God (*fī ḥuqūq Allāh*), neglecting nothing.¹¹⁹

Note here the language of Muḥāsibī, '*fī ḥuqūq Allāh*'. In what seems to be a direct refutation of Muḥāsibī's conclusions, Kharrāz goes on to cite renunciant anecdotes of the prophets. In fact they may have had possessions, but they lived as if they had none. 'They found no joy in anything [in any possession of the world], and they needed neither treatment nor struggle to escape it.'¹²⁰

Is this extended passage from *Kitāb al-ṣidq* in fact a polemic against Muḥāsibī's teaching? Earlier (2.4.1, page 35) I discussed Muḥāsibī's censure of the renunciant path in *al-Makāsib*: trusting in God also means relying on God to prevent sinful inclination toward the blessings God's gives. Kharrāz would concede that the prophets were able to have possessions in the world and not incline toward them, but everyone else must rely on the renunciant path to be rid of the love of the world. Even if 'holding on to possessions' is 'the station of the prophets', that station requires disapprobation even of what God has permitted.

Has not one of them (Muḥāsibī-?) even claimed that he has possessions just as those [righteous men] had in the past? Thereby he uses them to vindicate the pursuit of his passions and his observation of [practices] that oppose the lifestyle of these people (*sunnat al-qawm*). Rather it is nearer to salvation to confess one's shortcomings to God as a negligent servant, and to ask God to advance him to [the station] that these people reached.¹²¹

His rebuff is certainly an accusation against those who use the example of the prophets as a basis for holding on to possessions.

119. *Al-Ṣidq*, 34.

120. *Al-Ṣidq*, 35.

121. *Al-Ṣidq*, 39.

4.5.3.5 Faulting the World

Kharrāz's explanation of the station of disapprobation (*zuhd*) expands upon these attitudes to conclude that God finds fault (*dhamma*) with this world. 'He has disparaged its worth, and is not pleased with it as a dwelling place for His friends.'¹²² It is clear from the first paragraph of *Descriptions of Proximity* that enjoyment of this world plays no role in the life of those chosen by God (*al-khāṣṣa min al-khalq*).¹²³ What the world offers is very closely tied to what his centre of desire (*nafs*) enjoys so that the faithful man always suspects any desire originating from that locus. 'He takes only the bare necessities of food, drink, clothing, shelter, sleep, speech, talking, listening. He abandons all longing for things of this world, and is cautious about its adornments.'¹²⁴ Unlike Muḥāsibī, Kharrāz's distrust of the world engenders an austere approach toward surviving in it.

4.5.3.6 Reliance on God

Kharrāz cites a few of the many Quranic citations that establish the blessings and necessity of relying on God (*tawakkul*).¹²⁵ His definition emphasises a state of tranquility in regard to one's physical requirements in this life. 'It is confidence in Him; the unfeigned (*al-khālīṣ*) knowledge and abiding certainty that God's hand is outstretched to him, keeping His promise to him in everything he requires.'¹²⁶ His certainty in that promise allows him to quickly divest himself of any material provision that God grants. He is 'a treasurer of God's treasures'¹²⁷ because he has no reserve about passing on whatever he receives to others.

God's promise 'in everything someone requires' does not mean that God has promised to meet his needs as he perceives them. Rather reliance is confidence in the certainty that whatever God has decreed will reach him.¹²⁸ A person may have

122. *Al-Ṣidq*, 45.

123. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

124. *Al-Ṣidq*, 41.

125. *Al-Ṣidq*, 48. *Āl 'Imrān* 3:122, 159; *Al-Mā'idā* 5:23.

126. *Al-Ṣidq*, 39.

127. The same phrase used by Muḥāsibī.

128. *Al-Ṣidq*, 52.

complete confidence (*tawakkul*) in God and yet die in abject misery, not having had even one of his needs met.¹²⁹

Does this attitude promote the passivity toward well-being in this world that Muḥāsibī censured? Does the reliance of Kharrāz equate with the abandonment of Shaqīq al-Balkhī? Kharrāz's treatment seems on the surface to fall short of this extreme:

I said: 'Does reliance upon God function alongside [one's] means of subsistence (*asbāb*) or [does it require] severing [one's] means of subsistence?'

He replied: '[It requires] severing the greater part of these means so that one advances toward the [First] Cause, resting in Him.'¹³⁰

This brief response suggests Kharrāz's unwillingness to commit to complete passivity or the absolute abandonment of remunerative activity. His continued discussion suggests that complete reliance on God's decree might grant the passivity attributed to Shaqīq. For example, he grants the permissibility of medical treatment, but points out that therapeutic intervention can as easily kill the patient as treat him. Thus he avoids any absolute recommendation and appears apathetic about medical treatment in general.¹³¹ On the issue of imminent danger, such as facing wild beasts, Kharrāz emphasises the inevitability of God's will. He may be eaten, but only by God's will. He mentions the opinion of others that with prayer such beasts can be faced. In the end, it is difficult to know if he himself would have willingly faced beasts. There is evidence that he was apathetic toward the dangers of travel, and would begin a journey without acquiring provisions.¹³²

Reinert suggests that Kharrāz's aversion to indirect provisions is in line with the austerity of earlier renunciants, and at odds with Muḥāsibī.¹³³ Yet Kharrāz's unwillingness to absolutely reject intermediary sources of God's provisions suggests

129. *Al-Ṣidq*, 53.

130. *Al-Ṣidq*, 50.

131. *Al-Ṣidq*, 50–51.

132. Reinert, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, 167, 202.

133. *Ibid.*, 145, 161.

that Muḥāsibī's censure of Shaqīq's approach may have mitigated the fatalism of irrational abandonment to God's predestined provision. This development adds to *tawakkul* the attitudes of trust and confidence, beyond an earlier emphasis on abandonment.¹³⁴ But unlike Muḥāsibī, Kharrāz upholds the austere model of the renunciants, and finds that same way of life (*sunna*) in anecdotes of the prophets. He distrusts mankind's impulse to seek provisions and to store those provisions for future use. Moreover, progress towards God's nearness requires the disregard of all earthly possessions.

Reliance [on God] requires forsaking tranquility in any means of subsistence (*asbāb*) [within] the world; in denying any ambitious desire for the creation; and in denying any despair [in losing] it.¹³⁵

4.5.3.7 Fear in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*

Kharrāz admits that his treatment of fear in *Kitāb al-ṣidq* is abbreviated. The chief point of interest is that he considers the source of fear to be God's continual observation of the believer (*murāqaba*). Though he acknowledges that believers of rudimentary faith and practice fear God's punishment,¹³⁶ this eschatological fear of suffering is not mentioned within this description of the waypoint of fear.¹³⁷ This is a significant departure from Muḥāsibī, for whom fear of suffering is a powerful means of restraining desire, right up until the moment when an aspirant is aware of his friendship with God.

4.5.3.8 Shame

Kharrāz explains shame (*ḥayā'*) as God's continual observation of the believer. In this description, Kharrāz suggests contemplation of the grave and final judgement, but not without first acknowledging that one should be ashamed of God's kindness in the midst of transgression. Through short aphorisms he links shame with key

¹³⁴. Reinert, *Die Lehre vom Tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, 44–49.

¹³⁵. *Al-Ṣidq*, 53.

¹³⁶. *Al-Ṣidq*, 81.

¹³⁷. *Al-Ṣidq*, 54.

virtues like fear, pious caution and self-examination. These culminate to produce characteristic renunciant behaviour:

I said: ‘What is the condition of one who possesses shame?’ He answered: ‘Extreme submissiveness and continual humility; lowering one’s head; restricting one’s gaze; scarcely looking upwards toward heaven; a tongue that becomes weary from many words; fear of exposing oneself in the toilet; forsaking amusement and laughing; being ashamed of performing what God permits—not to mention the occurrence of what He has forbidden.’

4.5.3.9 Thankfulness

The final stage for those whose stations veil them from God is the knowledge of God’s blessings (*maʿrifat niʿam Allāh*) and thankfulness for them. Though relatively straightforward, this station is important as a prelude to the first station of those brought near to God, the station of love (*maḥabba*): ‘The wise (*ḥukamāʾ*) agree that love arises from the recollection of blessings.’¹³⁸ Exhibiting consistency with his esoteric writings, Kharrāz exhorts his reader to first thank God for the blessings he received before his physical creation: ‘He remembered you before you existed, and assigned to you [an understanding of] His singularity (*tawḥīd*) and your faith in Him and your lasting insight (*maʿrifā*) about Him.’¹³⁹ And in this present life, despite an initial experience of disobedience (also mentioned by Muḥāsibī), God granted the aspirant repentance (*ināba*) and settled him in His good pleasure.¹⁴⁰ This thankfulness is to be expressed in the heart, on the tongue, and with the members of the body by not misusing His favours in this world.

4.5.3.10 Moving Beyond the Stations away from God

The primary destination of these waypoints away from God is a purity that dislodges the love of the world from an aspirant’s heart. This significant expansion

138. *Al-Ṣidq*, 60.

139. *Al-Ṣidq*, 58.

140. ‘*Fa-wahaba laka al-ināba ilay-hi wa-aqlasa-ka ʿalā ṭayyib marḍāti-hi*’, *al-Ṣidq*, 58.

of Shaqīq's waypoints of disapprobation and fear develops a wariness of any extended contact with anything that mankind normally desires in the world. Such a person recognises that the world wherein God has placed Him is of no value, and is meant as a trial. His changing attitude toward the world and estrangement of his passions and desires should lead him toward nearness (*qurb*) with God. In an important passage within *Kitāb al-ṣidq* this transition is associated with a moment when the burden of religious works is lifted. Their designation as 'stations away from God' suggests that the effort involved in struggling against the desires of human nature can actually distract a person from God.

This struggle against human desires within the world begins to lift as God grants His love to the aspirant. Commitment to these prescribed way stations will find God turning toward the aspirant so that they become easy for him.¹⁴¹ This development entails an actual transformation of the human nature:

[God summons him to] embark upon the path of *ṣidq*; to resolve to make every effort; to be patient with God; and to bear [the burden] of the source of his desire (*nafs*); and to seek help from God. Then God observes that he desires what is only with Him, endeavouring to attain His favour, and He visits him with his kindness and help, and makes easy the burdens of the *nafs* that were difficult for him.¹⁴²

The passage continues on to describe the aspirant's perseverance in practices like fasting, night watches, and solitude. All of this ends with a transformed character: his concern and interest in this passing world diminishes; hardship and difficulty no longer challenge his faith because comfort in this life is no longer important to him.

One key aspect in this transition from worldliness is a shift in perception about God's attitude toward the disciple. His reflection of God's blessings cause him to anchor God's view of him in their primordial relationship and not in his performance of legal obligations. This naturally increases his own love for God and drives

141. *Al-Ṣidq*, 76.

142. *Al-Ṣidq*, 75.

out the love of the world. Further, the pursuit of God's reward no longer lingers as a motive for this journey.

And this is a sign: He preserves the constant meditation (*dhikr*) and affection that He has deposited in your heart. He causes you to find His nearness and to become attached in devotion to Him. Now He treats you with kindness so that you quiet your every attempt to strive for success in drawing near to Him, except to stir up within yourself thanksgiving to Him for His favours, to respond to His requirements, and [to have] intimacy with Him and no other, to find happiness in private discourse with Him and pleasure in serving Him. ... At that moment you have found His nearness, without being occupied with your own efforts or seeking any reward or recompense from him, no different from the devoted worshippers and renunciants (*zuhhād*). But your deeds toward God come from love and honour because He has created you in honour and installed you with [a noble] character and prestige.¹⁴³

The aspirant who transverses these stations away from God subdues his inclinations for the fleeting pleasures of the world.¹⁴⁴ Though his embarkation on this path toward salvation set him apart from those whose exclusive focus is God's reward, he nonetheless moves toward a maturity of posture and no longer focuses upon *himself* in his pursuit of God. He becomes convinced of God's mercy in electing him to a primordial experience of closeness and he now yearns in love toward God. As he pursues these stations he reaches toward the station of love, where pursuit of God replaces the pursuit of purification. These stations that had been 'away from God' are no longer burdensome and he has begun to taste the highest level of closeness to God.

4.5.4 Shaqīq's Legacy in the Stations away from God

The stations away from God presented in *Kitāb al-ṣidq* include repentance, pious caution, disapprobation, reliance, fear, shame, and thankfulness. Within this list, Kharrāz adds two topics that he considers integral to the procession of these stations: an understanding of the resistance an aspirant will face, and the import-

143. *Al-Ṣidq*, 76.

144. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 23.

ance of avoiding even permitted pleasures in the world. The station that receives the most significant treatment is disapprobation of the world, which also seems important to Kharrāz's understanding of pious caution, reliance, fear, and shame. Repentance and thankfulness function as transitional waypoints that orient an aspirant to a more advanced relationship with the lasting insight he gained in his primordial state. The ordinary believer is loyal to his primordial pledge only in his external behaviour, with little lasting insight of God. The aspirant who repents and enters the renunciant path knows that his earthly existence is at odds with his true identity and seeks to find deliverance from any love of the world or its pleasures. There is ample evidence to suggest that these aspirants were the likely consumers of Sufi training in the renunciant path, and that they were considered to be aspiring renunciants (*zuhhād*), at least by Sufis who appreciated the teaching of Kharrāz. Finally, the culmination of thankfulness could awaken love for God in the heart of the renunciant so that he is no longer veiled from God and begins his journey into the depths of nearness (*qurb*) to God. He recognises his identity through insight he gained in his primordial proximity to God.

This distillation of the stations away from God to disapprobation approximates the first two stations of Shaqīq's path from his treatise *Ādāb al-'ibādāt*. Shaqīq's brothers 'disapprobation and fear' are also described in *Disengagement* as having a reciprocal relationship such that each adorns the other.¹⁴⁵ Kharrāz clearly distinguishes these two stations from the higher levels of longing and love. 'Disapprobation and fear differ from (alt., 'branch out') meditation (*fikr*) and these two differ from the branch of longing toward God.'¹⁴⁶

Kharrāz uses Shaqīq's imagery of light to describe the interdependence and progression of these same stations: disapprobation, fear, longing and love:

Understand that the light of longing (*shawq*) is higher than the light of fear; the light of fear is higher than the light of disapprobation; and

145. *Al-Farāgh*, 43.

146. *Al-Farāgh*, 43.

the light of love causes the heart to shudder so that a person's spirit flutters in longing for meeting the beloved.¹⁴⁷

Nwyia rightly indicates a lack of clarity in this passage, though he makes too much of the mismatched order.¹⁴⁸ Rather, Kharrāz attempts to match different waypoints with different classes of people, but fails to achieve a lucid presentation (see Table 4.2). What is clear is an acknowledgement and expansion of Shaqīq's presentation by splitting his four waypoints into two distinct phases, one more ascetic and one more mystical. Those with insight (*ʿārifūn*) have a different level of experience than the renunciants, and may even be veiled from renunciant waypoints because of their timeless insight of God (*maʿrifat al-Maʿrūf*).¹⁴⁹

Table 4.2: Characteristic Waypoints of Different Classes

Class	Characteristic
The people of works	Exalt longing
Aspirants	Consider love to be noble
Renunciants	Elevate fear
God's friends	Desire 'these' waypoints
Those with lasting insight	Look down on 'these' states

4.5.5 Stations of Closeness

Beyond the purification of the renunciant path, classical Sufism promises to grant practitioners advanced states of spiritual awareness and experience. Unfortunately, these advanced states are extremely difficult to describe or analyse.¹⁵⁰ Vagueness of expression, whether arising from the fear of persecution or from the supra-rationality of the subject matter, is conducive to generalizations about generations of Sufi thought and subsequent projection into individual writers, especially in the ninth century. The tradition itself struggled with this tendency,

147. *Al-Farāgh*, 43.

148. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 251.

149. *Al-Farāgh*, 43.

150. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 105.

for example in later Sufi handbooks.¹⁵¹ Kharrāz's legacy is no exception, and the uniqueness of his approach merits detailed analysis.

The last four stations in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*—love, satisfaction, longing and fellowship—could easily be interpreted as no more than a continuation of the prior waypoints of the renunciant path. Though certainly only those who were close to God in their primordial condition would find these stations, Kharrāz's presentation implies that their attainment results from the steadfast application of the 'stations away from God'. *Kitāb al-ṣidq* subtly depicts a transition into these last four stations when the disciple abandons all attachments in this world for devotion to God's love, marking his entry into the 'waypoints of closeness'. Like Shaqīq, entering into this realm of love and closeness does not suggest that the renunciant path has been abandoned.¹⁵² Once recognised as a separate grouping, descriptions within *Kitāb al-ṣidq* fit within the framework I am suggesting:

I will mention to you one other station:¹⁵³ ... If you have drunk from the cup of timeless insight into God so that through the clarity of certainty He has disclosed to you (*aṭla'a-ka*) what you experienced with Him before time (*fī al-qadīm*)—when He sought you before you sought Him, when you were known before you knew Him, when He mentioned you before you mentioned Him, and when He loved you before you loved Him—now thankfulness to Him has been stirred up [in you] for His blessings and love clings to your heart because of those blessings. Now you prefer Him; your spirit rests in Him; and you are accustomed to His nearness. From now on you take refuge in Him and find peace in His nearness. He is never absent from you and you never lose [awareness] of Him, whether going or coming, whether standing or sitting, whether awake or asleep—in every circumstance [you are with Him].¹⁵⁴

Perhaps Kharrāz considers this the moment of entry into friendship with God.

Descriptions of Proximity, Disengagement and Luminosity (Kitāb al-ḍiyāʿ) all suggest that Kharrāz reserved a category of description for those whose renunciant jour-

151. e.g. al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism: al-Risāla al-qushayrīya fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*; al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf al-mahjūb; the oldest Persian treatise on Sūfiism*; and al-Kalābādhī, *The doctrine of the Sufis = Kitāb al-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*.

152. See 2.3.1, p. 29.

153. This passage is in the epilogue, placing this 'station' outside the prior sequence.

154. *Al-Ṣidq*, 85.

ney awakened a transition from thankfulness to love. *Disengagement* summarises this division as the difference between the ‘light of fear’ and the ‘light of longing’: ‘disapprobation and fear belong to a different branch from meditation, and to a different branch from longing.’¹⁵⁵ *Descriptions of Proximity* describes a select class that journeys beyond the ‘stations away from The Truth (God)’: ‘From these He selects whom He wills and discloses to them (*aṭla‘a-kum*) the magnificence of His sovereignty so that He can train them with true exercises and enable them to charge toward His magnificence.’¹⁵⁶ The shift from the ‘stations away from God’ to the ‘station of nearness’ is characterised as being enthralled (*wajd*) with God. *Luminosity* is devoted to describing the exalted status of those specially selected by God:

God created for Himself the elite (*ṣafwa*) of creation in the most exalted vista. Though He created them with a human shape, He exalted them above human nature, purified them from any hint of darkness, stretched them to the highest [human] endeavour, and set them upon the path of affection (*mawadda*). He raised their understanding to the heights of hidden reality and allowed them to reach and comprehend the dwelling place of light.¹⁵⁷

These stations of nearness express a newfound certainty about God’s selection of the disciple, and his newfound desire to experience God moment by moment.

4.5.5.1 Continuous Love

Arriving at the station of love marks a decisive shift away from the struggle of abandoning the world to a continuous devotedness to God. No impulse of desire distracts God’s friend from following the example of the Prophet ‘in his conduct, disapprobation and character’.¹⁵⁸ That character is marked by the preference of God’s affairs above one’s own, especially above the affairs of one’s locus of desire (*naḥs*). Thoughts of God are always upon his heart and tongue, and as Muḥāsibī

155. *Al-Farāgh*, 43.

156. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 22.

157. Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz, *Kitāb al-ḍiyā’*, in *Rasā’il al-Kharrāz*, ed. Qāsim al-Sāmarrā’ī (Baghdad: Maṭbū‘āt al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Irāqī, 1967), 28 (hereafter cited as *al-Ḍiyā’*).

158. *Al-Ṣidq*, 61.

warned, he recognises and avoids the pitfall of negligence. This path necessitates going beyond one's duties, as demonstrated in a Hadith Qudsī quoted by Kharrāz:

God says that my servant doesn't draw near to me according to the performance of what I require of him. Rather it is by supererogatory acts that he continues to draw near to me until I love him. And if I have loved him, I become his hearing, his sight, his hand, and his Helper. He prays to me and I answer him; he seeks my counsel, and I grant him counsel.¹⁵⁹

This Hadith hints at the displacement of human traits that seems to be the ultimate destination of the journey into God's proximity.

It is this supererogatory journey that displaces the diseases of the heart: 'The love of God eliminates pride (*kibr*), malice (*ghill*), envy (*ḥasad*), and injustice (*baghy*) from his heart, along with any advantages that might occupy him from the affairs of the world.'¹⁶⁰ Muḥāsibī envisioned comprehensive repentance and obedience to God's revealed commands to be the cure for the diseases of the heart.

Love of God becomes an obsession for His friend: 'The mark of love is to be in agreement with the Beloved, in every affair to conduct one's business only along his paths, to approach Him by every available stratagem, and to flee from any matter that does not directly concern this course.'¹⁶¹

4.5.5.2 Contentment with God's Decree

The next station of nearness in *Kitāb al-ṣidq* is contentment (*riḍā*). Kharrāz suggests that a common understanding of contentment is when one finds joy in God's decree. Patience, he says, is for those who face hardship. Does this suggest that contentment is reserved for the decrees of God that one finds agreeable? Kharrāz promotes a view of contentment that is no longer concerned with the circumstance itself, but with having confidence and joy in God's purposes, with no regard for the outcome. In an extreme example, he tells of a person who drinks poison, but then

159. *Al-Ṣidq*, 61. Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* 81, *riqāq* 10, *bāb al-tawāḍuʿ*.

160. *Al-Ṣidq*, 62.

161. *Al-Ṣidq*, 62.

refuses to receive the antidote. When contentment fails, the believer is comforted by patience, suggesting that the desired state of mind is indifference (*apatheia*) to the affairs of the world.¹⁶²

Though Kharrāz's description suggests contentment as a solidly renunciant virtue, he links it to love in a way that shifts it out of the 'stations away from God'.

When God's servant is faithful (*ṣadaqa*) in his love, a certain consultation and consent (*taslīm*) arises between him and God. Any suspicion (of God's decree) disappears from his heart. He relies on the excellent choice of the One whom he loves. He finds rest in the excellence of his administration (*tadbīr*) and tastes the fare of His presence with him. His heart is filled with happiness, tranquility, and joy. This attitude prevails over the pain of calamities, disagreeable circumstances, and tribulation.¹⁶³

This attitude of acquiescence is not simply a matter of indifference, like abandonment (*tawakkul*), but includes a heightened awareness that God's love is expressed through the experience of God's decree.

4.5.5.3 Longing for God

While Shaqīq al-Balkhī connects longing (*shawq*) with a desire to experience Paradise, Kharrāz specifies that its object is the experience of God within Paradise. He relates one of the prayers of the Prophet: 'Oh God, I ask you for the pleasure of life after death, of gazing upon your face, and of longing for [that] meeting with you.'¹⁶⁴ Like contentment, this station retains a distinctly renunciant outlook. 'The one who longs for God is vexed (*mutabarrim*) with the world and his remaining in it.'¹⁶⁵ This vexation is not simply an attitude of dislike, but results in intense emotions as if one is afraid of being estranged from his lover. The intensity of his vision (*ru'ya*) for God produces 'brokenness in his breast from the intensity of his passion'.¹⁶⁶ Yet like someone in love, he fears that he might find himself cut off from his Beloved.

162. *Al-Ṣidq*, 64–65.

163. *Al-Ṣidq*, 66.

164. *Al-Ṣidq*, 67.

165. *Al-Ṣidq*, 68.

166. *Al-Ṣidq*, 68.

‘Now he encounters genuine fear that he won’t reach his Beloved. He fears that he will be cut off from Him—without Him—and that something will stand between him and God, and veil him from God.’¹⁶⁷

This description foreshadows the intense experiences of emotion that are presented as the highest waypoints of closeness in the esoteric works of Kharrāz.

4.5.5.4 Intimacy with God

The final waypoint of intimacy (*uns*) is the fulfilment of the prior station of longing, when the friend of God becomes aware of God’s proximity. This experience is problematic for those whose renunciant journey has not surpassed the station of fear, because the awareness of God’s proximity will terrorise them. Those who have reached love rather find joy and delight, for they are certain of God’s good intentions toward them. This mention within *Kitāb al-ṣidq* of the division between the ‘station of fear’ and the ‘station of love’ is another demonstration that Kharrāz divided Shaqīq’s four stations into two halves—one focused on disengaging from the world, and the other focused on beholding God.

With this final waypoint the friend of God experiences a constant awareness of God’s proximity.

This is the mark of the one who has fellowship with God and with His nearness: he experiences God’s nearness and meditation (*dhikr*) of Him in his heart. He never loses this, regardless of the circumstance, time or place. God and his nearness have priority over everything else because the light of God’s nearness comes to dwell in his heart. He views everything by that light and by it he allows himself to be guided by that light in all things.¹⁶⁸

Once God’s friend reaches this stage in his journey, his disinterest in the world culminates in a preference for God above even other people. Unlike Shaqīq’s publicly active renunciant, the one who has fellowship with God is occupied in intimate conversation (*munājā*) with Him. Human company is shunned. ‘Meeting with

167. *Al-Ṣidq*, 69.

168. *Al-Ṣidq*, 71.

other men becomes a burden for him. He is fed up with them. Meeting and sitting with them becomes a hardship for him, and a waste.’¹⁶⁹ Moreover, those who experience fellowship with God have lost their natural fear of wild places. ‘Crowded places, ruins, and wastes; groups and solitude—they are all equal to him.’¹⁷⁰

Kitāb al-ṣidq discreetly expands Shaqīq’s light of longing and love to four waypoints. Though these still remain dependent upon the cultivated rejection of the world, that rejection is no longer the object of the friend’s experience. The intensity of emotion described in these four waypoints only alludes to the complex array of experiences and states that Kharrāz reserves for his esoteric writings. There order and coherence are sacrificed for rich expressions of intimacy and captivation.

4.6 The Esoteric Vision of Kharrāz

The esoteric treatises of Kharrāz explore the intense experiences of intimacy to which Kharrāz discreetly alludes in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*. I will introduce these works in this section, but reserve the greater part of my discussion for my comparative chapter on mysticism. These treatises are available from one manuscript, Kastamonu 2713, copied in 1218 CE.¹⁷¹

The introduction of *Descriptions of Proximity* describes the classification of mankind according to their loyalty to the Day of Summons. Only those on the renunciant path display fidelity (*ṣidq*) to their primordial allegiance. Of these, a select few ‘charge toward God’s nearness’ and follow the path of Moses, who fell down senseless when God crushed the mountain with his glory (*Al-A‘rāf* 7:143). Kharrāz then leads the interlocutor from the emotions of ardent love (*wajd*)¹⁷² to descrip-

169. *Al-Ṣidq*, 72.

170. *Al-Ṣidq*, 72.

171. Ahmed Ateş, ‘Kastamonu Genel Kitaplığında Bulunan Bazi Mühim Arapça ve Farsça Yazmalar’, *Oriens* 5, no. 1 (1952): 29.

172. Al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayrī’s Epistle on Sufism: al-Risāla al-qushayrīya fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf*, 80–81; al-Kalābādhī, *The doctrine of the Sufis = Kitāb al-ta‘arruflī-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, 103–104. Rabia Harris translates its occurrence in al-Qushayrī as ‘ecstasy’. Arberry likewise translates it as ‘ecstasy’ in Kalābādhī. Hujwīrī describes it as an intense emotion of sadness caused by love, al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf al-mahjūb; the oldest Persian treatise on Sūfism*, 413. Further research may indicate that ‘ecstasy’ is an over translation. Consider OED’s definition: ‘Used by mystical writers as the technical name for the state of rapture in which the body was supposed to become incapable of sensation, while

tions of losing one's self-awareness because of God's overwhelming presence. The friend of God is captivated by God's gaze upon him in a way that severs him from his ordinary experience of the world. Kharrāz explores the perplexing states of consciousness that belong to the stations of nearness:

Those who are strongest in their religion (*dīn*) and in their insight [of God] are those who draw near to God. Their understanding of Him becomes their nourishment; sitting and conversing with Him [becomes] their intimate companion so that the door opens between them and God. There is no moment when they are cut off from His benefits. Some of them are perplexed; some of them are amazed; and some of them experience rapture.¹⁷³

Table 4.3: The Waypoints of Proximity

	Rank	Arabic
1	'Strong emotions of enthrallment'	<i>wajd</i>
2	'Amazement'	<i>dahsha</i>
3	'Delight and rapture'	<i>ṭarab</i>

The description of this enthralling emotion (*wajd*) in *Descriptions of Proximity* intensifies until it ends in rapture (*ṭarab*).¹⁷⁴ Kharrāz's usage of *wajd* suggests an experience of strong emotions, which I am translating as 'enthrallment'. Saab's translation, 'love',¹⁷⁵ misses this element and suggests to the reader an underlying Arabic term like '*maḥabba*' or '*wudd*'. Rather this passage in *Descriptions of Proximity* suggests a very strong, but sustained, emotion. Though not altogether impossible, it seems unlikely that he intends ecstatic episodes accompanied by the loss of awareness or consciousness at this point in his discussion.

Before the terminal experience of rapture (*ṭarab*), Kharrāz describes what appears to be emotional outbursts from intense yearning. God's friend has a mental awareness of His gaze upon him, and he is momentarily undone. It is not clear

the soul was engaged in the contemplation of divine things.'

173. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 23.

174. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 24–26.

175. Saab, 'Sufi Theory and Language in the Writings of al-Kharrāz', 135.

whether these outbursts of shouting and crying are from joy or grief. They are sporadic, and not every friend experiences this.

The most advanced state in this description is rapture (*ṭarab*). In this state, the disciple is so overcome with an awareness of God that he loses an awareness of himself. In Kharrāz's thinking, the friend of God's connection to his primordial experience of closeness to God is so strong that his personal awareness has receded to the kind of consciousness he would have had before the creation of his soul. In this description the disciple is conscious, and perhaps even verbally responsive, but his responses no longer reflect a personality anchored in this world.

Despite the intensity of this description of rapture (*ṭarab*), there is little indication that Kharrāz consider this to be a condition of closeness (*qurb*) to God or establishes it as the goal of the stations of nearness. It is clearly not a permanent state and may not even have been considered a station by Kharrāz. Its description here indicates an occasional experience among those who experience nearness to God and are enthralled with Him.

Disengagement is a complex exposition of the source and nature of *ma'rifa*, timeless insight about God. The treatise does not discuss the mystical experiences of the stations of nearness, but rather grounds the journey of the renunciant path in the permanence of primordial insight. His argument contrasts what perishes, *al-fanā*, with what persists, *al-baqā*, and references verses in the Quran that speak of God's annihilation of creation at the end of time.¹⁷⁶ The treatise provides a theoretical framework for mystical experience by establishing the permanence of primordial insight (*ma'rifa*), the spirit (*rūḥ*), and friendship (*wilāya*) with God.¹⁷⁷ The stations of the renunciant path are placed within the context of mankind's primordial allegiance to God in their disembodied state as spirits (*al-rūḥ*). Because the friends of God experienced Him fully in that pre-temporal state, they are able to live in this world with an awareness and even an experience of *al-Ma'rūf*. The capacity of each person to possess this timeless insight is proportional to his belief in God's singularity,

176. *Āl 'Imrān* 3:185; *Al-Qaṣāṣ* 28:88, and *Al-Raḥmān* 55:26–27. See 4.2.1, p. 113.

177. *Al-Farāgh*, 39.

His *tawḥīd*. Throughout this exposition Kharrāz grounds the experiences of God’s friends in His eternal decree. Nwyia explains, ‘This is because *tawḥīd* is not only aimed toward events that are situated near God, in a prehistory where the story of every man was decided; but it (*tawḥīd*) must also control that story, becoming “the root of all our actions.”’¹⁷⁸

Table 4.4: The Waypoints of Insight

Rank	Arabic
1 ‘Perplexity with insufficiency’	<i>al-taḥayyur ma’a al-iftiqār</i>
2 ‘Joy with union’	<i>al-surūr ma’a al-ittiṣāl</i>
3 ‘Passing away while aware’	<i>al-fanā’ ma’a al-intibāḥ</i>
4 ‘Remaining with anticipation’	<i>al-baqā’ ma’a al-intizār</i>

Keeping with the theme of timeless insight, *Disengagement* lists four stations of those who have that insight (*ahl al-ma’rifa*). The passage is important because it mentions both *fanā’* and *baqā’* in the context of specific stations.

Following the discourse strategy preferred by Muḥāsibī, *Luminosity* (*Kitāb al-ḍiyā’*) sets out to enumerate the ranks of God’s elite. Seven short descriptions culminate in a startling description of their union with God. ‘Their characteristics amalgamate in His characteristics in their awareness of His divine secrets (*ghaybi-hi*).’¹⁷⁹

This table demonstrates the esoteric nature of these descriptions. Though there is a clear progression toward unity with God, Kharrāz’s language is abstruse and difficult to decipher. One imagines that key assumptions were taught orally.

Two additional works of Kharrāz in MS 2713 do not address esoteric themes. *Kitāb al-ḥaqā’iq*, entitled *The Truth of Words* by Nwyia, is a collection of apothegms in the format of a lexicon. Seventy-two terms (*khiṣāl*) cover a variety of topics, with only a few that are esoteric. For example:

What is the essence of the Sunna? He said: ‘Coldness toward the world and love for the Companions.’ This means that one feels only coldness

178. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 247.

179. *Al-Ḍiyā’*, 30.

Table 4.5: The Ranks of God's Elite

Rank	Arabic	Description
1 'God's counsel'	<i>ahl ishārāt</i>	shared counsel with God on <i>yawm alast</i>
2 'Entrance'	<i>ahl wulūj</i>	clear knowledge bestows pure vision
3 'Endeavour and exchange'	<i>ahl mujāhada wa mubādala</i>	pure love with oscillating states
4 'Privilege'	<i>ahl al-khuṣūṣiyya</i>	reaches God through His mysteries
5 'Deprivation'	<i>ahl al-tajrīd</i>	drinks purity, fidelity, and love
6 'Appropriation'	<i>ahl istilā' wa-tamkīn</i>	returns from God with His secrets
7 'Love'	<i>ahl al-muḥābba</i>	unification with God

toward the world and takes just enough from it [to live] for the sake of his Lord. He loves the Companions with the goodness of his heart and soul. He is shaped by their character and actions for the sake of his future. He is a *sunni*.¹⁸⁰

4.7 Conclusion

God's primordial relationship with believers is the foundation of Kharrāz's model of religious devotion. By sojourning along a path identified by progressive inward exercises, the aspirant grows in his awareness of that relationship which he had formerly with God. With this awareness he strives to cast aside his attachments to this world with stages like disapprobation and the absolute commitment of his physical provision to God. As he succeeds, his conviction of the benevolence of his primordial condition grows until thankfulness engenders a love and longing for God that squelches any lingering satisfaction with this world. Obeying God becomes a natural outgrowth of his love for Him as he becomes confident that God has chosen him and loves him. His life is characterised by fidelity to his previous state and he is consumed by intimacy with God. On occasion his persistent proximity to God may manifest itself with intense emotions and momentary detachment from his surroundings. In these moments he experiences the fullness of his primordial

180. Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz, *Kitāb al-ḥaqā'iq*, in *Rasā'il al-Kharrāz*, 56.

state, unaware and oblivious to his soul's immersion in the physical world.

Chapter 5

The Ascetic Dimension of early Islamic Piety

Each of the authors under consideration depicts their path toward God as a series of stages or ranks. As an initiate moves from one stage to the next, he gradually removes the impediments that have prevented him from pleasing God. In each case an important component of this journey is the initiate's gradual reorientation of his life to his relationship with God, away from competing attachments to the world. The late antique inheritance of these authors included celebrated demonstrations that religious devotion requires a lifestyle of denied pleasure.

Conventionally, this lifestyle of denied pleasure has been categorised as asceticism. Though the label is not older than the European Renaissance, the prevalence of asceticism as a diverse mode of piety in late antiquity impedes a precise, classical definition. The label's etymological origin in the Greek term *askēsis* is obvious. Yet modern usage does not limit the characteristics of asceticism to the characteristics of late antique *askēsis*. This is not entirely surprising because those characteristics are not easily distilled into a list of necessary and sufficient features. Diverse and even opposed religious identities developed their own understanding and pursuit of denying worldly pleasures. Choosing to treat asceticism as an historical or literary category should include an acknowledgement that the category itself should be considered as broad, with allowance for the cultural and religious diversity of late antiquity.

In this chapter I will discuss how understanding asceticism as a mode of piety helps scholars understand the religious devotion of Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 184/809–10), al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857–8), and Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 277/890–91). I will not attempt to compare their pieties with late antique Christian *askēsis*. Rather I will analyse their writings and demonstrate that their contributions in mapping the renunciant path were essential to the development of a shared Sufi identity in Baghdad. Muḥāsibī’s role was to challenge the ideal of this emerging path because it encouraged restrictions that hindered obedience to divine commands. This analysis includes a discussion of Muḥāsibī’s concept of the world and of mankind’s impulse to desire pleasure and prosperity in it. I will also clarify the authorship of an ascetic manual sometimes attributed to Muḥāsibī, and demonstrate that it belongs to the same ascetic trajectory as Shaqīq and Kharrāz. Finally, I will demonstrate the development of an ideal of exaggerated renunciation that became integral to Sufi forms of piety.

5.0.1 Differentiating ‘Asceticism’ from ‘Ascetic’

This thesis suggests that religious devotion can be differentiated by examining the religious practices, virtues, and beliefs a devotee pursues. I have used the term ‘piety’ as a superordinate category for religious devotion.¹ My examination of how these authors described and taught their religious devotion suggests that a part-whole conceptual hierarchy for ‘piety’ is more useful for historical studies than a genus-species hierarchy.² From the point of view of the practitioner, his piety consists of the practices, beliefs and virtues he pursues, and does not rely on abstract generalizations like ‘asceticism’ or ‘mysticism’. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the terminology discussed in this section.

1. ‘Piety’ can also refer to the virtue of faithfulness to the duties of kinship. Its usage as ‘reverence and obedience to God’ could also be viewed as a virtue. To clarify, I use piety as a synonym of religious devotion, consisting of practices, virtues, and beliefs. *OED* s.v. ‘piety’.

2. Classical taxonomies are genus-species hierarchies.

Table 5.1: Taxonomy of Islamic Asceticism

Term	Definition
religious devotion	a superordinate category that consists of one's virtues, practices, and beliefs
asceticism	a type-of category for religious devotion that denies pleasures and possessions
ascetic component	a virtue, practice, or belief that is shaped by a commitment to denying the world
ascetic piety	religious devotion whose ascetic components are prominent
disapprobation	the primary ascetic virtue of Islam that idealises disapproval of the world, <i>al-zuhd</i>
a renunciant	a paragon of religious devotion who pursues the renunciant path, <i>al-zāhid</i>
renunciant path	an ascetic lifestyle that seeks purification by limiting participation in the world

5.0.1.1 Asceticism

What kind of category, then, is asceticism? From the point of view of the researcher, there are certain patterns of practice, virtue, and belief that allow generalizations to be made about a person's piety. These generalizations are fuzzy categories consisting of selected components of piety (practices, virtues and beliefs) that share a significant orientation toward a particular value. As a fuzzy category, such a generalization does not have absolute boundaries. This orienting value is an abstraction that attempts to signify how some of the components of a person's piety are working together such that the researcher posits this value as a distinctive feature. What is significant is that this abstraction is not actually 'part of' the person's piety, but rather denotes a pattern observed between specific components of that piety. The overlap of categories like asceticism and mysticism suggests that they do not have a genus-species relationship with piety, as is expected in classical taxonomies. Rather, as prototype categories that are fuzzy, these generalizations function best within a type-of conceptual hierarchy to piety.

If piety could be classified successfully within a traditional, scientific taxonomy, one would expect that different kinds of piety could be distinguished from one

another through their necessary and sufficient features. Asceticism, for example, would have necessary features that are sufficient to distinguish it from mysticism, as well as other kinds of piety. Moreover, those features would be binary—a person's piety would either belong to asceticism or not. Strictly speaking, such a classification means that asceticism would have clear boundaries.³

This depiction of asceticism (or mysticism) within a classical taxonomy is problematic. Scholars recognise that asceticism and mysticism cannot be absolute categories. A dichotomy between the two has been questioned in both late antique and islamic studies.⁴ The difficulty scholars have in providing precise, non-overlapping definitions for asceticism and mysticism (perhaps other 'kinds' of piety as well), is that their distinction cannot be based upon a classical, non-overlapping taxonomy. This is to say that these categories have never functioned well as scientific categories, though there is general consensus about their application. Rather, these categories are best explained and described by making use of the prototype taxonomy I have suggested. Recognition of certain ascetic components in a person's piety would not require that their religious devotion is best characterised as ascetic.

With this taxonomy in view, this thesis treats asceticism as 'a mode of piety that demonstrates religious devotion through deliberate denial of pleasure, status, or possessions'. I use the term 'mode' to indicate that asceticism is a fuzzy category that can be considered as an abstracted description of a subset of the components

3. Based on Taylor's discussion, John R Taylor, *Linguistic categorization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19–39. Ernst presents a similar discussion of mysticism, Carl Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 19. Also, D. Alan Cruse and William Croft, *Cognitive Linguistics* (West Nyack, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 74–81, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/bodleian/docDetail.action?docID=10110137>.

4. Bernard McGinn, 'Asceticism and Mysticism in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', in *Asceticism*, ed. Richard Valantasis Vincent L. Wimbush (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1995), 59. It seems that Sviri's recent statement challenges this: 'It is evident that asceticism and mysticism represent two separate and independent trends within Islam, at times at odds with one another and at times interwoven into one another.' Sara Sviri, 'Sufism: reconsidering terms, definitions and processes in the formative period of Islamic mysticism', in *Les Maîtres soufis et leurs disciples : IIIe-Ve siècles de l'hégire (IXe-XIe s.) : enseignement, formation et transmission* (Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2012), ¶18.

that comprise a person's piety. So the phrase 'Shaqīq's asceticism'⁵ is an abstraction of those components of Shaqīq's piety that have a relationship to his valuing of deliberate denial of pleasure, status and possessions in his pursuit of God.

5.0.1.2 Ascetic Components of Piety

The application of the label asceticism depends upon identifying the orientation of a person's piety toward the denial of the world. If such an orientation exists, it should be observable in certain virtues, practices and beliefs of his religious devotion. Thus I label a virtue, practice or belief that has an orientation toward the denial of the world as an 'ascetic' component of piety. The matrix of these ascetic components and a person's relative commitment to them would warrant the label asceticism if they significantly define his piety. Muḥāsibī, for example, might have a rigorous commitment to avoiding illicit food—a practice that could be considered ascetic. Yet given the entirety of the components of his piety, that practice may function within his overall piety in a way that does not underscore his 'asceticism', but rather his commitment to obeying Islamic law. From the point of view of a researcher, a person's piety might include ascetic components without asserting that these components form a significant tendency of his piety.⁶ In my usage, the phrase 'Muḥāsibī's asceticism' would imply a salience of the ascetic components of his piety—a conclusion I suggest is not supported by careful research.

This suggests that the adjective 'ascetic' operates at two different levels within the conceptual hierarchy of religious devotion. At a lower level it describes a specific component of religious devotion and reflects a commitment to deny the world within that belief, virtue, or practice. Thus the virtue of trust (*tawakkul*) might be considered an ascetic virtue if one's pursuit of it included denying oneself gainful occupation.

5. Once the phrase is formulated as 'asceticism' rather than 'ascetic', there is a strong inference that these ascetic components are salient to one's overall piety.

6. To this extent Kinberg may be right: all forms of Islamic piety have some ascetic components. Kinberg, 'What Is Meant by Zuhd', 44.

At a higher level within this conceptual hierarchy, a person's piety or religious devotion could be considered 'ascetic' because his commitment to denying the world has salience in his piety overall. In this usage, it is important to clarify that the sentence 'Shaqīq's piety is more ascetic than that of Muḥāsibī' would not mean that Shaqīq has harsher or more rigorous practices, virtues or beliefs, but that the ascetic components of his piety are more prominent overall than the ascetic components of Muḥāsibī's piety. For example, Muḥāsibī's commitment to consuming only licit food included refraining from food whose origin was uncertain—even when this caused physical discomfort.⁷ By all accounts this is an ascetic component of Muḥāsibī's piety, but in the conceptual hierarchy I have described this does not mean that Muḥāsibī was an ascetic.

5.0.2 Clarification of *zuhd*

I make a distinction between the Arabic term *zuhd* and the category of asceticism. It will become clear that my preferred translation of *zuhd* is 'disapprobation (of the world)', though modern academic discourse is settled on 'renunciation'. I will give a lexical description of *zuhd*, followed by a brief synopsis of its usage within my research corpus. I will then discuss modern strategies for its translation.

Zuhd was an important virtue of 8th–9th century Islamic piety. Classical Arabic dictionaries list its antonym as 'desire' (*raghba*)⁸ or 'covetousness' (*ḥirṣ*)⁹. It describes a state and not an activity.¹⁰ Thus it has no direct object, and requires the preposition *fī* to express what is 'not desired'. Its object within Islamic piety is always 'the world' (*fī al-dunyā*). The verb can also be used in non-religious contexts, but in this case the infinitive form (*maṣḍar*) is *zahāda* and not *zuhd*. Strictly speaking, its use with *fī* expresses an attitude toward something, and not what one

7. *Al-Makāsib*, 201.

8. *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, s.v. 'zahada'.

9. *Lisān al-ʿArab*, s.v. 'ZHD'.

10. Its *Aktionsart* class is a state, see Robert D. Van Valin, *Exploring the Syntax-Semantics Interface* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 32–42, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CB09780511610578>.

‘does’ to it.¹¹ Lane’s *Lexicon* provides evidence that this dislike or contempt could include ‘abandonment’ (*taraka-hu*) or ‘avoidance’ (*a‘raḍa ‘an-hu*), though this may be by implication. Even with this extended meaning, it is likely that it is the attitude (for example, of abandonment) and not the act itself that is in focus.¹²

Lisān al-‘arab gives examples that indicate the root may also have an association with scarcity. The adjectival form *zahīd* can be used to describe someone who has a small amount of food. A *muzhid* is someone who has a small amount of money. The possible semantic connection of *zuhd* to the scarcity of *zahīd* should be noted, and could be connected to the common assumption that a *zāhid* (one who exhibits *zuhd*) is poor.

The collocation of *zuhd* with *fi al-dunyā* contributes ambiguity to its meaning. Strictly speaking, even the strictest *zāhid* could not abandon the world absolutely, lest he die. And there are descriptions of *zuhd* in which an attitude prevails and there is no strict abandonment. ‘*Al-dunyā*’ (the world), then, has a metaphorical interpretation and refers to a subset of activities or pleasures in the world. More broadly, it might be interpreted as mankind’s living in the world as opposed to his future life in the Hereafter—‘this present life’.¹³ How an author understands this metonymy is critical to his understanding of *zuhd*.

Shaqīq’s treatise begins with a discussion of *zuhd*:¹⁴ ‘Entry into *zuhd* begins by disciplining the *nafs* through restricting the appetite from food.’ At first glance, *zuhd* is a virtue that can be acquired through restricted consumption of food. It is a negative or at least indifferent attitude toward the world¹⁵ that is attained initially by distracting a person’s desires for the world through hunger. So *zuhd* might be equated with getting rid of any fondness for the world so that one avoids its pleasures.

11. When the verb has a direct object it means ‘to assess’, usually dates (the fruit).

12. Alternatively, Lane’s evidence for the meaning *tark* may be late and reflect the historical development of the word.

13. This is Gramlich’s translation strategy: ‘*Diesseits*’.

14. I refrain from suggesting a gloss for *zuhd* until the end of this section.

15. Again, the referent for ‘the world’ is itself ambiguous and in this case inferred.

Muḥāsibī explicitly links ‘the world’ with ‘what God has forbidden’. So *zuhd* is ‘to avoid and dislike what God has forbidden’. He gives allowance for extending this to an act that God has not forbidden if that act contributes to obeying God’s commands in some way. In these cases, the concept lacks the semantic component of [DISLIKE],¹⁶ perhaps then closer to the idea of ‘avoidance’ or ‘refraining from’, mentioned above.

Muḥāsibī’s student Abū Ja‘far ibn al-Farajī¹⁷ explicitly includes the concept of ‘loathing’ within his explanation of *zuhd*. His discussion makes clear that contented participation in any aspect of life in this world negatively affects one’s relationship to God. Like Shaqīq, practices such as hunger have a therapeutic effect upon the *nafs* and contribute to restricting its desires. The close association of such practices with *zuhd* may suggest that his concept of *zuhd* included them.

Kharrāz begins his discussion of *zuhd* with a Quranic reference in which God exposes the faults of the world and upbraids it. ‘How then can God’s servant be satisfied with anything in it?’, he asks. He clarifies that when scholars use the expression ‘the world’ they are referring to the desires that originate in man’s locus of desire (*al-nafs*). If one is to be successful in thwarting sinful desires then one must abandon (*tark*) the world. Kharrāz’ negative attitude toward the world is clear in his presentation.

5.0.3 *Zuhd* in Translation

Given this brief introduction to early usage of the phrase *zuhd fī al-dunyā*, how should *zuhd* be translated?

Nicholson and early modern scholars translated *zuhd* with the term ‘asceticism’. Within the model I am proposing, *zuhd* is a virtue of religious devotion—one of its components, while asceticism is a type of religious devotion. Nicholson’s usage suggests that *zuhd* is similar to the concept of *askēsis*. If in usage *zuhd* were limited to

16. In cognitive linguistics, the concept is narrowed to cancel the assumption of ‘dislike’. For an introduction to meaning components within the study of semantics, John I. Saeed, *Semantics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 259–297.

17. The likely author of *al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū‘*, falsely attributed to Muḥāsibī, see 5.4.4, p. 202.

a characterisation of the piety of a *zāhid*¹⁸ (pl., *zuhhād*), the translation ‘asceticism’, especially ‘Islamic asceticism’, might have merit. But as Kinberg’s survey suggests, *zuhd* was not simply a virtue of religious elites or the very pious (those typically labelled *zuhhād*), but was considered necessary and attainable for even ordinary Muslims.¹⁹ Thus there is a mismatch with the translation ‘asceticism’ because *zuhd* approximates a virtue and not a broader category or type of piety.²⁰ Within early Islamic conceptual hierarchies, ‘*zuhd*’ and ‘asceticism’ do not function at the same level of categorisation.²¹ Even without the academic presuppositions inherent in the term ‘asceticism’, *zuhd* is a very suspect translation for Greek *askēsis*.

Arberry translates *zuhd* within the *Kitāb al-ṣidq* of Kharrāz as ‘abstinence’. This has merit and should not be dismissed. If one abstains from the world, they refrain from activities in it that he would consider pleasurable or at least beneficial. Accuracy would require severing the common association of ‘abstinence’ with forgoing sexual intercourse, but that seems easily inferable. What is missing is the equanimous or even negative evaluation implicit within the concept indicated by *zuhd*. Usage and classical dictionaries suggest that the opposite of *zuhd* is desire rather than gratification.

Van Ess has translated *zuhd* as ‘*Weltverzicht*’ in his work on Muḥāsibī. That translation has become commonplace within German literature, such as in the important collection of translated *zuhd* passages and aphorisms by Gramlich. Nwyia uses ‘*renoncement*’ in his discussion of Shaqīq. In English research the term ‘renunciation’ is common, perhaps reflecting earlier research by van Ess or Nwyia. Melchert also translates *zuhd* with ‘renunciation’ and connects it to the concept of aus-

18. A common designation within early Islam and its biographical tradition for those who restricted themselves from taking pleasure in the world, often including reports of restricted participation in it. The designation may sometimes lack specificity and simply refer to any pious person.

19. Nonetheless, her conclusion that *zuhd* is the Islamic term for morality is overstated, if not inaccurate. Kinberg, ‘What Is Meant by *Zuhd*’, 20.

20. Kinberg at certain points in her argument distinguishes *zuhd* from *zuhhād* but does not pursue the possibility that the *zuhhād* practice an exaggerated (from the perspective of other Muslims) form of *zuhd* or even a specific type of *zuhd*.

21. Friedrich Schmid Ungerer, *An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics* (London; New York: Longman, 1996), 85–91.

terity: 'the deliberate embrace of practical austerities'.²²

Though 'renunciation' has become the established modern translation of *zuhd*, it is not a flawless equivalent. In English primary usage is within the domain of (Western) law and not piety. In the context of law, 'renunciation' and its French and German counterparts reference a public act of relinquishing one's rights. Even within the domain of piety, the most common understanding is that one renounces a religious 'belief or opinion'. Moreover, the English phrase 'renounce the world' is today associated with withdrawal from the world to a monastery, at least in the dictionaries. Historically, Christian baptismal candidates renounced 'the devil, the world, and the flesh' in a public act of repudiation. One can renounce something in the sense of 'giving up or forsaking something naturally attractive', but this is not limited to acts of piety. Strictly speaking, 'renunciation' in this sense lacks the semantic component of [DISAPPROBATION] or [EQUANIMITY].²³

'Renunciation' strongly suggests an open or verbal pronouncement of abandonment. The works I have investigated do not suggest that *zuhd* was understood as a speech act. Perhaps some *zuhhād* (plural of *zāhid*) did make such declarations against the world, but that seems not to be important in descriptions of them within the biographical dictionaries. When private, 'renunciation' suggests an element of reluctant abandonment of something one otherwise enjoys—with no noticeable negative or even indifferent attitude. As with 'abstinence', perhaps these are only minor observations that do not disqualify it as an acceptable translation.

Melchert's association of *zuhd* with austerity merits consideration. Though the focus of austerity is on sternness and severity, it allows for a range of attitudes from indifference to strong contempt. Austerity also suggests commitment to avoiding pleasure even if the accompanying attitude is indifference. The sometimes associated feature of forced restraint seems incongruous with early Islamic usage,²⁴ but perhaps this feature is absent within the domain of piety. Austerity could function

22. Melchert, 'Baṣran Origins of Classical Sufism', 223.

23. One can renounce chocolate during Lent with no sense of moral reprehension or even indifference.

24. 'The austerities of war', or 'austerity' as a government policy.

as a virtue within competing frameworks of religious devotion, perhaps even for the average Muslim adherent. The lack of a verbal form complicates this translation choice, though this may reflect a questionable tendency to shift *zuhd* into a transitive action. As a translation for the verbal '*zahada fi*', one would have to use a phrase like 'have an austere attitude about'.

An option that has not been suggested is 'disapprobation'. If one accepts that grammatical flexibility may not be the deciding factor in a translation equivalent, this translation captures well the primary semantic component of [DISAPPROVAL] within the concept of *zuhd*. It also more closely relates this disapproval with motives of piety, unlike the term 'austerity'. 'Disapprobation of the world' is conceivable as a virtue, especially if one allowed for the conceptual enrichment of 'world' to imply 'the pleasures, status, and possessions of the world'. Even Muḥāsibī's rich *zāhid* could hold on to his wealth for licit obligations and yet be committed to disapprobation of it. This example is difficult to express with either 'renunciation' or 'austerity'.

One promising connection that has been overlooked is between *zuhd* and the *apatheia* of late antique *askēsis*. Best translated as 'equanimity', this was one of the primary goals of the ascetic practices of late antique monasticism.

Within the conceptual taxonomy of piety, *zuhd* is a component of religious devotion, subcategorised as a virtue. I find no compelling support to subcategorise it as a practice of religious devotion. This distinction, along with other issues discussed above, suggests significant shortcomings with the translation 'renunciation', which is usually understood to be an activity. Translating it this way entails a subtle shift from a virtue to a practice, and makes it more difficult to regard *zuhd* as a 'stage' of religious devotion.

Zuhd does not indicate the fuzzy category of asceticism I described above. One could interpret certain practices like hunger or poverty as components of *zuhd*, but given the descriptions in Arabic lexicons, this seems unlikely. As the following analysis will indicate, the better interpretation is that those practices are useful for achieving the virtue of *zuhd*, but should not be confused with *zuhd* itself. In other

words, I find it unlikely that *zuhd* is a superordinate category that consists of other practices, virtues or beliefs.

A direct equivalent in English, then, should be broad enough to allow a range of disapprobation toward the world, from indifference to loathing. Implicit within this emotional stance would be the avoidance of its object, though not always its rejection. Kazimirski's definition of *zuhd* is helpful: 'to be entirely free from any desire [for it] and to forbid oneself its usage'.²⁵ Pending further research into the possible connection with *apatheia*, I suggest 'disapprobation' as the best translation for *zuhd*. The verbal phrase *zahada fī al-dunyā* can be translated with the synonym 'to disapprove the world'. 'Renunciation' as a translation may be acceptable in instances where disapproval is overshadowed by rejection, but seems inadequate in other contexts. Moreover, it will likely skew the understanding of *zuhd* to a practice of religious devotion, rather than a virtue.

5.0.4 The *zāhid*: One characterised by *zuhd*?

I concede that a significant difficulty with this suggested translation is the active participle *zāhid*. While *zuhd* is a virtue recommended for all believers, becoming a *zāhid* is not considered practical or incumbent for every Muslim. Though *zuhd* is widely (if not universally) recognised as a necessary virtue for any believer, not every person with *zuhd* has the status of a *zāhid*. Granted that evidence of a particular scholar's status as a *zāhid* comes from later biographical sources, it becomes difficult to establish if the biographical tradition labels someone a *zāhid* simply because his devotion to God was admired, or because he in fact demonstrated a remarkable attitude of equanimity or disapprobation toward the possessions and pleasures of the world. Regardless, not every believer was recognised to have even admirable indifference toward the world, much less a calling of actual abandonment. For the person truly devoted to God, his disapprobation of the world would likely not be admired unless he actually abandoned it. Within the early period of

25. *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français*, s.v. '*zuhd*'. I will discuss below Muḥāsibī's accommodation in case one refrains from an act without disliking it.

Islam, one expects that the typical ‘holy man’ did not simply ignore the world, but withdrew from ordinary participation in it. Though his *apatheia* (equanimity) was expected, it was his *askēsis* that gave him status.

So the *zāhid* is not simply someone with *zuhd*, but someone whose devotion to it as a lifestyle grants him recognition within society. Muḥāsibī’s rich *zāhid* was surely not typical.²⁶ The demonstration of piety through active disapprobation suggests that the rejection of an ordinary life was expected of the true *zāhid*. He rejected at least some of society’s norms. Borrowing categories of Greek late antiquity, his *apatheia* toward the world was developed and maintained through regular observance of restrictions in his quality of life, easily equated with Greek *askēsis*.

Is there then justification for translating *zuhd* as disapprobation and *zāhid* as ‘ascetic’ or ‘renunciant’? Perhaps the orientation of the *zāhid*’s piety toward ascetic practices and virtues as an outgrowth of the priority of *zuhd* in his piety is a natural intensification of that *zuhd*. A marked focus on *zuhd* suggests that thorough disapprobation of the world would necessitate abandonment of it. This observation does not suggest that [ABANDONMENT OF THE WORLD] is a necessary semantic component of the *zāhid*, but that this is the prototypical feature that would have been expected by late antique society, even in the early Islamic period. This would warrant the translation of *zāhid* as ‘ascetic’. When milder, yet admirable commitments to austerity are taken into account, however, the better translation is likely ‘renunciant’, now common in the literature. Perhaps ‘ascetic’ is best retained for the more specialised *nussāk*. To remark again, my acknowledgement of the conventional translation ‘renunciant’ for *zāhid* does not require that the virtue of *zuhd* be translated as ‘renunciation’.

Because disapprobation of the world (*zuhd*) is to some extent common to most every form of Islamic religious practice, it cannot be equated with asceticism. Though any Muslim who pursues an ascetic lifestyle must surely regard the world with disapprobation, it is not the case that all Muslims who develop disapprobation for the world would pursue an ascetic lifestyle. As commonly understood, as-

26. See 2.4.3, p. 42.

ceticism indicates a more comprehensive commitment than disapprobation of the world, even if disapprobation is a part of that commitment. For Sufi precursors, asceticism indicates an orientation of practices, virtues and beliefs toward the pursuit of inner purification through the systematic rejection of participation in the world.²⁷ In the reports of the Sufi biographers, renunciants were generally expected to despise the world and avoid any kind of ordinary life in it—something God did not expect of ordinary Muslims. Though Islamic tradition extols disapprobation as a virtue, ascetic manuals explicitly connect it with attaining purity and intimacy with God. This characteristic differentiates this kind of piety from the concept of disapprobation that Muslims hold more commonly. It is not enough to say that their asceticism differs from *zuhd* only in degree. Rather, at least by the time of Shaqīq, certain renunciants pursued extraordinary rejection of the world because they believed that this would rid their soul of encumbrances that prevented them from achieving intimacy with God.

In addition to the terms ‘asceticism’, ‘disapprobation’ and ‘renunciant’, I consider this particular orientation toward ascetic practices and virtues the ‘renunciant path’. Throughout this thesis I describe this renunciant path in reference to a mode of Islamic piety that pursues spiritual purification by refusing to participate in the world. This renunciant path is indicated not simply by a particular approach to disapprobation of the world (*zuhd fī al-dunyā*), but by a comprehensive orientation of the renunciant’s piety toward ascetic virtues and practices. It is not simply a variant of *zuhd*. Rather, it indicates how *zuhhād* employed the metaphor DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH as an explicit way of referring to the prominence of asceticism in their piety. Even if *zāhid* (‘renunciant’) sometimes assumes only a milder devotion of austerity, the renunciant path would differentiate this milder form from

27. ‘A voluntary, sustained, and at least partially systematic program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual, or profane gratifications are renounced in order to attain a higher spiritual state or a more thorough absorption in the sacred,’ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. ‘asceticism’. Fuchs’ definition is also helpful, but has been generalised beyond religious contexts: ‘By “asceticism” (from Gr., *áskesis*, ‘exercise’) is understood, in today’s usage, a conscious, prolonged, systematic diminution in the quality of one’s life wherein the religious element continues to be involved only peripherally,’ *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, s.v. ‘asceticism’.

Sufi pre-cursors who were committed to a path of purification through the taming of the *nafs*. I suggest that the prototypical *zāhid* was expected to demonstrate recognisable abandonment of the world.

5.1 Ascetic Tendencies in the Piety of Shaqīq al-Balkhī

Shaqīq al-Balkhī's treatise *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* is the earliest systematic outline of the renunciant path in Islamic literature. The ascetic tendencies present in his piety can be distinguished from Muḥāsibī's approach to disapprobation (*zuhd*). Shaqīq's treatise suggests that renunciants at the close of the eighth century were recruiting followers and guiding them along a defined path toward ascetic practices and a renunciant lifestyle. Though the origins of the ascetic tendencies characteristic of Baghdad Sufism may remain difficult to establish, Shaqīq was a key figure at the beginning of that trajectory. Discussion of Shaqīq's renunciant path will demonstrate that his approach differs substantially from that of Muḥāsibī.

Ādāb al-ʿibādāt is the earliest extant example of an Islamic ascetic manual. Shaqīq invites those who desire to become renunciants to begin a journey that leads to closeness and intimacy with God. Along that journey are four waypoints that allow the aspirant to progress toward God's love: disapprobation of the world (*zuhd*), fear, longing (*shawq*), and love for God. The aspirant may terminate his journey at any of these waypoints and live in the 'light' of that virtue.²⁸

The first waypoint of disapprobation provides the critical foundation for the remainder of Shaqīq's programme. Through a rigorous practice of hunger the aspirant will weaken his organ of desire (*nafs*) so that he no longer succumbs to its passions. By renouncing all but meagre nourishment, his seat of desire will be occupied with thoughts of food and thus unable to initiate desire for the world's pleasures. Hunger will monopolise a person's centre of desire so that God's light displaces the dark love of this world in his heart with the light of God's love. 'He will desire to neither enjoy it [the world] nor take any delight in intimacy with it.'²⁹

28. See 2.2.3, p. 15.

29. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 18.

Shaqīq's programme is strict because the slightest satiety allows the *nafs* opportunity to promote the love of the world within a person's heart. Though Shaqīq describes this initially as a forty day regimen, the 'People of Fidelity' who reach the highest rank of God's love never diminish the light of their disapprobation of the world. 'He will master this stage [of love] without withdrawing from the light of disapprobation or fear or the longing for the Garden.'³⁰

Shaqīq's manual does more than simply explain a path toward intimacy with God. It also establishes a path by which a person may attain divine favour, and consequently, unique social status. One who has the light of disapprobation exhibits the radiance of devout worshippers. His heart is filled with the same illumination experienced by other renunciants. When combined with the next waypoint of fear, the renunciant has arrived at an 'auspicious stage, momentous in the sight of the public because they don't know any stage beyond it'.³¹ If he persists to the waypoint of love for God, then God will cause those around him, even the angels, to love him.³²

Shaqīq's manual affirms that renunciants before Muḥāsibī had established a renunciant path that amplified disapprobation into an ascetic programme that curbed worldly passions. This subjugation depended upon severing the renunciant's interest and participation in the world. Meagre subsistence was prescribed as the only safe path in the struggle between love for God and love for the world. More importantly, this manual establishes the early association of a disapprobative stance against the world with an intimate relationship with God. Finally, the form of the treatise suggests that renunciant masters of the late eighth century promised their followers a path toward recognised social standing as *zuhhād*. Shaqīq's manual enunciates the general trajectory of the renunciant path that Muḥāsibī engages and censures.

The renunciant path that Shaqīq promotes goes beyond the life of perfected

30. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 18. *contra* Sviri, 'The Self and Its Transformation in Ṣūfism', 197.

31. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 19.

32. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 21.

obedience described by Muḥāsibī. Besides hunger, the portrayal of Shaqīq in the Sufi biographical dictionaries describes his commitment to an entire range of ascetic practices: thirst, poverty, sleep diminution (vigil), inadequate clothing (nakedness), and abandonment of occupation.³³ Though discussions of supererogatory acts are never attributed to him, the elite status of the successful renunciant suggests this kind of categorisation. This is not to suggest that Shaqīq has no interest in obedience to prescribed acts of the Sunna,³⁴ but that his renunciant path lies outside legal obligation.

The ascetic practices of this renunciant path are closely related to ascetic virtues. Besides the obvious connection with disapprobation of the world, traditions from Shaqīq make explicit connections between these practices and virtues like patience, contentment and joy.³⁵ Diminished expectation (*naqṣ amali-hi*) is mentioned in connection with the renunciant path,³⁶ whose ascetic practices are sure preparation for the final judgement.³⁷ Thankfulness is mentioned, but always in connection with the good works God gives a person, and never in response to material blessings.³⁸ One should never pray for material blessings and should be grieved if he finds abundance.³⁹ A renunciant cannot possibly be rich.⁴⁰

The clearest ascetic tendency in Shaqīq's legacy is his abandonment of gainful occupation. Because of his exaggerated confidence in God's provision, Shaqīq exaggerates *tawakkul* to reject any intermediate provision that might depend upon labor or financial transaction. What ordinarily might be thought of as a virtue—trusting in God—has become an ascetic practice. This approach toward *tawakkul* also orients the virtue of confidence in God, *thiqa*, in a distinctly ascetic direction.⁴¹ None of the traditions attributed to Shaqīq connect his understanding of *tawakkul*

33. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 60,6–12; 62,9–14.

34. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 68,14–23; 71,9–12.

35. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 60,6–12.

36. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 67,6.

37. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 62,16–25. Contrast Muḥāsibī, whose preparation for the final judgement is an assessment of one's obedience to God's commands.

38. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 69,15–23; 70,17–25; 71,12–16.

39. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 57,8–10; 57,11–58,2; 58,2–4; 58,5–7.

40. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 71,23–25.

41. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 8, pp. 61,12–14.

or *thiqa* to *zuhd*, supporting my assertion that asceticism is a fuzzy category distinct from disapprobation.

The biographical dictionaries do not add any new information on Shaqīq's view on the *nafs* or the world (*al-dunyā*). But because they affirm his commitment to poverty and hunger, an inference that he would reject Muḥāsibī's pious participation in the blessings of God in this present life is warranted. Unlike Muḥāsibī's strategy to subdue the *nafs* through reflection and understanding, Shaqīq's solution is to strip it of any desire beyond hunger. Perhaps he would agree with Muḥāsibī's portrayal of the world as an opportunity to gain reward in the Hereafter, but it seems unlikely that he would affirm Muḥāsibī's refusal to extinguish passions altogether.

Unlike Muḥāsibī, Shaqīq presents a simple choice in life. Either desire and love the world, or desire and love God. Physical desire, even for life maintenance, interferes with a love for God. Mankind's centre of desire (*al-nafs*) must be distracted, weakened and suppressed. Shaqīq's devotion to God is marked by ascetic practices and virtues which underscore how his disapprobation of the world requires limited participation in it.

5.2 Disapprobation in the Writings of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī

I suggested earlier in this thesis that disapprobation of the world is not a dominant virtue in Muḥāsibī's path of salvation. His best known work, *al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, does not include *zuhd* as a virtue that is necessary to attain perfected obedience. He systematically censures those who exaggerated disapprobation of the world in their ascetic practices. Muḥāsibī was concerned when Islamic renunciants presented an ideal of piety that interfered with obedience to God's revealed commands. Moreover, a true friend of God (*walī*) finds fellowship (*uns*) with His hope through a life of careful obedience in the trials of this world, and not through disapprobation that leads to exaggerated abandonment of life in this world.

Muḥāsibī devotes one book to an exposition of the concept of disapprobation, a short treatise entitled *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd*.⁴² This work is written in the form of questions that a student presents to his teacher. The teacher is identified as Muḥāsibī, while the student remains anonymous. In what follows, I will discuss the view of disapprobation he presents there.

The interlocutor of *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd* begins by asking Muḥāsibī whether ‘disapprobation of the world’ is incumbent or supererogatory. Muḥāsibī responds: ‘disapprobation of what is forbidden is required by God Most High.’⁴³ In situations of excess (*mawḍiʿ al-faḍl*), God rewards (alt., commends) those who disapprove the storage of what he permits (what is *halāl*).⁴⁴

The category ‘supererogatory acts’, *nafl* or *nāfila*, indicates the performance of acts that are not obligatory, but nonetheless are rewarded by God. Practically, this means any act that Islamic tradition recommends for Muslims without explicitly commanding it as an obligatory act. In a later section of *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd* Muḥāsibī acknowledges supererogatory acts as a category. He substantiates their existence by citing prophetic traditions in which a reward is promised for non-incumbent acts. He then enumerates their benefits.⁴⁵

First Muḥāsibī demonstrates that supererogatory acts ‘cover sins’. ‘Whoever makes ablutions and reflects upon God while washing his face, He [God] forgives him for every member [of his body] that has committed sin, wherever the water reaches.’⁴⁶ In this case ‘reflecting on God’ while performing ritual ablutions is a supererogatory act because God rewards it, though it is not legally binding. His citations continue on in this manner to mention forgiveness through acts that are

42. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd*.

43. Such a response is attributed by Abū Nuʿaym to Sufyān ibn ʿUyayna (d. 198/814). *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 7, p. 297, cited in Melchert, ‘Baṣran Origins of Classical Sufism’, 230.

44. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd*, 43. He probably means that Muslims are commended when they disapprove of what would otherwise be permissible in order to avoid excessive possessions. Compare Gramlich’s translation, ‘Gott hat den Menschen den Verzicht auf das, was er verboten hat, zur Pflicht gemacht und ihnen den Verzicht auf das Behalten dessen, was er erlaubt hat, um der Übergebühre willen empfohlen’, Richard Gramlich, *Weltverzicht : Grundlagen und Weisen islamischer Askese* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), 15.

45. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd*, 122–125.

46. Ibid., 122.

not recognised as incumbent.

Likewise, supererogatory acts mend deficiencies in the regular performance of incumbent acts. Muḥāsibī reminds the reader of a prophetic Hadith narrated by Abū Hurayra: ‘If a man does not have any voluntary acts (*al-taṭawwuʿ*), let him be taken by the hands and the feet and thrown into the fire.’⁴⁷ In *al-Riʿāya* Muḥāsibī uses this principle to dissuade renunciants from the exaggerated practice of seclusion (*al-khalwa*). Muḥāsibī criticises that by cutting off their contact with the public, these renunciants presume that their acts of incumbent worship are without defect. ‘If each of these would reflect on this, he would realise that he has not performed every single act that God has made incumbent upon him through his life.’⁴⁸ He suggests it foolish to live in a condition where voluntary good deeds toward the public are impossible—surely everyone needs the expiation of sins and deficiencies.⁴⁹

Supererogatory acts grant wisdom and can effect change in the heart. They aid one in continual reflection upon God. And these acts set one apart like ‘twinkling stars’.⁵⁰ This assembly of the pious is envied by the prophets and the martyrs. Implicitly connected to their supererogatory acts, these pious practitioners are radiant on the day of judgement. While others fear and mourn, they do not. They are brought near to God. Thus, in the opening of *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd* the interlocutor is asking Muḥāsibī if disapprobation of the world could belong to this category—that it would have the power to cover sins, change the heart, and set one apart from ordinary people that are satisfied with duty.

His answer is not an unqualified ‘yes’. He first clarifies that one is commanded to desire what God wants him to desire; and to hate what God would have him to hate. So one cannot regard anything God has made incumbent with disapprobation. As Muḥāsibī explains in *al-Makāsib*, God has created man’s nature to desire

47. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd*, 122.

48. *Al-Riʿāya*, 376 = ed. Smith, 299.

49. This example suggests that Muḥāsibī questioned the status of seclusion as a supererogatory act in *al-Riʿāya*. Perhaps there he is promoting the limitation of even supererogatory acts to canonically defined limits.

50. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd*, 125.

the provision he grants them in this life.⁵¹ This means that there should be no direct disapprobation of God's provision in this world. At least in terms of provisions God has given, disapprobation of the world does not mean rejection of the world. Rather, one disapproves holding on to those possessions. One whose station of disapprobation is mature will accumulate only what he needs for his sustenance for the sake of more noble causes. Even in this, Muḥāsibī exempts the accumulation of possessions to provide for Muslims in case of unforeseen calamities—as long as he does this without desiring them. He may also need to hold on to possessions so that he can fulfil his family obligations. If he has not deceived himself into miserliness, such a person becomes a treasurer of God's wealth. Conversely, if a person spends accumulated wealth frivolously or acquires with it what God has forbidden, he is a covetous person (*rāghib*), even if he has few possessions.⁵²

This affirmation of possession means that Muḥāsibī can hardly condone self-imposed poverty or hunger. To that end he recollects the examples of the prophets and of the first generation of Muslims who could hold great possessions without condemnation. They only went hungry when God was testing them.⁵³ One might consider the benefits of supererogatory acts that Muḥāsibī enumerates and conclude that these justify self-imposed poverty and hunger, but Muḥāsibī aligns himself against groups that do these things, and expresses doubt that self-imposed hunger could play a significant role in purifying the heart.⁵⁴

With such a description, one can wonder whether Muḥāsibī's renunciant 'treasurer' need restrict himself from anything. In fact, he must.

Though easily overlooked, there can be no doubt for Muḥāsibī that the believer must regard anything God has forbidden with disapprobation and renounce it. Such disapprobation is closely connected with one of Muḥāsibī's key virtues, pious caution (*al-wara'*). This is his definition: 'Averting what God hates in terms of

51. *Al-Makāsib*, 181.

52. *Al-Muḥāsibī*, *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 43–44. One who is covetous (*rāghib*) is the opposite of a renunciant (*zāhid*).

53. *Al-Makāsib*, 196–197.

54. *Al-Ri'āya*, 372–373 = ed. Smith, 296–7; *al-Makāsib*, 227; *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 45.

one's words and actions, whether internal or external. [This includes being cautious] about anything that might thwart what God has made incumbent upon the heart or the body.⁵⁵ Muḥāsibī elaborates on this definition to include caution about acts whose legal status is unclear, and about acts that might lead to something forbidden.

As an example consider Muḥāsibī's attitude toward food. His standards for licit food and drink are strictly in keeping with prescriptions from the Quran and Sunna. He engages with ongoing legal debates about issues such as how thoroughly one should inquire about offered food while traveling. In all such examples, he interacts with various positions in terms of the Hadith that support that position.⁵⁶ When substantiated variation is present within the Hadith tradition, he refrains from making a binding conclusion about what is permitted or forbidden.⁵⁷ But even in situations of uncertainty, Muḥāsibī inclines toward caution. In day to day life, one's fear of experiencing divine displeasure on the day of judgement compels a person to extreme care in how he handles the world's fare. Even in cases of extreme hardship and starvation, a true servant eats only enough 'suspect' food to get him through the next hour, and never enough to get him to the next day.⁵⁸

This zeal for guarding God's commands will sometimes require refraining from what is permitted. Muḥāsibī affirms this with prophetic tradition: 'A servant isn't truly God fearing (*min al-muttaqīn*) until he leaves aside what is permitted out of caution for what is forbidden.'⁵⁹ He gives examples of refraining from speech out of fear of lying or slander, or eschewing some forms of occupation that would threaten one's well-being.

Because the focus of disapprobation is upon what is legally forbidden, and guarding this requires pious caution, there is a conceptual link between *zuhd* and *wara'* in Muḥāsibī's writings. He can dispute the urgency of a disapprobation of

55. *Al-Makāsib*, 200.

56. *Al-Makāsib*, 229–234.

57. *Al-Ri'āya*, 366 = ed. Smith, 293.

58. *Al-Makāsib*, 199.

59. *Al-Makāsib*, 201.

the world that logically necessitates practices of self-inflicted hunger and poverty without diminishing his fervency in *wara'* against the (sinful) enticements of the world. Thus his unwillingness to condone these ascetic practices as an acceptable consequence of *zuhd* should not be equated with laxity in regard to the world's pleasures. In fact, the believer should also exercise pious caution in his acts of piety to ensure that they do not impede the performance of required religious duties.

The enemy beckons him to innovate in his *zuhd* and in his contentment and abandonment [upon God]. Thus [his *zuhd*] differs from the *zuhd* of the earlier [faith] communities and their abandonment (*tawakkul*) [upon God]... and they think that this is Sunna. ... Every group that we have mentioned needs the [prophetic] traditions, and the Book, and analogical [legal] reasoning (*al-maqāyīs*).⁶⁰

Incidentally, this quotation indicates that Muḥāsibī differentiated his understanding of *zuhd* from the understanding of those who practised non-canonical acts of piety, a common characteristic of those dedicated to the renunciant path.

Key works of Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya*, *al-Makāsib*, and *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, suggest that *zuhd* is the cultivated disapproval of what God has forbidden. That disapprobation might naturally be extended to cases when the licitness of an action is in doubt. In cases outside these parameters, Muḥāsibī clarifies that it is commendable to disapprove of storing up possessions. Even then, as long as one has no desire (*raghba*) for what he stores up, and is firmly resolved to expend them in charity, he can have disapprobation of the world and keep his riches. When it comes to ascetic practices like hunger or voluntary poverty, Muḥāsibī is unable to affirm their connection to disapprobation of the world.

5.2.1 Disapprobation as a 'Heart Action'

The focal point of Muḥāsibī's understanding of *zuhd* is the disavowal of what God has prohibited. As such, *zuhd* is incumbent. It follows that supererogatory disapprobation of the world should not lead to renunciant acts that go beyond the recom-

60. *Al-Ri'āya*, 87–88 = ed. Smith, 47. This is one of the few references to *zuhd* in *al-Ri'āya*.

mendations of Sunna, and must never take precedence over mankind's primary responsibility to God's revealed commands. It is from this clearly defined centre that Muḥāsibī discusses the inner dimensions of *zuhd*.

Within *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd* Muḥāsibī affirms that disapprobation is one action of the heart among many: 'One must affirm *zuhd* [with his heart] and reject desire (*raghba*).'⁶¹ But even in this list of 'heart actions' (*a'māl al-qulūb*) Muḥāsibī carefully establishes the primacy of correct doctrine and adherence to Sunna:

God has made some duties within their heart incumbent upon his servants, besides external actions. These can be summarised in three categories. The first of these is to affirm [correct] doctrine (*īmān*) and distance oneself from unbelief (*kufr*). The second of these is to affirm the Sunna and to distance oneself from innovation (*bida'*).⁶² The third of these is to affirm obedience and to flee away from anything that God hates. Now these three categories branch out into specific acts of the heart that are innumerable and the concerns (*humūm*) of the heart [branch into] external actions.⁶³

In the first section of *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd* Muḥāsibī's interlocutor poses the question, 'What induces disapprobation of the world?' The question itself reiterates Muḥāsibī's complex understanding of human thoughts, attitudes and virtues. As an action of the heart, disapprobation seems associated with another virtue: 'disapprobation is induced when one cuts short his expectations [of the future] and exerts himself to do good deeds'.⁶⁴ Muḥāsibī means by this that one expects death at any moment and so devotes himself to good deeds in anticipation of the Hereafter, rather than in labour that only improves his state in this life.⁶⁵ This idea of 'cutting short one's hopes or expectations' is a common virtue within the Islamic tradition.⁶⁶ For example, Kharrāz repeats this association of *zuhd* with shortened expectation and adds a list of scholars who affirmed and taught it: Sufyān al-Thawrī

61. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 128.

62. In this context Muḥāsibī probably means belief or practice that cannot be derived from Sunna.

63. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 128.

64. Ibid., 45.

65. *Al-Ri'āya*, 114 = ed. Smith, 73.

66. For an overview, Gramlich, *Weltverzicht : Grundlagen und Weisen islamischer Askese*, 145–9.

(161/777–78), Wakī‘ ibn al-Jarrāḥ and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal.⁶⁷ Muḥāsibī’s connection of these two virtues does not result in ascetic practices, as with Shaqīq, but in obedience.

Muḥāsibī’s treatment of the categories rich and poor indicates how he links the attitude of shortened expectation to canonical acts of obedience. In stark contrast to the ascetic tendencies of renunciants he censures, Muḥāsibī does not encourage poverty or hunger as the ideal demonstration of true *zuhd*. Extreme poverty should not be chosen, and is only commendable when it is unavoidable. In an interesting passage Muḥāsibī redefines poverty not as an ideal, but as a state of moral laxity. Though perhaps the vices of the ‘poor’ man are no different from vices equally deprecated by his censured renunciants, his redefinition of these categories challenges their idealisation of poverty.

I asked: What is poverty? He (Muḥāsibī) answered: It is intense appetite and the abundance of your thoughts upon what you have lost, along with disgusting worry. Whoever finds himself in this condition is situated in great loss and sadness, since his heart is bound up with the loss of what he had attained.⁶⁸

Here Muḥāsibī has moved beyond the common statement that even a mendicant can begrudge what others have.⁶⁹ Unlike ascetic traditions that admire the pious man whose neglect of the world leads him into poverty, Muḥāsibī only commends the poor man who remains devoted to God within the trial of poverty that he didn’t choose. Moreover, ‘the one who is in need of him (*iftaqara ilay-hi*) becomes rich in his poverty’⁷⁰—and thus Muḥāsibī rejects poverty as an ideal.

Even if the renunciant path of early Islam might agree with Muḥāsibī that the physically poor may nevertheless be spiritually poor, it is slower to acknowledge that the physically rich may also be spiritually rich. For example, Shaqīq al-Balkhī was asked, ‘How does a poor man know that God has granted him the protection

67. *Al-Ṣidq*, 41.

68. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā’il fī al-zuhd*, 53.

69. *Ibid.*, 45.

70. *Ibid.*, 53.

(*ḥifẓ*) of poverty?’ His reply: ‘when he fears riches and avails himself of poverty’.⁷¹ Muḥāsibī is confident that the rich man may possess wealth without being distracted by it. As long as the rich man is piously cautious of worldly goods, and doesn’t attach more importance to them than to God, he may freely store up his wealth or spend from it. It is not reproachable to save money as long as one is saving for lawful causes. As stated earlier, a rich man may be the treasurer of God’s riches.⁷²

Muḥāsibī doesn’t take for granted that a man who intends to covet nothing will retain his disapprobation of the world when he acquires possessions. In *al-Ri‘āya* he describes how a man’s soul convinces him of his piety but then betrays him in the day of testing.

Disapprobation (*zuhd*) is given to you as long as you have no possessions, so that you are convinced that you are one of the renunciants (*zāhidūn*)—at least until you come into worldly possession or lose [the little] you have. [When that happens], a desire springs up from those possessions so that your seat of desire (*nafs*) pleads and struggles in its desire for what is contrary to its [former] disapprobation (*zuhd*).⁷³

This suggests practical uncertainty about whether one truly could be certain of his disapprobation of the world unless he has experienced poverty. Muḥāsibī’s interlocutor doesn’t neglect this concern: ‘What brings about the disapprobation of the things that God encourages one to disapprove?’⁷⁴ Muḥāsibī compares possessions to the provisions that a man packs when he goes on a journey. He knows that what he takes with him will be used upon the journey and he doesn’t hoard these provisions lest they encumber him. With this attitude he can be released from concern and worry about possessions.

Practically, this disapprobation is tested by one’s preparedness for losing those provisions. In this we see the connection back to ‘shortened expectations’. For Muḥāsibī this is part of his programme of reflection and introspection—continually

71. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīya*, 57.

72. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā’il fī al-zuhd*, 51–2.

73. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 260 = ed. Smith, 203.

74. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā’il fī al-zuhd*, 46.

reminding oneself of the shortness of life and searching out whether one's attitudes toward the world reflect that. Whether rich or poor, one's thoughts and concerns should be centred in the Hereafter and not in this present world, even if one has possessions.

Muḥāsibī contributes a significant indicator of disapprobation that I have not found in the writings of Shaqīq al-Balkhī or Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz. As a supererogatory act, thankfulness (*shukr*) demonstrates that a believer has shifted his focus from possessions to the provider of possessions, regardless of whether one is rich or poor. Muḥāsibī's unexpected synthesis of disapprobation with thankfulness not only challenges the renunciant path's stark rejection of the world, but also suggests an awareness and interaction with God that has mystical overtones. The thankful renunciant knows that whatever he has or has lost reflects God's loyalty to him. He can appreciate the provider without depreciating the provision—an attitude hardly compatible with the ascetic censure of riches. Such a person has found true riches: 'In his heart he journeys away from [base] appetites and orients himself toward the one who never disappoints the supplicant [who comes] before him.'⁷⁵

5.2.2 Disapprobation and the World

If a rich man may pursue disapprobation of the world through cultivated thankfulness, then the world's (lawful) provisions cannot be censured. This puts Muḥāsibī in an awkward position against the idea that disapprobation leads to a complete rejection of the world and its pleasures. The Quran itself consistently warns the believer that the pleasures of this world are worthless and dangerous.

Know that the life of this world is only play and idleness and ornament and mutual boasting among you and rivalry in wealth and children. [It is] like rain, the vegetation produced by which pleases the unbelievers; then it withers, and you see it turning yellow, and then it becomes chaff. In the world to come there is severe torment but also forgiveness and satisfaction from God, whilst the life of this world is only the enjoyment of delusion.⁷⁶

75. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 53.

76. *Al-Ḥadīd* 57:20, Jones trans.

Rather than interpreting this to mean that the world must be completely rejected,⁷⁷ Muḥāsibī correlates this to God’s purpose in placing mankind within the life of this world. In *Ādāb al-nufūs* he cites three verses from the Quran to prove that everything in the world is put there by God as a test for mankind.⁷⁸ For example: ‘We have made all that is on the earth an ornament for it, to test which of them is best in deed’ (*Al-Kahf* 18:7).⁷⁹ In this sense, this present life is the ‘realm of salvation’, where good deeds within it accrue toward eternal bliss.⁸⁰

Muḥāsibī pushes this idea even further in *al-Ri‘āya* to suggest that this present life is the necessary backdrop for good works. He comments on *Al-Kahf* 18:7 in *al-Ri‘āya*: ‘This verse tells you that He wants good works in this present life (*al-dunyā*)’.⁸¹ The best of those good works is disapprobation of the world, says Muḥāsibī, but this does not mean that one should suppress his attraction toward it: ‘So if it [the test of this world] were to vanish before you and its every pleasure became tepid to you, then it would necessitate the Lord’s wrath.’⁸²

This strong statement suggests that Muḥāsibī’s approach to life in this world is not built on the diametrical opposition of this world and the world to come. Rather, this present world presents mankind the opportunity to obey God in the midst of its pleasures. Supererogatory disapprobation does not necessitate abandoning the world, as the renunciant path promotes. Instead, disapproval of God’s approved provisions requires that one avoid being captivated by them—though the *nafs* seeks just that. Disapprobation is not to love God *instead* of the world, but to love God *despite* the world. As early chapters demonstrated, this cannot happen without a systematic review of one’s thoughts and actions, above all in the practice of pious caution (*waraʿ*). If one’s soul is unresponsive to pleasures in the life of this world,

77. I have refrained from adding here, ‘...rejected as evil’. I will later show that Kharrāz believes God hates the world, but have not yet seen explicit indication that the world ‘is evil’.

78. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-nufūs*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1987), 70.

79. Jones trans. Also *Muḥammad* 47:4 and *Al-An‘ām* 6:165.

80. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu‘ātabat al-nafs*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Cairo: Dār al-I‘tiṣām, 1986), 56.

81. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 257 = ed. Smith, 200.

82. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 257 = ed. Smith, 200–1.

how can one pursue *wara'*, which Muḥāsibī considers incumbent?

So disapprobation of what is licit in the world need not require repugnance toward it. Thankfulness to God for His provision in it is reasonable. 'He considers that if the world approaches⁸³ him, he will be patient with it. If he looks into its consequences he finds goodness and grace (*khayra wa-ni'ma*). Thankfulness occurs within him for it.'⁸⁴ I will demonstrate below that this runs counter to underlying assumptions in the writings of Shaqīq al-Balkhī and Kharrāz, and even in one work attributed to Muḥāsibī.

One important application of this approach is Muḥāsibī's attitude toward livelihood in this world. I have addressed Muḥāsibī's censure of Shaqīq's (reported) position on this in an earlier chapter, but want here to illustrate how Muḥāsibī's position relates to his overall view of disapprobation.

If mankind finds God's goodness and grace within the world through the test of his obedience in it, then surely one's livelihood is part of that. Muḥāsibī considers the impulse within common believers to participate in the life of this world as part of their basic nature.⁸⁵ This stimulation toward the world (*al-ʿājila*), as part of human nature,⁸⁶ does not prevent the believer from trusting (*tawakkul*) in God. In fact, without this impulse toward the world, Muḥāsibī is not sure that a person is able to practise genuine trust in God.

Whatever is in their nature in terms of impulses does not exempt them from the beliefs that God has made incumbent on them. This is because God has not ordered them (*lam yastaʿbid-hum*) to remove it [this impulse toward the world]. Rather he has ordered them to the performance of obedience and to take things [from it] inasmuch as he has permitted.⁸⁷

As long as they obey God and don't cross any of His boundaries, there is nothing within their human nature that can harm them.⁸⁸ He continues this argument

83. Alt., 'takes an interest in him', '*aqbalat ʿalay-hi*'.

84. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd*, 44.

85. '*Wa-innamā kānat hādhihi al-ḥarakāt al-mawjūda min-hum bi-ḥarakāt al-ṭabʿ alladhī ʿalay-hi al-bunya*.' Al-Makāsib, 181.

86. '*Hādhihi al-ṣifāt qāʾima fī al-bashariya*', Al-Makāsib, 182.

87. Al-Makāsib, 182.

88. Al-Makāsib, 183.

further to refute renunciants like Shaqīq who claimed that those who truly trust God would forgo any livelihood. Since God has allotted their sustenance regardless of whether they work or not, working shows a basic lack of trust in God, claimed Shaqīq.

What is important here is Muḥāsibī's belief that the world is not diametrically opposed to God's purposes. Mankind's attraction to it in his appetites and desires is crucial for him to live in obedience and receive his eternal reward. Though of course man must hate what God finds hateful within the world, supererogatory disapprobation that leads to the avoidance of otherwise permissible things is not motivated by detestation for those things, but by the pursuit of some good. And such restraint must never impede a believer's performance of God's commands.

5.2.3 Disapprobation and the Impulse of Desire

Muḥāsibī's concept of *zuhd fī al-dunyā* indicates a particular nuance of the concept *al-nafs*.⁸⁹

Within contexts of Islamic piety, the term *al-nafs* indicates the source of an individual's desires for felicity in this world, usually corrupt.⁹⁰ Though used extensively within these contexts, especially by renunciants, it is unclear at what point this concept of *al-nafs* became associated with three references in the Quran: *Yūsuf* 12:53, *Al-Qiyāma* 75:2 and *Al-Fajr* 89:27. It is also unclear when Muslim scholars began to apply a hermeneutic of progressive moral transformation upon the collocation of these verses.⁹¹ Without additional evidence of this collocation from

89. Translating the term *al-nafs* is one of the more troubling challenges for scholars of Islamic renunciant traditions. Outside Islamic literature of piety, the term is almost always translated as 'the soul' and carries with it the complex philosophical discussions surrounding an immaterial dimension of mankind's existence in this world. For a brief discussion, see Svirī, 'The Self and Its Transformation in Šūfism', 195–6. Also, van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī*, 30.

90. I will translate *al-nafs* variously as 'the seat of desire', 'the locus of desire', 'the source of desire', or 'the organ of desire'. At times I will use the term without translation. My aim is to develop an accurate presentation of the renunciant concept of *al-nafs*, without being limited by an oversimplified gloss.

91. Svirī, 'The Self and Its Transformation in Šūfism', 197. Her article suggests this interpretive grid was acknowledged and taught by the time of al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī.

the eighth and ninth centuries, scholars should remain cautious about projecting this understanding into the writings of this period.

With this provision, the common understanding of the Quranic origins of this progressive moral transformation of man's seat of desire is as follows: *Yūsuf* 12:53 substantiates the idea that a person's *nafs* will incite him to evil actions in its ordinary state—it 'always enjoins wrongdoing, except so far as my Lord has mercy'.⁹² The Quran uses the term *hawá* for these desires, which are considered evil.⁹³ Traditional understanding suggests that this source of desire must be blamed or censured (*lawwāma*).⁹⁴ Finally, the *nafs* may be addressed in a state of peace, '*yā ayyatuhā al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*'.⁹⁵

As concepts, each of these is present within the writings of Muḥāsibī. He extensively warns believers to be cautious of the desires that arise from man's locus of desire. Muḥāsibī has an entire treatise devoted to censuring the *nafs*, *Mu'ātabat al-nafs*.⁹⁶ And he envisions a state where a person's intellect subdues the ever present impulse of the *nafs* towards gratification. The traditional idea of subduing mankind's seat of desire is present within Muḥāsibī's writings, even if he does not substantiate this with the traditional collocation of these verses from the Quran.

Muḥāsibī recognises the importance of understanding this organ of desire within his own programme of moral transformation. In earlier chapters I examined the process that Muḥāsibī recommends for the purification of the heart toward the ideal of perfected obedience. Because God has created the world as an effective stimulant for man's organ of desire, this process must prepare the heart to turn away from any unlawful desires that originate in the *nafs*.

With regard to disapprobation of the world, the role of this source of desire is particularly complex. One easily overlooks the distinction between incumbent disapprobation of whatever God forbids and commendable disapprobation of God's

92. Jones trans. Thus a common German translation of *al-nafs* in this sense as *Triebseele*. Van Ess employs 'Ich' with qualifications. van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī*, 31n.

93. *Al-Nāzi'āt* 79:40.

94. *Al-Qiyāma* 75:2.

95. *Al-Fajr* 89:27.

96. *Al-Muḥāsibī*, *Mu'ātabat al-nafs*.

licit provisions. Muḥāsibī blames the *nafs* for desiring what God has forbidden in the world. He warns his disciples that the primary motivation of this centre of desire is to maintain a state of satisfaction (*riḍā*): ‘Don’t you see its resolve to maintain a state of satisfaction that is prepared to lavishly sacrifice discernment, with no restraint?’⁹⁷ On the other hand, Muḥāsibī seems to acknowledge that lawful desires—which must certainly have their origin in the *nafs* as well—can be pursued as long as one is thankful for what God provides and does not slip into selfish excess. This is one reason *waraʿ* is important—to be on guard against allowing lawful participation in the world to distract one from obeying God’s commands.

Earlier chapters in this thesis explained Muḥāsibī’s dynamic of struggle against the *nafs*. Initially, this struggle is to carry through with a resolve to repent of past wrongdoing and to avoid future transgressions. Continued effort toward this eventually convinces the *nafs* that it can no longer find the ‘satisfaction’ it seeks through external pleasure. So it changes its strategy to find satisfaction in internal sins, like hypocrisy or arrogance. Through carefully defined stages of self-reflection, God’s servant can build his resolve to avoid these as well. The passage in discussion comes at this point, when the *nafs* is prepared to voice its assent to abandoning these diseases of the heart. By this voice of assent, it hopes secretly to lead God’s servant into a neglectful state of mind that will allow it to regress to those internal vices in the moment of action. For example, it convinces a person of his contentment with God’s provision (*al-riḍā*) in the day of plenty, but when hardship comes, that contentment is quickly abandoned. Earlier I mentioned Muḥāsibī’s description of disapprobation as another such example.

There are two important observations here. First, these discussions are focused on man’s organ of desire in terms of what has been forbidden. Without realising that disapprobation has two aspects, one easily censures this organ of desire in absolute terms when Muḥāsibī only rebuffs the *nafs* for its impulses to forbidden things. In fact, in Muḥāsibī’s discussions on *al-nafs*, the attention is almost always on impulses toward what is evil (that is, forbidden).

97. *Al-Riʿāya*, 257 = ed. Smith, 201.

Secondly, the remedy for the misguided impulses of man's desire is not to destroy that centre of desire.⁹⁸ 'It isn't proper for you to kill it [the *nafs*] and you aren't able to say goodbye to it.'⁹⁹ Insofar as the *nafs* originates desire in its connectedness to this present life, its basic nature is incorrigible.

He should know that God has trials [in store] that a person will encounter in his life; that his enemy will not perish; that his basic nature (*ṭabʿ*) is established and will not be altered; and that the world, with its pleasantries and loathsome things, will not pass away.¹⁰⁰

5.2.4 Summary of Disapprobation in Muḥāsibī's writings

Muḥāsibī's wider approach is to attain salvation by renouncing actions God has forbidden and refraining from attitudes He has prohibited. Disapprobation of the world is the accompanying attitude of disapproving what God requires one to abandon. Optional disapprobation of licit possessions in the world is not wholly embraced by Muḥāsibī. Rather one disapproves of excess possessions, especially when there is no intent to spend them for God's purposes. Disapprobation of them, much less their abandonment, misconstrues mankind's relationship to the world and may interfere with the performance of what He requires. God has created the world as a place to test whether or not mankind will obey His revealed commands. He also created within mankind a locus of desire that requires the cultivation of self-awareness and reflection to thwart otherwise unruly appetites. Disapprobation of the world that lies outside God's commands, especially when it leads to renunciatory practices designed to deaden the attractiveness of the world, interferes with obedience to God's commands and diminishes the proper role of self-reflection. In that self-reflection one purposes priority to God's commands so that disapprobation of the world's unlawful pleasures and their abandonment becomes routine. Mankind's salvation is in this obedience, and not in cultivated disengagement from the world.

98. I suggest that Muḥāsibī was also suspicious of the ascetic practice of 'disciplining' the *nafs*.

99. *Al-Ri'āya*, 262 = ed. Smith, 205.

100. *Al-Ri'āya*, 75 = ed. Smith, 36.

5.3 The Renunciant Path in the Writings of Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz

Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz¹⁰¹ (d. 277/890–91?) is the latest scholar under consideration in this thesis. If Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd is considered the central figure of the Baghdad Sufi network,¹⁰² then Kharrāz would be one of the older renunciants identified with it. His ascetic manual *Kitāb al-ṣidq* may have played an important role in the formation of the Sufi identity and in providing a curriculum of practical knowledge for those interested in joining the renunciant path. The latter section of this work along with other shorter treatises demonstrates that the renunciant path of these networks had begun to amalgamate a mystical dimension to their practice. In this section I will discuss the term *zuhd* (disapprobation) within the writings of Kharrāz as an indication of this renunciant path. I will then compare this with findings from the writings of Shaqīq and Muḥāsibī.

Significant to this discussion is the differentiation of disapprobation as a concept from the renunciant path as an ascetic approach to piety. Shaqīq, Muḥāsibī, and Kharrāz are cautious about ‘the world’ and committed to forgo whatever displeases God in it. Each of them relates this basic commitment to their own understanding of disapprobation (*zuhd*) as a virtue,¹⁰³ despite their differences. Yet Shaqīq and Kharrāz contribute to an ascetic approach to piety, what I am labelling the ‘renunciant path’. It is important to point out that this ideal is not limited to their concept of disapprobation. Thus, as I discuss the concept of disapprobation within the writings of Kharrāz, I will also relate how that concept relates to other ascetic virtues and practices within the renunciant path.

The best source of information about the renunciant path of Kharrāz comes from *Kitāb al-ṣidq*. In this manual he devotes one section to disapprobation

101. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 223–238. The death date of (286/899) is also recorded, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād aw Madīnat al-salām*, ed. Aḥmad Ibn al-Ṣiddīq, vol. 4 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1931), vol. 4, pp. 276–8.

102. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 141–2. Al-Sulamī places him at the beginning of the second generation (*tabaqa*) of Sufi figures.

103. One indication that each considers this a virtue is their description of it as a trait that can be improved.

(*zuhd*).¹⁰⁴ He begins this discussion by describing God's attitude toward the world.¹⁰⁵ Since the Quran states, 'Know that the life of this world is only play and idleness and ornament and mutual boasting among you and rivalry in wealth and children',¹⁰⁶ how can God possibly remain tranquil about a place of such frivolity? God does not value it and he is not pleased that his friends must live in it.¹⁰⁷ Kharrāz does not tie this condemnation to any evil essence of corporeality, but to the desires that the world incites within a man's soul. Because the source of these desires is the world, they are corrupt, regardless of whether they are for something permitted. Any desire the world stirs up within man's *nafs* will distract a person from closeness to God and his reflection on Him. Even poor people who desire possessions outside their reach will face God's judgement for the desires that the world stirred up within their organ of desire (*nafs*).¹⁰⁸

For Kharrāz this dire circumstance dictates that one strive to limit participation in the world. In the first place he must realise that he cannot conform to God's love (*wāfaqa maḥabbat Allāh*) without disapprobation of anything desired in the world. Thus 'he takes just what he needs: of food, drink, clothing, shelter, sleep, speech, talking, listening. He abandons any longing for things of this world, and and is cautious when he finds it agreeable.'¹⁰⁹ The one who is faithful in his disapprobation of the world must then progress further and shorten his expectations of it. He will think only of the Hereafter and become completely indifferent to the world, neither grieving its loss nor rejoicing in its gain.¹¹⁰ Such renunciants fear accumulating any possessions lest their weight impede them as they cross over the narrow bridge into Paradise.¹¹¹ The highest stage of disapprobation is for those who abandon the world with no regard for any reward they might receive from

104. *Al-Ṣidq*, 40–48.

105. Note here the connection between one's concept of renunciation and the exact nature of the object of that renunciation. See above, p. 2.

106. *Al-Ḥadīd* 57:20, Jones trans.

107. *Al-Ṣidq*, 40.

108. *Al-Ṣidq*, 40.

109. *Al-Ṣidq*, 41.

110. *Al-Ṣidq*, 42–43.

111. *Al-Ṣidq*, 44. This suggests the same connection between renunciation and fear that Shaqīq taught.

God. They take his condemnation of the world seriously and know that he hates it, even if he permits his servants to take from it.

They would be ashamed before God were he to observe them inclining toward anything that he had reproached or that did not please him. And so they make that (its disapprobation) incumbent (*farḍ*) upon themselves without seeking any reward. Out of noble-mindedness they conform to God in their love for Him. And thus God does not thwart the reward of those most noble in works.¹¹²

With this last phrase Kharrāz connects this highest level of renunciation with the status of God's friends (*awliyā'*) through an allusion to *Al-Bayyina* 98:7–8:

Those who believe and do righteous deeds—those are the best of creation. Their recompense is with their Lord: gardens of Eden through which rivers flow, in which they will stay for ever. God is pleased with them, and they with Him. That is for those who fear their Lord.¹¹³

Kharrāz shares with Shaqīq an absolute distrust of any enjoyment of the world. He may even exceed Shaqīq in his longing to withdraw from the company of men in order to experience solitude with God. 'The one who longs for God (*al-mushtāq*) is dissatisfied with the world and remaining in it. His characteristics include alienation from other people, the need for seclusion, and isolation.¹¹⁴ Both share the awareness that this progression toward a state of utter discontent with the world is reserved for God's friends. Neither seems obsessed with avoiding the evil that is in the world, but with becoming so consumed with God's love that there is no affection remaining for the world or its people. Earlier chapters demonstrate that Kharrāz connects this consuming love of God with a primordial experience of proximity to God. God's friends can experience a state of detachment from this world so that they temporarily experience a connection to the primordial origin of their absolute love for God. In those moments their life of worldly detachment constricts their interaction with the external world.¹¹⁵

112. *Al-Ṣidq*, 45.

113. Jones trans., cf. *Al-Ma'ida* 5:54.

114. *Al-Ṣidq*, 68.

115. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 24–6. I discuss this more fully in a previous chapter.

This primordial suspicion of the world is also evident in Kharrāz' view of man's seat of desire, the *nafs*. His discussion begins by quoting *Yūsuf* 12:53, mentioned above. The *nafs* urges a man to evil and so its passions (*hawā*) must be denied.¹¹⁶ It is a man's greatest enemy, according to a non-canonical Hadith. The faithful person must struggle against it by withholding from it anything it desires. And anything it desires strongly must be questioned, even if licit.

And if your *nafs* urges you toward any passion or occupies your heart [with thoughts] of acquiring anything that has been forbidden you or that has been made licit for you, then become suspicious of it with the suspicion of one who wants its salvation (*ṣalāh*); and deprive it of [what it wants] like one who wants to subdue it; and induce it to join those who have preceded it by depriving it of any comfort.¹¹⁷

Both in his approach to the world and in his approach to man's seat of desire, Kharrāz differs fundamentally from Muḥāsibī. These differences create a higher standard for the renunciant who strives toward God. Muḥāsibī never disassociates his discussions of disapprobation from the primary duty of all believers to obey God's revealed commands. Those brought near to God are those who obey the standard he requires in the Book and in the Sunna, and not those who busy themselves with practices whose supererogatory status is not clearly established. In *Kitāb al-ṣidq* Kharrāz beckons the renunciant time and again to strive beyond what God has required in order to have a unique relationship of closeness with him.

Despite these fundamental differences, *Kitāb al-ṣidq* provides evidence of Muḥāsibī's influence upon Kharrāz. For example, he allows that a person may be the 'treasurer of God' if he stores up provisions for his family or for the needs of Muslims in dire circumstances.¹¹⁸ Yet this concession seems not to change the basic profile of a master renunciant—he will have nothing.¹¹⁹

116. *Al-Nāzi'āt* 79:40–41.

117. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 26.

118. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 49.

119. Kharrāz quotes a tradition at the end of this section, 'I am never more confident in God than when my servant-girl says that we have nothing in the house', *al-Ṣidq*, 50.

Perhaps Muḥāsibī's censure of Shaqīq's abandonment of financial occupation also influenced Kharrāz. Suggestive of Muḥāsibī's careful description of inner states, Kharrāz describes abandonment (*tawakkul*) as an attitude of absolute surrender to the unfolding of God's decree. And this must include general indifference to one's condition in the world. For Shaqīq the sincerity of this required abandoning any 'intermediate' sources of provision, meaning that one did not trust his own financial dealings to provide life's necessities, but God directly. In the course of his exposition of abandonment, Kharrāz in the end mitigates Shaqīq's position only slightly. When asked whether a person can rely on 'secondary causes' for provision, he responds: '[One abandons himself to God] by severing the greater part of secondary causes: for then one passes direct to the Causer, and rests in Him.'¹²⁰ Kharrāz goes on to clarify that there are 70,000 men who are exempt from God's final judgement because they abandoned themselves in trust upon God and forsook any intermediate sources of provision.

Those whom God had chosen to experience primordial proximity to Himself are simply in a different category from ordinary believers. Certainly they too must heed Muḥāsibī's warnings against neglecting God's explicit commands. But this obedience is straightforward because their primordial proximity to God enables their comprehensive disapprobation and even abandonment of the world.

...just as they experienced no heaviness or labour in the performance of what [God] requires. This is because their hearts were overwhelmed by their preference of God and their nearness to Him. So they did these works without trouble and without occupying themselves with outward acts because service and outward acts only affect the physical body. Understand this point: their hearts became indifferent—rather they were completely occupied with God, who had befriended them, and His nearness, and His love, and in yearning after Him.¹²¹

Kharrāz' renunciant path is clearly distinct from what Muḥāsibī taught. Kharrāz renounces even licit involvement in the world, and focuses on supererogatory

120. Al-Kharrāz, *The Book of Truthfulness (Kitāb al-ṣidq)*, 30 = ed. Maḥmūd, 50. Translation by Arberry.

121. *Al-Ṣidq*, 88.

practices of renunciation. He prefers absolute abandonment to God for daily provision and mistrusts financial remuneration. He finds no good in the world, and recommends a programme that will quarantine his organ of desire (*nafs*) from it.

Perhaps Muḥāsibī would have been pleased that Kharrāz clarified the religious obligation of supporting one's family and did not forbid savings outright. And Kharrāz does enunciate that the renunciant path he follows requires obedience to God's revealed commands. Perhaps this demonstrates the corrective that Muḥāsibī sought in his censure of promoting the ascetic orientation of the renunciant path. Yet in this reformulation of the renunciant path that had been expressed earlier in Shaqīq, Kharrāz sidesteps Muḥāsibī's censure by conceding that the ascetic virtues and practices he promotes, including *zuhd*, are beyond God's legal requirements, and thus only applicable to select paragons of Islamic devotion. Thus Kharrāz can continue with the basic ascetic programme that Shaqīq and others like him had been promoting and avoid Muḥāsibī's chief complaint that their supererogatory devotion interfered with obedience to God's revealed commands.

5.4 *Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujūʿ ilā Allāh*

Forerunners of the Baghdad Sufi movement contributed to an ongoing discussion about disapprobation and its place within religious devotion. For Muḥāsibī, disapprobation of the world supported his commitment to follow a path of obedience carefully demarcated by the Quran and the Sunna. Shaqīq and Kharrāz contributed to a renunciant path that valued supererogatory disapprobation as a path to purification from the world and fellowship with God. Clarification of these approaches suggests that the treatise *al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujūʿ ilā Allāh*, generally attributed to Muḥāsibī, in fact favours the renunciant path of Shaqīq and Kharrāz.

Establishing the text of *al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujūʿ ilā Allāh* is not without confusion. There are two printed editions: one edited by ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā;¹²² and the other by

122. Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujūʿ ilā Allāh*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiya, 1986), 217–328 (hereafter cited as *al-Qaṣd*). Because of the difficulty in obtaining the Qūwatli edition, all citations will reference only the ʿAṭā edition, except when found only in the

Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī and published in a series of journal articles in *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*.¹²³ ‘Aṭā’s edition is based on an unidentified manuscript in Turkey. The Qūwatlī edition is based on three manuscripts, two from Turkey and one from Rabbat & Morocco. The Qūwatlī edition is significantly longer than that of ‘Aṭā. A miscatalogued manuscript in Turkey was not considered by either editor.¹²⁴

Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ is an ascetic manual presented as a series of questions and answers about the key virtues of the path toward God. These virtues are presented as waypoints (*maqāmāt*) on the journey toward intimacy (*uns*) with God. A common thread throughout this journey is the struggle to weaken the organ of desire (*al-naḥs*). The journey progresses through these waypoints: repentance (*tawba*), despondency of the *naḥs* (*fatra*), self-accounting (*muḥāsaba*), pious caution (*wara’*), renunciation (*zuhd*), faithfulness (*ṣidq*), contentment (*riḍā*), enlightenment (*wurūd al-ma’rifā*), contemplation (*i’tibār*), purity (*ṭahārat al-qalb*), mourning (*ḥuzn*), love of God (*maḥabbat Allāh*), the awareness of God (*murāqaba*), and fear. Qūwatlī’s edition continues on with devotion (*taqwā*),¹²⁵ abandonment to God (*tawakkul*), curing

Qūwatlī edition.

123. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *al-Muṣṭalah laddā al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*, 1 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 12, no. 12 (December 1983): 53–59; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *al-Tawba*’, 2 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 1 (January 1984): 43–47; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *Muḥāsabat al-naḥs wa-mukhālifat al-‘adūw*’, 3 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 2 (February 1984): 57–62; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *al-Wara’ wa-l-zuhd*’, 4 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 3 (March 1984): 49–54; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *Ma’nā al-dunyā wa-l-‘aql wa-l-ṣidq*’, 5 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 4 (April 1984): 39–43; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *al-Ikhlāṣ wa-l-riyā’ wa-l-i’jāb*’, 6 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 5 (May 1984): 23–26; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *al-Ṣabr wa-l-Riḍā*’, 7 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 6 (June 1984): 93–97; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *al-Ma’rifā wa-l-i’tibār*’, 8 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 7 (July 1984): 47–53; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *Ṭahārat al-qalb wa-l-ḥikma*’, 9 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 8 (August 1984): 43–46; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *Ḥadīth al-naḥs wa-ṣifat al-ḥuzn*’, 10 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 9 (September 1984): 31–34; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *Khawf al-muḥibbīn li-llah ‘azza wa-jalla*’, 11 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 10 (October 1984): 71–75; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *al-Khawf wa-ṣifat al-khā’ifin*’, 12 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 11 (November 1984): 65–70; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *al-Tawakkul wa-ma’nā-hu*’, 13 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 13, no. 12 (December 1984): 49–53; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *Taṣṭīḥ al-dawā’ wa-l-istirqā’ wa-l-‘ilājāt lil-mutawakkil*’, 14 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 14, no. 1 (January 1985): 31–35; ‘[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’ ilā Allāh*]: *Faḍl al-fakīr al-qānī ‘alā al-ghanī al-shākīr*’, 15 of 15, ed. Ḥusayn al-Qūwatlī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* 14, no. 2 (February 1985): 37–43. Article titles indicate different sections of *al-Qaṣd*.

124. This manuscript is located in the Orhan Gazi Mosque collection in Bursa and has the archive number Or 637/2. It is catalogued under the name al-Qāḍī ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad.

125. A consistent gloss for *taqwā* is difficult. In this passage the author contrasts fear (*khawf*) with

the heart's diseases, trials, and poverty. The Orhan Gazi manuscript ends with the same sections as the Qūwatlī edition.

The two editions lack full information about the participants in this dialogue. In these, though the introduction identifies Muḥāsibī as the author, the treatise begins the first station with Abū Jaʿfar Muhammad ibn Mūsá responding to questions by an unnamed interlocutor.¹²⁶ The appellation 'ibn Mūsá' is either in error or a variant.

The manuscript in the Orhan Gazi Mosque of Bursa gives fuller information. The introduction reports that 'al-Qāḍī 'Alī ibn Aḥmad reported that Abū Jaʿfar al-Farajī said that al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī said...'.¹²⁷ The first station of the treatise likewise identifies the interlocutor as Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Farajī and al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī as the respondent or teacher.¹²⁸ This appellation corresponds to Abū Nuʿaym's entry of Abū Jaʿfar Muhammad ibn Yaʿqūb ibn al-Farajī (d. 271/884–5), a known companion (*ṣāḥib*)¹²⁹ of Muḥāsibī.¹³⁰ Abū Nuʿaym also reports that Abū Jaʿfar Muhammad ibn Yaʿqūb ibn al-Farajī authored *Kitāb al-waraʿ* and *Kitāb ṣifāt al-murīdīn*.¹³¹ *Al-Makāsib* identifies 'Abū Jaʿfar' as the source of Muḥāsibī's information on the different views of *waraʿ*.¹³² Moreover, Abū Jaʿfar's response to his interlocutor's question on *waraʿ* in *al-Qaṣd* conflates the description of various approaches to *waraʿ* that Muḥāsibī attributes to Abū Jaʿfar in *al-Makāsib*.

taqwā. He defines *taqwā* as: 'The relocation of the heart, external limbs, and interior (*al-bāṭina*) away from anything that God hates to what he loves.' al-Muḥāsibī, '[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-Rujūʿ ilā Allāh*]', 69.

126. Unnamed in the sense that he is not named within the dialogue.

127. Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujūʿ ilā Allāh*, Orhan Gazi Mosque (Istanbul) Or 637/2, f. 64r.

128. *Ibid.*, f. 65r.

129. This may be an instance where *ṣāḥib* has the sense of companion and not student or follower. Abū Nuʿaym also remarks that Abū Jaʿfar was of the same generation as Muḥāsibī. This may suggest that although Abū Jaʿfar died 28 years after Muḥāsibī, he was closer to his age and not considered part of Junayd's generation. Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, 10:287.

130. Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums* / 1. Teil, 327, for full bibliography.

131. Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, 10:287.

132. *Al-Makāsib*, 205.

5.4.1 Excursus on Abū Ja‘far’s Presentation about *wara‘* in *al-Makāsib*

In *Al-Makāsib* Muḥāsibī identifies and interacts with contemporary positions on topics related to practices of the renunciant path. In the case of pious caution (*wara‘*), he first defines his opinion: ‘Averting what God hates in terms of ones words and actions, whether internal or external. [This includes being cautious] about anything that might thwart what God has made incumbent upon the heart or the body.’¹³³ In the next section Muḥāsibī asks Abū Ja‘far what the scholars say about pious caution (*wara‘*) and receives the clarification that there are three prevalent positions:¹³⁴

- The followers of al-Thawrī and ibn Ad’hām teach that one should abandon anything that is entrenched in the heart, probably with the idea that the person has an uneasy conscience that what he has done could have been forbidden (*ḥākka fī ṣudūr*).
- The followers of Hadith (*aṣḥāb/ahl al-hadīth*) teach that *wara‘* is to hesitate (*wuqūf*) in the face of any action whose legal status is in question.
- One grouping, the *qurrā’* and the *mutaṣawwifa*,¹³⁵ adhere strictly to a prophetic Hadith that defines the pious (*muttaqīn*) as those who desist from things that are unobjectionable because they fear that there might be something detrimental in them.

Exactly these three phrases are echoed in Abū Ja‘far’s response to his interlocutor in *al-Qaṣd*, though without clarification that they represent three different viewpoints.

133. *Al-Makāsib*, 200.

134. ‘*Sa’altu Abā Ja‘far ‘an al-wara‘*’. *Al-Makāsib*, 205.

135. ‘Atā’s edition misspells this, ‘*mutawaṣṣifa*’, though it is correct on p. 210. The fifth form need not imply that they were pretenders—compare with *taṣawwuf*, which has no negative connotation. It is significant that this group was identified in the generation before the Baghdad Sufis.

5.4.2 Disapprobation in *al-Qaṣd*

The purported conversation between Muḥāsibī and Abū Jaʿfar ibn al-Farajī presents a substantially different application of disapprobation (*zuhd*) that is not found in the works of Muḥāsibī discussed above.

In *Al-Qaṣd* the object of disapprobation is the entire world and includes any desire for it. Abu Jaʿfar associates the term not simply with restraint, but with an attitude of disgust: ‘*Zuhd* is abandonment, hatred (*qilā*), and loathing (*bughḍ*)’.¹³⁶ Disapprobation is strengthened when one realises ‘the evil consequences of the world’.¹³⁷ This phrase directly contradicts what Muḥāsibī says in *Kitāb al-zuhd*: ‘If one looks into the outcome (*fī ʿāqabati-hi*) of the world he finds goodness (*khayra*) and blessing (*niʿma*) so that thankfulness becomes incumbent upon him’.¹³⁸ *Al-Qaṣd* does not mention thankfulness in this context. One should fear God’s judgement against even an atom’s weight of the world.¹³⁹ A true renunciant is distinguished by his knowledge of ‘the evil of its outcomes, the speed of its destruction, the corruptness of its diseases and the multiplicity of its harm’.¹⁴⁰

Al-Qaṣd clarifies that it is not correct to restrict the world to money, perhaps in response to those who would limit disapprobation to monetary issues. ‘The world’ (*al-dunyā*) is life itself, both its inner and outer dimensions. Anything taken from it for its own sake is blameworthy, while anything taken from it for the sake of God is commendable. Certainly taking anything from the world so that one may hoard it or boast of it indicates a love of the world. One may take what is permitted as long as there is benefit in it, and he guards against spoiling his religion (*dīn*) by it.¹⁴¹

Though this summary indicates some tension between the presentation of disapprobation in *al-Qaṣd* and Muḥāsibī’s authentic writings, one might conclude that

136. *Al-Qaṣd*, 238.

137. ‘*Maʿrifat al-qalb bi-sūʾ ʿawāqibi-hāʾ*’, Orhan Gazi 637/2, f. 70r = *al-Qaṣd*, 239 = Qūwatli ed., *al-Waraʿ wa-l-zuhd*, p. 51. The Orhan Gazi MS and both editions read *bi-sūʾ*, and not *bi-sawāʾ*.

138. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masāʾil fī al-zuhd*, 44.

139. ‘*Wa-khawf al-ʿiqāb ʿalā mathāqil al-dharr min-hāʾ*’, *al-Qaṣd*, 239.

140. Orhan Gazi 637/2, f. 72v = *al-Qaṣd*, 246–7 = Qūwatli ed., *al-Waraʿ wa-l-zuhd*, p. 53. Both editions and the Orhan Gazi MS again read *bi-sūʾ*, and not *bi-sawāʾ*.

141. *Al-Qaṣd*, 248–9.

al-Qaṣd nonetheless affirms at least a similar concept of *zuhd* to what is contained in Muḥāsibī's other writings. A true renunciant is one who loves God more than the world.

The difference is subtle but significant. Muḥāsibī's other writings always resolve back to an emphasis on obedience to God's revealed commands. Disapprobation ultimately serves to ensure that God's servant is obedient. The Quran warns the believer that the world's attractions can lead him away from obedience to God's commands. Certainly the world can ensnare a person's heart and stir up inner vices. When God's servant realises that something otherwise permissible may be thwarting his obedience to God, he should turn from it. Yet Muḥāsibī's teaching on thankfulness makes it difficult to conclude that this restraint is motivated by 'loathing'. Rather it is *wara'* or pious caution that makes it a sensible choice to avoid what might get in the way of obedience. Perhaps one's disapprobation of the world grants an indifference that makes the abandonment of what is questionable easy, but this seems to be an entirely different process from the disapprobation of the world that loathes even what is licit because God also loathes it.

In *al-Qaṣd* any 'excess' of the world should be renounced. Though God's commands are certainly not irrelevant, the focus of the renunciant path is to shun any participation in the world that might compete with love for God. God may have allotted necessary provisions for life in this world, but anything beyond that is suspect and likely to distract one in his pursuit of God. When asked what might spoil the practice of renunciation, the respondent explains:

[What spoils *zuhd* is] the relaxation of the *nafs* and its [subsequent] inclination toward explanations [one might hear in] auditions (*samā'*) of knowledge that give licence to [freely] take that whose loss causes no harm [i.e. the world], and [gives licence] to continue to live in the overabundance (*fuḍūl*) of what is allowed. Then a small desire is produced in him so that love for his organ of desire (*nafs*) subdues his love for his Lord. Then the peace of mind he experienced in his disapprobation [of the world] becomes disturbed. Despite the fruit (lit., inheritance) of his disapprobation, his heart grants him licence to [live in the] overabundance of the world according to his desires. Such a situation is produced

in his heart so that it loses its discernment because the desire for the world is a darkness in the heart. But disapprobation is a light to the one who is faithful in disciplining the organ of his desire by abandoning the pleasures of the world, whose loss causes no harm.¹⁴²

5.4.3 The *nafs* in *al-Qaṣd*

As this description implies, alienation from the world requires a rigorous programme of disciplining the *nafs*, the organ of desire. Even the first step of this journey, repentance, is strengthened by diminishing (*qalla*) one's food and drink.¹⁴³ Purifying the heart requires extended practices that cut off passions and eliminate any inclination toward concessions (*rukḥṣa*). Repeated again is the necessity of diminishing one's food and drink. 'Nothing can remove the rust from one's heart like hunger because hunger cuts off any means for the organ of desire to call upon [its] passions.'¹⁴⁴ The first step after repentance is to bring the organ of desire to a weakened state that avoids any inclination toward the passions.¹⁴⁵

Muḥāsibī's other works recognise the challenge of subduing the desires of the *nafs*. But in them he rejects ascetic programs that glorify hunger and poverty in favour of reflection and self-accounting.

5.4.4 Conclusions about *al-Qaṣd*

The attribution of *al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū' ilā Allāh* to Muḥāsibī is based on its opening line and the clarification of Muḥāsibī as the respondent and Abū Ja'far as the respondent immediately after the introduction. This presents inconsistencies.

As demonstrated above, it is difficult to avoid the association of Abū Nu'aym's entry on Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ya'qūb ibn al-Farajī with the Abū Ja'far of this manual. He has a reported link to Muḥāsibī and books attributed to him match the content of *al-Qaṣd*. To insist that the Abū Ja'far ibn Mūsā of *al-Qaṣd* is someone

142. *Al-Qaṣd*, 242. Note the collocation of disapprobation and light.

143. *Al-Qaṣd*, 225.

144. *Al-Qaṣd*, 291.

145. *Al-Qaṣd*, 227.

other than the Abū Jaʿfar ibn al-Farajī mentioned in Abū Nuʿaym’s *Ṭabaqāt* is a difficult alternative to substantiate. This is especially the case because Muḥāsibī asks Abū Jaʿfar in *al-Makāsib* for information on what other scholars teach about pious caution (*waraʿ*).

The more difficult question is how it is that Muḥāsibī is asking Abū Jaʿfar questions in both *al-Qaṣd* and in *al-Makāsib* when Abū Nuʿaym reports that Abū Jaʿfar is Muḥāsibī’s companion.¹⁴⁶

Each instance must be considered separately. In the case of *al-Makāsib* it is clear from the text that Muḥāsibī is not asking Abū Jaʿfar for his opinion about the essence of *waraʿ*, but about what other scholars are teaching. Though unusual, nothing in the text requires Muḥāsibī to be the student of Abū Jaʿfar. In this instance we can only speculate that Muḥāsibī respected Abū Jaʿfar’s knowledge about this subject and was willing to acknowledge him when he surveyed the various opinions on *waraʿ* held by scholars. Abū Jaʿfar ibn al-Farajī did write a book on pious caution and he is known for having transmitted anecdotes about Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī (245/859),¹⁴⁷ an ascetic peregrine who was the disciple of Ḥātim al-Aṣamm al-Balkhī (237/851–2), the most famous disciple of Shaqīq al-Balkhī.¹⁴⁸ If more credit for *al-Makāsib* should be granted to the students who compiled Muḥāsibī’s lectures, then perhaps these students knew well that Muḥāsibī relied on others—even his more ascetically minded companion—for information on these groups.

In the case of *al-Qaṣd* the situation is markedly different. A later passage in *al-Qaṣd* clearly demonstrates that the text’s interlocutor is the student:

I [Muḥāsibī?] said: May God have mercy on you. What I have heard from you won’t put distance between us.¹⁴⁹ But my desire in my need of you is according to your knowledge of my need for you.

He [Abū Jaʿfar] said: Listen to me ... because I heard it said from those with wisdom: ‘Disciples don’t perish after they have experienced obsessive love for God (*ʿishq*) unless they diverge from their teacher

146. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 10, p. 287.

147. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 136; Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums* / 1. Teil, 327.

148. See 4.0.1, p. 102.

149. Perhaps an appeal.

(*ustādh*)'. So beware of [following something] different! Whoever disagrees with his doctor lengthens his illness. Approach God with your heart. Join me entirely. For I am prescribing [for you] what you hear. And God will confirm the understanding of your heart. Appeal to God about your distance and desire God and his guidance. Oh my child¹⁵⁰

The interlocutor in this interchange is clearly the student. Moreover, Abū Jaʿfar expects his student to agree with him and trust his wisdom. If we accept that Abū Jaʿfar ibn al-Farajī is the respondent in *al-Qaṣd*, then Muḥāsibī, his *shaykh*, cannot be the interlocutor.

Another possibility is that the roles of Muḥāsibī and Abū Jaʿfar became reversed in the transmission of Muḥāsibī's teaching. In this case, the introduction's assertion that the treatise reports the words of Muḥāsibī would be correct, but Abū Jaʿfar is in fact the interlocutor, despite clear indication to the contrary. Qūwatlī suggested this clarification throughout his edition of *al-Qaṣd*, at the beginning of each instalment.¹⁵¹

There are three difficulties with this position. First, Abū Nuʿaym reports that Abū Jaʿfar ibn al-Farajī did author a book on this very subject. His biographical entry on Abū Jaʿfar is consistent with the renunciant path represented in *al-Qaṣd*.¹⁵² Secondly, I have demonstrated that the ascetic perspective of *al-Qaṣd* not only differs in substance from Muḥāsibī's presentation in his other works, but those other works censure the very position promoted in *al-Qaṣd*. Finally, it is common for a work to be attributed to the more famous of two possible scholars.

It is possible that Abū Nuʿaym's designation of Abū Jaʿfar ibn al-Farajī as a 'companion' of Muḥāsibī intended to depict them as colleagues, without suggesting a student-teacher relationship. That would better explain Abū Jaʿfar's quotation in Muḥāsibī's *al-Makāsib*. What it would not explain is why *al-Qaṣd* clearly depicts Muḥāsibī as his student. And that 'student' would author several books presenting

150. Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī al-zuhd*, 291–2.

151. Qūwatlī suggests that the student is Muḥammad ibn Mūsā ibn 'Imrān al-Qaṭṭān Abū Jaʿfar al-Wāsiṭī, a Hadith transmitter found in the collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and Ibn Mājah. Neither Sulamī nor Abū Nuʿaym provides an entry on him. al-Muḥāsibī, '[*Al-Qaṣd wa-l-Rujū' ilā Allāh*]', 47n7.

152. Abū Nuʿaym also reports that he was one of the leaders in the sciences of the ascetics (*ʿulūm al-nussāk*). *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 10, p. 278.

a substantially different view of renunciation, even censuring the views promoted by his ‘teacher’ in *al-Qaṣd*.

The best interpretation of the evidence is that Muḥāsibī did not write the introduction ascribed to him in *al-Qaṣd*. Moreover, he was not Abū Ja‘far’s interlocutor. Rather, *al-Qaṣd* is Abū Ja‘far ibn al-Farajī’s *Ṣifāt al-murīdīn*, mentioned by Abū Nu‘aym. The title fits the content of *al-Qaṣd* and could be expected of one who valued the teaching of Abū Turāb and Ḥātim al-Aṣamm.

5.4.5 *Ṣifāt al-murīdīn* and the Development of Islamic Ascetic Piety

Ṣifāt al-murīdīn provides important evidence in the development of the renunciant path leading up to the Baghdad Sufi network. Shaqīq’s piety in *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt* is the earliest extant example of an Islamic ascetic manual. One would expect that its principles and even content were transmitted through Ḥātim al-Aṣamm and then to Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī (245/859), a teacher of Abū Ja‘far ibn al-Farajī. Abū Turāb and Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz shared a common teacher, Abū Ḥātim al-‘Aṭṭār al-Baṣrī al-Sīrīn (260’s/874–884).¹⁵³ In terms of ascetic tendencies, Shaqīq al-Balkhī, Abū Ja‘far ibn al-Farajī and Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz belong within the same trajectory. *Ṣifāt al-murīdīn* is important chronologically because it provides an example of an Islamic ascetic manual between Muḥāsibī and Kharrāz. In the unlikely event that the Orhan Gazi MS is incorrect in identifying the author of *al-Qaṣd* as Muḥāsibī’s student Abū Ja‘far [ibn-?]¹⁵⁴ al-Farajī, the work would be important as an example of an Islamic ascetic manual written by an unidentified Abū Ja‘far of the generation immediately prior to Muḥāsibī.

5.5 The Culmination of the Renunciant Path in Baghdad Sufism

As early as Shaqīq al-Balkhī, an ascetically oriented renunciant path emerged within Islamic piety. *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt* indicates that this ideal had developed bey-

153. Melchert considers Abū Ḥātim a synthesising figure, ‘Baṣran Origins of Classical Sufism’, 234ff.

154. Abū Nu‘aym inserts ‘ibn’ here; the MS does not.

and the spectacular acts of isolated renunciants (*zāhid*). Renunciant masters like Shaqīq could offer potential adherents a defined path that would rid them of sinful impulses and promise them the possibility of experiencing God's love. The path itself idealised ascetic practices like self-imposed hunger and poverty. Certain virtues and attitudes were depicted as progressing toward recognition of a unique status of friendship with God. These virtues were thought of as waypoints along this path toward God.

Shaqīq's ascetic manual suggests that this emerging ideal no longer relied on discrete traditions and aphorisms. With this manual, renunciants might become teachers or even masters who not only challenged their disciples with sayings that promoted ascetic simplicity, but also guided them through a curriculum of piety. That curriculum consisted of concepts, virtues and practices that would remain stable, yet continue to develop into a distinctly Sufi piety. Moreover, alongside this emerging curriculum, masters like Shaqīq could hold opinions on select topics that would also be passed on as part of this emerging body of knowledge. The association of the extreme practice of forgoing financial occupation with Shaqīq is an example of this.

Several of these concepts are worth mentioning because they become intrinsic to the renunciant path and its realisation as a body of knowledge. Fundamental is the metaphor of DEVOTION TO GOD IS A PATH toward Him. Important stages of development are mentally represented as waypoints or milestones. Renunciants must consciously embark on this journey and are encouraged to visualise an ideal experience of God at the end of this journey. Another important concept is the careful balance of human responsibility and divine initiative for progress along this path. Disciples must adhere to basic patterns of practice, but will only find success as a gift from God. Those moments of success in reaching a particular waypoint are conceptualised by Shaqīq as divine 'light'. Light as a metaphor of divine enablement and encounter becomes part of the renunciant path.

Muḥāsibī's censure and investigation of renunciant ideas becomes an important part of the history of this renunciant path. When he challenges the renunci-

ants, he identifies a key point of tension between this path's ideal and the emerging systematisation of Islamic law. Are not their ascetic practices eschewing the duties God gave mankind in the Quran and Sunna? The recognition of Abū Jaʿfar ibn al-Farajī as his student and false attribution of his ascetic manual to his teacher Muḥāsibī suggest that Muḥāsibī's concerns did not develop into an antagonism toward this renunciant path. In fact his exposition of internal obligations would be accepted and assimilated into the later Sufi movement. Despite his stern rebuke of renunciants, it is not clear that Muḥāsibī ever distanced himself from them. In fact biographers like Sulamī and Abū Nuʿaym consider him to be among them.

In this way Muḥāsibī's challenge of the pre-Sufi renunciant path demonstrates the strength of their movement. They could embrace both Muḥāsibī and his writings without lessening their own resolve. I suggest again that the curious transmission of Abū Jaʿfar's thoroughly ascetic manual under Muḥāsibī's name suggests a certain depth to their movement. What will not do is to minimise the clear distinction between Muḥāsibī's disapprobation of the world and the ascetic nature of this pre-Sufi renunciant path.

Muḥāsibī's writings are also important to historical studies of ascetic tendencies in early Islam because they demonstrate that Muḥāsibī recognised these ideas as worth writing about. He was able to identify key concepts (like *waraʿ* or *zuhd*) and even present a nuanced description of different opinions being taught about those concepts. Knowledge of ascetic virtues and practices was accessible and Muḥāsibī was able to interact with that knowledge. The renunciant path that Shaqīq had enunciated had followers and a defined body of knowledge. Muḥāsibī could ask Abū Jaʿfar for details about renunciant concepts because as Sulamī says, 'he (Abū Jaʿfar) was a leader in the sciences of the ascetics (*nussāk*)'. Though access to the ideas and writings of early adherents to this renunciant path is very limited, it should not be doubted that there was a body of knowledge and practice that was being developed and transmitted. The Sufi biographers seem not to have been fanciful in this aspect of the story they tell for this early period.

Discussion presented in this chapter on the treatises of Abū Jaʿfar ibn al-Farajī and Kharrāz demonstrate that Shaqīq’s contributions remained pertinent up to the dawn of the Baghdad Sufi movement. His vilification of the world and rejection of any desire for it was expanded and systematised in their writings. Kharrāz drew key connections between these concepts and Quranic verses, thus substantiating their practice in Quranic teaching. They expanded the number of waypoints upon the path to God, and presented fully formed curricula for attaining proximity to God. They heeded Muḥāsibī’s key rebukes against setting aside God’s duties in pursuit of their renunciant path. Family should not be abandoned; savings might have a reasonable function; limited financial occupation was acknowledged. And perhaps most importantly, Kharrāz is careful to affirm the necessity of abiding by God’s revealed commands in the Quran and in the Sunna. Nonetheless, the core values of their renunciant path, introduced formally by Shaqīq’s manual, remained intact. With significantly more reflection and description, Kharrāz offered adherents of this path a way to escape the passions of this world in discrete unitive experiences of God.

The writings of Shaqīq al-Balkhī, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, his student Abū Jaʿfar ibn al-Farajī, and Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz present an important trajectory of renunciant discourse leading up to the Sufi movement of Baghdad. Ascetic practitioners like Shaqīq and his student Ḥātim al-Aṣamm provoked Muḥāsibī to contribute important correctives to extreme renunciant practice, and to trace out the inner dimension of obedience to God that was readily incorporated into the renunciant path. With these new insights Abū Jaʿfar and Kharrāz developed comprehensive curricula for that path. The renunciant discourse they participate in affirmed that God had chosen a select few who would devote themselves to unconditional obedience. The culmination of this renunciant discourse into the Sufi movement of Baghdad fully adopted the renunciant path necessary for God’s friends to transcend mankind’s base desire for the world’s pleasures, and fully embrace their primordial devotion to God alone.

Chapter 6

The Mystical Dimension of Piety

6.0.1 Mysticism and the Renunciant Path

In the last chapter I demonstrated that Sufi precursors developed a renunciant path that was central to their piety. This suggests that the common understanding that the emergence of Sufism reflects a transition from asceticism to mysticism need not imply that ascetic tendencies within these movements were replaced by mystical categories and practices. Rather, this characterisation could suggest that mystical elements developed alongside ascetic components until the Sufi self-awareness included an orientation toward mystical components. In this chapter I will briefly consider the problem of categorising Islamic mysticism and explore what mystical components might be present in the authors under discussion.

Based on the model I presented in the last chapter, mysticism is a semantic category that scholars use to indicate a salient orientation of a person's piety toward a mystical value (see Table 6.1, page 211). Identifying this value is complex because of ongoing debate about the nature of mystical knowledge and experience. The substantial influence of theological beliefs upon the mysticism of any given context affirms an approach that does not attempt to reduce a mystic's expression and interpretation of their experience to an underlying mystical experience. Mysticism as such must be understood within the broader context of a specific religion, in this case Islam.

No mystics (at least before the present century) believed in or practised

‘mysticism’. They believed in and practised Christianity (or Judaism, or Islam, or Hinduism), that is, religions that contained mystical elements as parts of a wider historical whole. These elements, which involved both beliefs and practices, can be more or less important to the wider body of believers. They also can be present in varying degrees of intensity and development.¹

For the historian, I suggest that mysticism is best understood as a fuzzy category that acknowledges the family resemblance of mystically oriented religious devotion between different religious and historical contexts.² One expects that the orienting value of mystical devotion within these differing contexts will demonstrate variation. Acknowledging that there is mysticism within both Islam and Christianity need not suggest that they share the same mystical experience, nor require the formulation of a core mystical value that they share. This approach minimises the debate surrounding mystical experience and encourages the researcher to give attention to the entirety of a person’s religious devotion as described in his writings and the writings of others about him (or her).³

By situating the mystical orientation of a person’s piety within a conceptual hierarchy of religious devotion, I am able to account for the beliefs, practices, and virtues that surround accounts of mystical experience.⁴ In the initial three chapters of this thesis, I have established the general nature of the religious devotion of Shaqīq, Muḥāsibī, and Kharrāz by examining the beliefs, virtues, and practices that seem most significant in their writings. As McGinn’s quote above suggests, it is *these* components that comprise their religious devotion, and *not* mysticism (or asceticism). I account for this within a conceptual hierarchy of religious

1. Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xvi. See also, Bernard McGinn, ‘Eriugena Mysticus’, in *Giovanni Scoto Nel Suo Tempo: L’organizzazione del Sapere in Eta Carolingia* (Todi: Centro di Studi Sulla Spiritualita Medievale, Accademia Tudertina, 1989), 238. McGinn credits Hügel as the initial proponent of this approach, *The mystical element of religion: as studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her friends* (London: Dent, 1908).

2. For an investigation of fuzzy categories and family resemblance, see John R. Taylor, ‘Prototypes in Cognitive Linguistics’, in *Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition*, ed. Peter Jake Robinson and Nick C. Ellis (New York: Routledge, 2008), 41–46.

3. ‘Those who define mysticism in terms of a certain type of experience of God often seem to forget that there can be no direct access to experience for the historian.’ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xiv.

4. *Ibid.*, xvii.

devotion by considering mysticism to be a type-of category of religious devotion. Thus mysticism describes a perceived orientation of the components of religious devotion toward a value that is initially posited as a heuristic device. Within this approach, the formulation of that value is open to scholarly debate, as is its relevance to any particular component of a person's religious devotion.

Table 6.1: Taxonomy of Islamic Mysticism

Term	Definition
religious devotion	a superordinate category that consists of one's virtues, practices, and beliefs
mysticism	a type-of category for religious devotion that strives for the immediate awareness of God's nearness
mystical component	a virtue, practice, or belief that is shaped by a commitment to pursue an awareness of God's nearness
mystical piety	religious devotion whose mystical components are prominent

Within ninth-century Islam, I will consider a belief, virtue, or practice to represent a good example of a 'mystical' component of piety because it is perceived by the aspirant (*murīd*) to express a claim to the awareness of God's immediate proximity (*qurb*). For Christianity, McGinn has defined mysticism as an awareness of God's presence.⁵ This description includes 'the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to'⁶ a person's awareness of God being near. By using the term 'awareness' I avoid discussions of the definition or validity of what they experience. As McGinn explains: 'I am primarily interested in underlining the necessity for exploring forms of language that will be both more true to the historical record and potentially more accurate and flexible in investigating its significance.'⁷

My discussion of Kharrāz's mysticism should demonstrate that *qurb* (nearness) is an important if not primary indication of the mystical dimension of his religious

5. McGinn, 'Eriugena Mysticus', 238.

6. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xvii.

7. Ibid., xviii. See also Edward Howells, 'Mysticism and the Mystical: The Current Debate', *The Way Supplement*, 2001, 15–27; and Louise Nelstrop, *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 13.

devotion. Though it may have nearly the same meaning as ‘presence’, at least for Sufis, Quranic precedent sanctions its occurrence in Sufi texts.⁸ ‘We created man, and We know what his soul whispers to him, for We are nearer to him than his jugular vein’ (Qāf 50:16).⁹ Nwyia does mention presence (*ḥudūr*) as a significant concept of Islamic mysticism,¹⁰ but discusses only one unrelated occurrence in Tirmidhī’s definition of a martyr.¹¹ I have not located the expression ‘God’s presence’ in any of the texts I have examined.

McGinn’s model considers the ‘immediacy’ of God’s presence to be essential to Christian mysticism. He means by this that the mystic considers his experience to be extraordinary in comparison to the religious experience of ordinary Christians. That is because the mystic describes his experience as something other than ‘the usual conscious activities of sensing, knowing, and loving’.¹² He considers his awareness of God to be ‘both subjectively and objectively more direct, even at times as immediate’.¹³ Though I have included the concept of immediacy within my formulation of a mystical component of piety, I will discuss instances when a practice or virtue may suggest God’s nearness *without* any indication of immediacy. Like McGinn, I doubt that these warrant labelling that person’s religious devotion as mystical. Within a broader conceptual hierarchy of religious devotion, these instances can be explained as minor, mystical tendencies whose influence upon their piety is limited.

I acknowledge that my approach to mysticism highlights terminology and expressions located in Sufi manuals, especially Kharrāz. My discussion of Shaqīq and Muḥāsibī should demonstrate that ‘an awareness of God’s immediate nearness’ is a heuristic that clarifies whether their religious devotion shares the same mystical orientation of later Sufism. I also propose that it brings to light the possibility of

8. For a brief introduction and examples from Sufi writers, see Rustom, ‘Approaches to Proximity and Distance in early Sufism’. Also Baldick’s comments, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, 2.

9. Jones trans.

10. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 3.

11. *Ibid.*, 152.

12. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xix.

13. *Ibid.*

other mystical values that might indicate a different sort of mystical orientation. In the case of Shaqīq, for example, I will discuss his arguably mystical value of experiencing God's love and intimacy. My approach to religious devotion as a conceptual hierarchy allows for this, and significantly alters the scholarly debate surrounding asceticism and mysticism within early Islam.

6.1 The Mystical Dimension of Shaqīq's Ascetic Piety

Ādāb al-ibādāt formalises the renunciant path as a metaphor that expresses progressive devotion to God at the expense of satisfying human desire. That path consists of four waypoints: disapprobation, fear, longing for Paradise, and love. One who perseveres through all four of these waypoints is promised an intimate relationship with God. The central mystical feature of this text is the outcome or final destination of the renunciant path: God's love.

6.1.1 The Passive Reception of God's Love

The climax of Shaqīq's description of love promises that the one who seeks God in this life will receive God's love. God will 'cast' his love on him (*Tā' Hā'* 20:39). The active sense of the term 'to cast' suggests that this is entirely the initiative of God. In the context of *Tā' Hā'* 20, Moses is a baby when God promises a special relationship of protection to him.

On the other hand, the beloved is one who actively seeks God. There seems not to be in this the idea that the aspirant deserves God's love. This seeking (*ibtighā'*) also has precedent in the Quran.¹⁴ The format of Shaqīq's manual does not suggest that this seeking is to be equated with obeying God's commands, but with choosing to devote oneself to Him rather than the world. It seems unlikely that Shaqīq considers God's love to be a reward for adhering to the legal requirements of Islam. If God's love is a response to man's initiative, it is not an outcome of his legal righteousness.

14. *Al-Ḍuḥā* 92:20; *Al-Baqara* 2:207. Also *Al-Kahf* 18:28.

So God's love for the beloved is a response to his love of God. This creates an infinite loop within the piety of Shaqīq because God's beloved loves what God causes him to love. Shaqīq uses the causative form of the verb 'to love' to connect man's love back to God's agency: 'The initial entry into the love of God is that he inspires his heart with a love for what God loves, and that he loathes what God loathes until it happens that there is nothing more beloved to him than God and pleasing him.'¹⁵

Two aspects of Shaqīq's description suggest a mystical dimension. The complexity of agency on the one hand motivates the aspirant to love God, but on the other to thank God for that love. An awareness of God's agency as an act of love that inspires love suggests the passivity that has been suggested as one of the general features of mysticism.¹⁶ Shaqīq uses the common metaphor that GOD'S ACTIVITY IS LIGHT. His treatise also displays the perplexing nature of mystical language. Within Shaqīq's manual this inexactitude is not sufficient to suggest esoteric language, but it does have traces of this mystical tendency.

6.1.2 Love as a Dynamic Relationship with God

Shaqīq's description of the final waypoint of love also suggests a dynamic experience rather than a static declaration of preferred status before God. The love of God is not simply a theological truth, but a state that the beloved experiences. At the mundane level, he knows that God prefers him because He provides directly for him. Thus he no longer pursues financial gain or even sustenance. 'He never sets out to acquire money nor occupies himself with work.'¹⁷ This is because he abandons himself to God (*tawakkul*). According to Shaqīq, God's love of him will also cause others to love him—something he should observe in his relationship with others.

15. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

16. James' list: 'ineffability', 'noesis', 'transiency', and 'passivity', William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008). For a helpful explanation, see Nelstrop, *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches*, 3–6.

17. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

To these two wholly exterior experiences of God's love, Shaqīq adds an array of virtues that have both interior and exterior dimensions:

He will become [God's] beloved (*maḥbūb*)..., noble, brought near (*muqarrab*), refined, gentle, compliant, very pious (or reverent), righteous (free from sin), shunning debauchery, and renouncing worldly authority. Whenever you encounter him, he will be smiling, gentle, noble, of refined character, [and] pleasant, [even with] the insincere.¹⁸ He will not frown. He will have the excellence of joy and [carry] pleasant tidings. He avoids sins and opposes lying.

Apparent in this list of mostly visible manifestations are inner dimensions of piety that resemble what might be thought of as inner states or virtues. A reasonable assumption would be that these are the result of the intimate relationship that the beloved has with God. For Shaqīq, the effects of the reciprocity of God's love will be apparent both in the actions of the beloved and in his inner states. Perhaps these experiences give Shaqīq confidence to describe an experienced intimacy with God:

Their hearts have become attached to their Lord [and] they are delighted with his private discourse (*munājā*) with them when they are alone with him. The mercy and the kindness they had expected appears upon their hearts. [God] is the victor over their hearts. God is their intimate friend in this world and their tranquility, their joy and the happiness of their hearts.¹⁹

This description of intimacy suggests another mystical value: that the beloved will experience an ongoing awareness of God's love. To be clear: though Shaqīq richly describes this kind of experiential awareness of God, he does not attribute it to an esoteric conception of knowledge that Sufis would categorise as timeless; that is, *ma'rifa*.

Other tendencies of Shaqīq's religious devotion are less likely to be mystical. Though at first terrifying, the experience of fear that follows and maintains disapprobation of the world is eventually softened by the longing for Paradise (*shawq*).

18. Alt., 'tactful', Sviri's translation.

19. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 22.

Its effects are still described by Shaqīq as an abiding light, though the terror itself is forgotten.²⁰ The longing for Paradise should not be mistaken for a longing for God, as we find in Kharrāz. This longing and the fear that precedes it are present within the Quran and are not particular to the renunciant path. Shaqīq's description of longing encourages imagining (*tafakkur*) the descriptions of Paradise,²¹ though the imagination is not present in his description of fear. Fear and longing, especially combined with the image of light, have a mystical semblance, but in the end fall short of mystical components of piety within *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*.

6.1.3 Mystical Traditions of Shaqīq

Traditions attributed to Shaqīq in biographical dictionaries offer few mystical observations.²² Rather he seems best remembered for his ascetic piety. The ascetic piety of his traditions urge believers to abandon any love for the world. 'Purify your heart from love for the goods offered by the world so that the love of the Hereafter might enter it, along with the reward of God.'²³ One infers that a love for God replaces the love of the world, though this is not explicit in any tradition. More common are traditions clarifying that to trust God means to abandon the world and rely on Him alone.²⁴ As mentioned above, the experience of sustaining oneself through God's direct provision is an ongoing indication of a relationship with God and may support a mystical awareness of intimacy with God.

In isolated traditions, this connection between ascetic piety and trust in God is not convincingly mystical, even if such a trust demonstrates loving the Hereafter instead of the world. Within *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, the connection between the renunciant path and loving God is clear. God does not bring anyone to this love unless his

20. *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, 20.

21. Perhaps also *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, 8:71-5-9.

22. He learned the 'disciplines of the path from the people of *ma'rifa*', though there is no mystical content within the traditions presented in this entry, Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Balkhī, *Faḡāʾil-i Balkh*, 138. See Bernd Radtke, 'Theologen und Mystiker in Ḥurāsān und Transoxanien', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 136, no. 3 (1986): 540.

23. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiya*, 59,3; and *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, 8:68, 8-12.

24. *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiya*, 56,4; *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, 8:61,12-14. Abū Nuʿaym has other traditions about *tawakkul* mentioned above in the chapter devoted to Shaqīq, see 2.4.1, p. 35.

heart is strengthened by extraordinary actions (*al-fi‘āl al-fā‘iq*) that are purified of sin (*al-muṭahhar min al-dhunūb*),²⁵ perhaps reflecting the promise of *Al-Baqara* 2:222 that God loves the one who is pure.

Without the treatise *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt* it would be difficult to establish mystical tendencies within Shaqīq’s legacy.²⁶ The ascetic piety affirmed in traditions attributed to him does not suggest the special relationship with God that is the province of God’s friends. If these traditions suggest a unique relationship with God that is developed and sustained through changes in the renunciant’s character, that relationship is not characterised as proximity to God nor as a shared love between them. Nonetheless, Muḥāsibī’s depiction of those who teach fear, hope, love and abandonment to God lists side by side the love found in *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt* and the abandonment of occupation common in the biographical dictionaries.²⁷ In *Makāsib* Muḥāsibī clearly associates Shaqīq with the latter, suggesting that Muḥāsibī was aware of the main components of Shaqīq’s piety from his followers, regardless of when *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt* came into circulation. Kharrāz’s writings demonstrate a clear awareness of the four waypoints of *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt* and one wonders why these are not associated with him or his followers in the biographical dictionaries.

6.1.4 Prolonged Awareness or Discrete Encounters?

The mystical dimension of Shaqīq’s piety is built around reciprocal love as the goal of the renunciant path. Key terms taken from quotations in this section express that relationship: *maḥabba* (love), *uns* (intimacy), and *munājā* (intimate prayer). Nearness is mentioned using the term *muqarrab*, though it is uncertain if this refers to an experience of proximity or simply to preferred status. Mention of ‘God’s light’ enables the aspirant to imagine God at work in his heart and perhaps subtly alludes to an esoteric knowledge of that experience. The centrality of the heart as the arena of that activity is also a necessary component of describing a reciprocal

25. *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*, 20. The adjective *al-fā‘iq* is the masculine, singular form in the MS, Shaqīq al-Balkhī, *Ādāb al-‘ibādāt*, Topkapı Emanet Hazinesi (Istanbul) 1762, f. 161v.

26. For discussion of authorship, see 2.2, p. 10.

27. See 6.2.5, p. 230.

relationship between God and man. If *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* indicates a tangible orientation of Shaqīq's piety toward an experience of God's nearness, it would be through his usage of these terms to develop the concept of reciprocal love at the end of the renunciant path.

What is unclear, however, is whether Shaqīq's descriptions suggest a 'direct' or 'immediate' awareness of God's nearness. Even when the renunciant reaches the noblest station of God's love, Shaqīq never mentions episodes of epiphany, strong emotion, or suspended awareness of the world. His description does suggest that the reciprocal love between the renunciant and God is extraordinary. Muḥāsibī's description of his likely followers affirms their conviction that they possessed knowledge that common people lacked.²⁸ When God casts his love upon His friend, that friend has an abiding awareness of an intimate relationship with God. Perhaps this is best explained as Shaqīq's belief that the accomplished renunciant had a special status with God that was demonstrated by God's direct provision of his needs. McGinn's investigations in Christian mysticism suggest that its best examples describe periods of mystical experience against the backdrop of ordinary life. In apophatic examples, it is God's absence that heightens mystical awareness.²⁹ If Shaqīq's descriptions suggest an awareness of God, albeit as reciprocal love, he describes a permanent state that lacks the periodic intensity of Sufi descriptions.

6.1.5 Shaqīq's 'Mysticism'

The renunciant path presented in *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* is an affirmation that early ninth-century renunciants pursued intimacy with God in their denial of the world and its pleasures. Shaqīq's descriptions of this intimacy do not require the aspirant to uncover God's mysteries nor to comprehend a higher form of knowledge. Success in even the waypoint of disapprobation guarantees that the aspirant is chosen by God and that he will be privileged with God's direct provision. In some sense this provision originates outside the natural realm of events, though Shaqīq never explores

28. See 6.2.5, p. 230.

29. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xviii-xix.

this.

Shaqīq's religious devotion suggests only a family resemblance to the prototypical mystical piety of later Sufism. His main treatise and the traditions attributed to him do not present convincing examples that direct awareness of God's proximity was central to his piety. Likewise there is very little evidence that Shaqīq sought mystical knowledge of God. Rather, Shaqīq was primarily a renunciant (*zāhid*) whose path culminated in the apprehension of a dynamic relationship with God. This intimacy is surely a mystical feature that has salience within his piety. Yet that mystical dimension cannot be divorced from the ascetic orientation of his religious devotion, and seems never to stray from his renunciant path.

6.2 Mystical Tendencies of Muḥāsibī

6.2.1 Muḥāsibī the Sufi?

Muḥāsibī offers a good case study on the changing perception of Sufism and mysticism in modern scholarship. Earliest focused research on Muḥāsibī classified him as a mystic³⁰ in the sense that his piety reflects the mysticism that was considered to be a basic category of all religious experience. Smith treated mysticism as a description of religious experience that transcended cultural and historical instances. 'Yet Mysticism itself represents something much wider than its derivation: it represents a spiritual tendency which is universal, for we find it in all religions worthy of the name and in all true faiths, and it is often the most vital element in such faiths.'³¹ This approach continued through the work of Arberry, who accepted this premise unconditionally,³² and more recently Schimmel, whose writings grant copious examples of such an approach.³³

Mahmoud revised this universalist approach by accommodating social and religious influences within his understanding of mysticism. He can speak of mysticism

30. Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*.

31. Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*, 2.

32. A J Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1979), 11.

33. e.g. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1975), 3-22.

in a universal sense, but qualifies that such a generalization is always subject to the religious and social influences at work in an individual's life.³⁴ One assumes that his identification of the 'inner struggle of salvation'³⁵ within Muḥāsibī's thought is acknowledgement of Muḥāsibī's own mode of mysticism. But his identification of the same theme of struggle within the writings of saint Theresa and saint Paul, perhaps even within Hinduism, suggests that his work on Muḥāsibī could be a case study of his own view of mysticism. His idea of struggle is nonetheless significant and might be another way of noticing what I consider to be the progressive vision of Muḥāsibī's piety.

Schoonover also labeled Muḥāsibī a mystic:

In relation to the final goal of the mystic, al-Muḥāsibī again displays the more normal type of mysticism. This ultimate relationship with God is intimate, but it is more on the basis of purity of heart, and of understanding and fellowship than of 'mystic union'.³⁶

He reacts to Massignon's project of establishing the origins of Islamic mysticism exclusively in Islam itself. This discussion of 'mystical origins' cannot be wholly divorced from Mahmoud's unconvincing attempt to differentiate 'Islamic mysticism' from the universal mysticism of Smith *et al.* Both reflect on how Islamic mysticism is connected to the larger phenomena of mysticism, assumed to be universal. Schoonover's comments suggest that Muḥāsibī's mysticism is different from later Sufi forms, but he still finds in it similarity to Eastern Christian mysticism. Schoonover's discussion of the uniqueness of Muḥāsibī's mysticism is adequate, though it is uncertain that he had any significant influence on later scholarship.

34. Mahmoud, *al-Mohāsibī*, 12. A more recent discussion, Carl Ernst, 'Mystical Language and the Teaching Context in the Early Lexicons of Sufism', in *Mysticism and language*, ed. Steven T Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 195.

35. Mahmoud, *al-Mohāsibī*, 250–51.

36. Schoonover, 'Al-Muḥāsibī and his al-Ri'āya', 29. Schoonover's doctoral dissertation was a translation of the first part of Muḥāsibī's *al-Ri'āya*, Schoonover, 'Kitab al-Ri'āya li-Ḥuqūq Allāh by al-Muḥāsibī: A Translation with Introduction and Notes'.

Besides these scholars who wrote specifically on Muḥāsibī, many Sufi generalists also consider him a mystic.³⁷ Underlying their identification of him as a mystic is their understanding of mysticism in general. That is, their conclusions about him are part of larger projects whose outline owes much to their fundamental preconceptions of mysticism in general. Each of them finds in Muḥāsibī evidence of the mysticism which they consider to be a widespread category of human experience.

This is not to say that their positions lack textual evidence altogether. Those who consider Muḥāsibī a mystic find support not only in mystical traditions that Abū Nu‘aym attributes to him, including a *Kitāb al-ḥubb*, but also in an autobiographical passage from his *Kitāb al-waṣāyā*. Particularly if mysticism is understood to be a universal category, the decision that Muḥāsibī is a mystic becomes part of a hermeneutic that discovers mysticism in all his works. Such passages will be discussed later in this chapter, but are mentioned here to underscore that those who consider Muḥāsibī a mystic cite textual evidence, regardless of whether or not their reading and interpretation of those texts is informed by the larger context of Muḥāsibī’s religious devotion.

This suggests another factor that influences one’s perception of Muḥāsibī (and other early Islamic figures). There are primarily two early sources of information on early Muslim scholars like Muḥāsibī: the Sufi biographies and the extant writings of the scholars themselves.³⁸ The scholars who consider Muḥāsibī to be a mystic tend not to differentiate between these two types. This is problematic not simply because the traditions about Muḥāsibī tend to be more mystical than his own writings, but also because the Sufi biographies present Muḥāsibī as a Sufi, when there is no evidence from his own writings that he identified himself with

37. Louis Massignon, *Recueil de textes inédits concernant l’histoire de la mystique en pays d’Islam* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geunthner, 1929), 17; Arberry, *Sufism : An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, 46ff; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 149–50; al-Muḥāsibī, *Une Vision humaine des fins dernières: Le Kitāb al-tawahhum*, 17–18; Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in early Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Birgitta Sharpe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 99; Michael Anthony Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi‘raj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 21; J Spencer Trimingham and John Obert Voll, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 144.

38. Of course both come through their own manuscript traditions—an issue in itself.

that designation.

Perhaps factors like these influenced German scholars, outstandingly Ritter, Meier and van Ess, to work within an alternative ‘historicist’ model of Islamic mysticism.³⁹ Their research reflects a subtle shift in the periodisation of the Sufi movement. It can no longer be taken for granted that a scholar’s inclusion within the Sufi biographical literature demonstrates that he identified himself as Sufi or belonged to a circle with such an identity. More specifically, it seems unlikely that Sulamī’s first generation of Sufis thought of themselves as Sufis.

There are isolated occurrences of the terms *ṣūfiya* and *mutaṣawwifa* before the biographical dictionaries, but these yield few reliable conclusions about a *ṣūfi* identity earlier than the Baghdad Sufi movement.⁴⁰ Ogén’s article ‘Did the Term “Sūfi” exist before the Sufis?’ discusses this further in an attempt to link early usage of the term *ṣūfiya* to Syrian ascetics.⁴¹ Recent research on Sufism makes this distinction and is reticent to speak of Sufis before the Baghdad Sufi movement epitomised by Junayd.⁴²

Within this German academic tradition, van Ess provides the definitive statement on whether Muḥāsibī was a mystic or Sufi:

Since Muḥāsibī is usually classified as a mystic, it may appear surprising that there is not one word of a conversion to *taṣawwuf* in either place (*Kitāb al-Khalwa* or *Kitāb al-Naṣā’ih*). Rather there is only discussion of *taqwā* (‘fear of God’), *wara’* (‘scrupulousness’), and the fulfilment of duties. Mysticism, inasmuch as one understands it as something more than simply fulfilling every religious duty of the heart and of the extremities; that is, ‘love mysticism’, only occupies a small place in the majority of his extant writings.⁴³

39. There are others that could be included. I am not attempting here a history of this development, but an overview.

40. Bernd Radtke, *Neue kritische Gänge: Zu Stand und Aufgaben der Sufikforschung* (Utrecht: Houtsma Stichting, 2005), 259ff.

41. Gören Ogén, ‘Did the Term ‘Sūfi’ exist before the Sufis?’, *Acta Orientalia* 43 (1983): 33–48.

42. For example, L Librande, ‘Islam and Conservation: the Theologian-Ascetic Al-Muḥāsibī’, *Arabica* 30, no. 2 (1983): 125; Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, 34,49; Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*.

43. van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥarīṭ al-Muḥāsibī*, 6. ‘Es mag überraschend scheinen, daß an beiden Stellen mit keinem Wort von einer Konversion zum *taṣawwuf*, zur Mystik, in die man Muḥāsibī meist einordnet, die Rede ist, sondern nur von *taqwā*, „Gottesfurcht“, *wara’*, „Skrupelhaftigkeit“,

6.2.2 Mystical Tendencies in the Writings of Muḥāsibī

From an historical perspective, Muḥāsibī predates the Sufi circles of Baghdad. He challenged the ascetic values of proto-Sufi renunciants and presented an alternative path of salvation to their renunciant path of mortifying human desire. Scholars of Sufism nonetheless find ‘mysticism’ in the writings of Muḥāsibī.

My framework for evaluating these claims is an adaptation of McGinn’s contextual approach to mysticism: mysticism as a research category indicates a salient orientation of a person’s religious devotion toward an awareness of God’s proximity, including the preparation and denouement of that encounter. Unlike perennialist approaches, the ‘data’ of mysticism are literary descriptions of this experience, rather than the experience itself. I consider mysticism, like asceticism, to be a fuzzy category whose boundaries may be difficult to define.⁴⁴

The implication of this approach is that certain of Muḥāsibī’s beliefs, practices and virtues should have a salient orientation toward encountering God’s proximity if his religious devotion is a good example of mystical piety. As the following discussion will demonstrate, such an orientation is not obvious. His usage of terms like ‘fellowship’ and ‘love’ do not seem to function within a framework of God’s presence or nearness. There are passages that indicate an experience of extreme joy or a sense of favoured status, but these seem to be only tangentially related to God’s proximity. Certainly Muḥāsibī imagines that the one who obeys God’s requirements will have a new and blessed perspective on life, but is this new perspective linked to an awareness of God’s nearness? Though this new perspective may resemble the Sufi awareness of God’s closeness, Muḥāsibī’s warning to those on the renunciant path suggests that he was aware of individuals or groups whose piety favoured the experience of God’s nearness, and that he was reluctant to identify himself with them.

und Erfüllung der Pflichten. ... Mystik, sofern man darunter mehr versteht als bloße verinnerlichte Erfüllung aller religiösen Pflichten des „Herzens“ und der „Glieder“ — also Liebesmystik etc. — nimmt in den meisten seiner uns erhaltenen Schriften nur einen geringen Raum ein.’

44. There are indications that other scholars are also considering this approach, Baldick, *Mystical Islam : An Introduction to Sufism*, 2; and Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, xvii.

I structure my discussion around salient features of Muḥāsibī's religious devotion that suggest the potential to be interpreted as indicative of a mystical orientation.

6.2.2.1 Passivity and Listening

Unlike Shaqīq, the pattern of piety that Muḥāsibī describes in *al-Ri'āya* does not suggest that the goal of the journey of obedience is to become aware of God's proximity or even His love. Above all God expects His servants to obey the commands He has given them in prescribed religion. Increasing one's understanding and applying that knowledge toward the struggle against base desires results in the heart's purification from sin and disobedience. The aspirant strives to have his sins forgiven by acknowledging his former transgressions and then to cure any diseases in his heart so that he is able to maintain that state of perfected obedience. In this he will find confidence in his future reward and peaceful reflection upon the delights of Paradise.

Muḥāsibī's description of this final destination at the end of this journey resembles a conversion experience. As the servant becomes confident that he has acknowledged and repented of all of his sins—that he has become fully observant of all of God's commands—in that moment he finds himself with the hope that God has predestined him to be one of His friends, one of His *awliyā'*. He determines that God has helped him to bring him to this destination. In finding himself in this status, he also finds an absolute commitment to remain obedient to all of God's commands.

Van Ess is correct that this does not resemble the trope of conversion to an ascetic lifestyle common in Sufi descriptions. Muḥāsibī's description suggests that hard work is in the past, the result of a prior commitment to uncover every past transgression. Though there are minor indications that the one committed to this journey is aware of God's proximity, experiencing that proximity immediately is not part of Muḥāsibī's descriptions. Nor is there a hint that the full realisation of this proximity is the envisioned end of this path. In terms of the journey toward

this realisation of friendship with God, and the epiphany of this new relationship, descriptions of nearness to God are not paramount.

In hindsight, what is emphasised is that arriving at this destination is not the result of human effort. Hints of this are present even at the beginning of this journey toward God. Those who return to God after following pleasures in their youth find God ready to help them. When God sees their struggle (*mujāhada*) against passions, He grants them His divine aid: ‘God will grant them His aid and make the path of obedience easy for them’.⁴⁵ Muḥāsibī clearly links this divine aid to God’s activity in drawing near to a person who draws near to Him. This he demonstrates with a Hadith linked to Abū Hurayra: ‘God has said, “Oh Son of Adam, if you draw near to me the span of a finger (*fitran*) I will draw near to you the span of a hand (*shibran*) ...”’.⁴⁶

In contrast, those struggling to escape persistent sin will hardly escape cycles of fear and hope. Muḥāsibī can also describe God’s agency in this, but the recipient will not escape the stubborn unresponsiveness (*qaswa*) of his heart without contemplating the terror of punishment in the Hereafter. The hope that beckons one out of this persistent horror is more clearly the act of divine grace, but Muḥāsibī’s descriptions don’t suggest that the recalcitrant sinner has an awareness of God’s proximity, even when his desperate hope may be on the verge of delivering his heart from unresponsiveness.

Once these cycles of fear and hope drive a person to the resolve of repentance and future obedience, the character of the journey toward friendship with God shifts substantially. The committed servant begins to contemplate possible lapses in his obedience and to investigate if his locus of desire (*nafs*) is in any way deceiving him about the acts of obedience he performs. Are there diseases of the heart like pride that lie under the surface of his obedience? The locus of this activity

45. *Ḥatta yumidda-hu Allāh ‘azza wa jalla bi-ma‘ūnati-hi wa-yusahhila ‘alay-hi sabīl al-ṭā‘a*. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 56 = ed. Smith, 20.

46. *Al-Ri‘āya*, 56 = ed. Smith, 20. Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* 97, *al-tawḥīd* 50, *bāb dhikr al-nabī wa-riwāyati-hi ‘an rabbi-hi*, no 7536/7; Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* 48, *al-dhikr wa-l-du‘ā* 2/3/20; Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ* 45, *da’awāt* 131.

seems to be the intelligent use of the mind (*al-ʿaql*). In the lexicon of this activity are terms like attentiveness (*ihitimām*),⁴⁷ concentration (*tathabbut*)⁴⁸ and discernment (*tabayyun*).⁴⁹

These activities all belong within the domain of listening, perhaps itself an indication of a mystical posture toward God’s nearness. In the strictest sense, Muḥāsibī intends with this ‘listening’ the quiet receptivity of the heart to the recitation of the Quran or even scholarly discourse:

And this is what it is to listen, just as God loves when [His] servant refrains from busying his limbs so that he occupies his heart with what he is hearing: He lowers his gaze so that his heart is not distracted with what he is seeing. His mind is present so that he doesn’t repeat anything to himself besides what he is listening to.⁵⁰

Though clearly an act of the intellect, listening also involves the heart, especially if the act of listening is to properly give birth to obedience. Muḥāsibī’s adaptation of the parable of the soils (Mark 4:1–8; Luke 8:1–15) underscores how the heart must listen with the intention of acting upon what it hears.

Muḥāsibī’s model of committed obedience requires an awareness of the subtlety of God’s guidance. This means listening not only with the mind, but with the heart in a way that results in obedience. The importance of the heart here is linked to the necessity of activating the will. The heart as the instrument for apprehending God’s nearness or even guidance seems out of place. Though it is the heart that responds in obedience to what one hears, Muḥāsibī lays greater stress on allowing the mind (*aql*) to act as the lamp that illuminates the path of obedience. Even the concentration (*tathabbut*) required to implement the guidance (‘the lamp’) of God’s commands seems primarily an activity of the mind, and is not equated with a spiritual apprehension of God’s presence.⁵¹ It seems that this posture of receptivity

47. See above, 3.3.4.1, p. 93.

48. See above, 3.3.4.2, p. 94.

49. See 3.3.4.3, p. 96.

50. *Al-Riʿāya*, 34 = ed. Smith, 2.

51. *Al-Riʿāya*, 35 = ed. Smith, 2.

falls short of an awareness of God's proximity and likely has no mystical inclination. Yet it clearly frames the journey Muḥāsibī presents in *al-Ri'āya* as one that is inner and concerned with far more than external compliance to God's commands.

6.2.3 A New Awareness of God

Muḥāsibī presents an intimate picture of the relationship God promises to the one who practises vigilance in obedience (*taqwā*). This passage is cited within Smith's writings as a demonstration of Muḥāsibī's mysticism. I quote it again for convenience:

The Kind One (*al-Laṭīf*) will not abandon them in the world, despite what He will give them in the Hereafter. Thus will He illuminate their hearts (for them), and strengthen their centre of desire (*anfusa-hum*), and suffice them from [needing] His creation, and make obedience to Him a delight. He will compel their hearts not only to fear, but to an excellent view of Him and to fellowship (*uns*) with His hope. And beyond this He grants them pleasure with longing (*shawq*) for Him, Mighty and Exalted is He, and His Paradise. And He shifts them from endurance in obeying Him to pleasure and joy in it. He provides them with ease in this life through the insignificance of the world so that their life in it is pleasant. His support and help in the world are unsurpassed. This is what He has promised them.⁵²

This passage indicates that Muḥāsibī envisions the obedient disciple with a new perspective on life. In language of passivity, God will act upon the hearts of the fully obedient, expressed with the symbolism of illumination, *anāra la-hum qulūba-hum*. Yet language here that might be associated with an awareness of God's nearness points rather toward the future experience of God in Paradise. Fellowship (*uns*) is clearly pointed toward hope as eschatological security, beyond the fear of an uncertain end. Longing (*shawq*) as well is to see God in Paradise, rather than an awareness of Him in the Here and Now. Those practicing *taqwā* have a 'high opinion' (*ḥusn al-ẓann*) of God because obedience is a delight, and they know that God rewards the obedient.⁵³

52. *Al-Ri'āya*, 41 = ed. Smith, 7. Quoted above, 3.2.3, p. 68.

53. One sign of deception is having confidence in a 'high opinion of God' so that the demand of repentance is ignored. *Al-Ri'āya*, 351 = ed. Smith, 276.

6.2.4 Drawing Near to God

The most explicit statement in *al-Ri'āya* about approaching God is linked not to an awareness of God, but to the blessings of obedience. Muḥāsibī develops this concept with the Hadith quoted above: 'If you draw near to me the span of a finger I will draw near to you the span of a hand ...' God's activity in drawing near to the believer seems to be a reference to their perception of His blessings and guidance (*hudā*). 'This (Hadith) [explains] the excellence of His aid, the speed of His response, and His guidance according to righteousness and enabling grace (*tawfiq*).'⁵⁴

As for man's part, it is repentance and subsequent obedience that opens the heart to God's guiding activity. Later in *al-Ri'āya* this theme is revisited and explicitly linked with obedience:

God terrifies sinners with His wrath and the consequences [of His judgement] so that He frightens their *nafs* with those thoughts and they repent to their Lord. And God grants hope to those who repent and abandon their sins lest they become discouraged and [return to] committing sins. Those who do acts [of obedience] hope that their hope will incite them to do acts (*a'māl*) that bring them near (*taqarraba*) to Him.⁵⁵

6.2.4.1 Eschatological Proximity

An unexpected source of ideas that might be interpreted as indicative of mystical inclinations is Muḥāsibī's censure of legal scholars (*fuqahā'*) at the end of *al-Ri'āya*. He chastises legal scholars who presume superiority over others because of their superior understanding of God's requirements. They believe that their expertise in formulating legal rulings and judgements precludes their susceptibility to Satan's temptations and misguidance. What they don't realise is their own failure to obey God in the inner domain of their hearts. Their self-importance indicates to Muḥāsibī that they pursue their mastery of Islamic jurisprudence for the sake of the world, and not for God's pleasure.⁵⁶

54. *Al-Ri'āya*, 57 = ed. Smith, 20.

55. *Al-Ri'āya*, 351 = ed. Smith, 276.

56. *Al-Ri'āya*, 359–61 = ed. Smith, 284–86.

The only way they can escape the pride in their hearts is to acknowledge that God is greater than their legal reasoning. Muḥāsibī's advice highlights the role of imagination in granting aspirants the proper posture before God. Behind His legal requirements are His personal promises and threats to mankind. The legal scholar must witness Hellfire and Paradise in his heart so that his legal pronouncements never become divorced from the reality of God's punishment and reward. When he 'sees the pain of [God's] punishment with his heart, then his longing (*shawq*) for the environs of God and nearness (*qurb*) to Him is increased'.⁵⁷

Terms that could indicate mystical intimacy or awareness are connected here with the experience of God in Paradise. This language resembles the role of *shawq* in Shaqīq's treatise, except that there it leads on to a reciprocal love of God. Though Muḥāsibī's usage seems to lack any awareness of God's immediate nearness, the role of imagining a future encounter with God should not be passed over. He has in mind here something different from a propositional understanding of Islamic eschatological traditions. Rather the mental image of God's activity in the Hereafter allows one to keep God at the centre of legal reasoning. Without this vision of God's activity in the heart, albeit of the future, legal reasoning (*fiqh*) becomes disassociated from God's lordship over mankind and legal reasoning itself.⁵⁸

Earlier in *al-Ri'āya* Muḥāsibī describes in detail the blessing of seeing God in the Hereafter:

[There] he is joyful in the blessings of the Hereafter that he will have at his disposal, remaining there forever. He won't want anything except to reach God's will there in a life where there is no death, and [to reach] pleasures whose passing he need never fear, near the highest Holy King in His realm. He does not fear any wrath that might come after His pleasure. And he will never be fully satisfied until God completes the purpose of His generosity toward him and draws him near Himself in pilgrimage, and accomplishes what He promised him—the vision (*ru'ya*) and perception (*naẓar*) of His noble Face.⁵⁹

57. *Al-Ri'āya*, 359 = ed. Smith, 284.

58. *Al-Ri'āya*, 359 = ed. Smith, 284.

59. *Al-Ri'āya*, 77 = ed. Smith, 38.

Certainly this vision of God's face in the Hereafter causes the aspirant to yearn for that future. Perhaps it is even a source of yearning in the present life. The certainty of this future bliss and Muḥāsibī's imagining of it may contribute to a heightened awareness of God's blessings and a greater capacity to endure hardship. For the jurist, this awareness of the reality of future blessings with God is crucial to avoiding hypocrisy in his familiarity with God's law.

To avoid the inclination of the *nafs* toward the subtler pleasures of the world, the legal scholar must direct his contemplative faculties toward God's blessings. 'He reflects on what God has revealed of the unceasing nature of His blessings and his unsurpassed rewards so that he stays awake at night and fasts in the day and denies the world so that he may receive those rewards.'⁶⁰ Within a hermeneutic of mysticism, statements like these could be read as an awareness of God's nearness in everyday life. What seems more likely is that these kinds of statements are connected to the deep impression that Muḥāsibī expects God's future rewards to have upon the thought life of the aspirant.

6.2.5 God's Love

Within Muḥāsibī's prescription for perfected obedience, love for God is never mentioned as a virtue or station. One can assume that avoiding the love of the world must imply a love for God, but this is not presented as an awareness of a reciprocal relationship with God, but simply as the choice of obedience over the pleasures of the world.

An example of this usage is found in *Kitāb al-ʿilm*:

Whoever has not abandoned this world, desiring the world to come, preferring the love of God, mighty and exalted is He, to the passion of his carnal soul, sacrificing himself and what he possesses, not withholding anything from Him and not being stingy about it towards Him,

60. *Al-Riʿāya*, 360 = ed. Smith, 285.

he did not know God, might and exalted is He, nor was he familiar with Him.⁶¹

In another passage Muḥāsibī equates God's love with His satisfaction in the person who never gives in to youthful passions (*ṣabwa*). This is part of his explanation of a non-canonical Hadith he uses to establish God's friendship with some:⁶² God is amazed (*yu'jabu*) with those chosen to be His friends in two senses. He loves the magnificent potential of obedience;⁶³ and 'He has love for him [His friend] and is pleased with Him'.⁶⁴ Here God's love is equated with His pleasure or satisfaction with His friend. In the next phrase Muḥāsibī states that the one who grows up worshipping and 'loving' God has the same reward as seventy righteous men.

In another extensive passage of warning, Muḥāsibī addresses those who understand and teach the waypoints that become integral to the renunciant path of the Sufis: 'love, fear, hope, the virtue of trust, satisfaction with God's decree, the meaning of actions for which God would reproach them, and what He forbids of the character of the world.'⁶⁵ These individuals are convinced that they pursue every possible avenue of drawing near to God. Unfortunately, as Muḥāsibī sees it, they know and even praise these stations, yet themselves are deficient in their practice. This is because they have not pursued God's requirements of their inner lives and continue to linger in the diseases of the heart. Muḥāsibī continues on to describe how their practice is deficient in each of these stations.

Here I will focus on his thoughts about the station of love:

In the same way he praises (*yaṣifu*) love toward God Most High, yet he is always with people—day and night—and forgets His love for God whenever something opposes it; when he desires seclusion or fellowship (*uns*) with His Lord, he rather feels alienated so that such acts become a burden. If he withdraws, he doesn't find in his withdrawal any

61. Librande, 'Islam and Conservation: the Theologian-Ascetic Al-Muḥāsibī', 138. Arabic, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-ʿilm*, ed. Muḥammad al-ʿĀbid Mazālī (al-Dār al-Tūnisīyah, 1975), 94.

62. See 3.1.3, p. 53.

63. *Al-Ri'āya*, 55 = ed. Smith, 19.

64. *Al-Ri'āya*, 56 = ed. Smith, 19.

65. *Al-Ri'āya*, 362 = ed. Smith, 286–87.

secret discourse (*munājā*) with his Lord to illuminate his heart nor any sweetness in the mention (*dhikr*) of [Him]; he turns his attention to intimacy (*uns*) with the created world instead, taking rest there and filling his heart with its delights—have you ever seen a lover forget his beloved?⁶⁶

In this comment on their pursuit of love Muḥāsibī uses the term nearness (*qurb*) in a way that indicates an awareness of God's presence. There is no indication that he condemns this group for their pursuit of these waypoints, rather they are hypocrites because they still pursue the world and the approval of men. But as Muḥāsibī sees it they are genuinely unaware of their shortcomings:

They praise the high rank (*manāzil*) of those who fear (*al-khāʿifūn*), who hope, who love, who depend completely on God (*al-mutawakkilūn*) and of those who have sincere intentions as well as the practical knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of these things ... and he supposes that there is nothing of what he has described that he himself does not possess.⁶⁷

When he examines his heart, he can't imagine that he lacks these high stations. He is confident that he knows about these things in ways that the common people (*al-ʿawamm*) don't. Though Muḥāsibī castigates the hypocrisy of those who describe these virtues without possessing them, he does have hope that they will one day realise their deception.

When he reflects upon himself in his desire for these things, he realises that he doesn't resemble them and that the only things he possesses from them are his commitment to profess his faith. He knows then that he is as bad as the worst common Muslim and that he has abandoned the exalted ranks and praiseworthy virtues that he has been praising. Instead he has devoted himself to blameworthy things; he imagined that he had left the things from which he had been saved. He realises that he has been deceived about these things when he reflects on [whether] he himself [has them].⁶⁸

66. *Al-Riʿāya*, 364 = ed. Smith, 289.

67. *Al-Riʿāya*, 365 = ed. Smith, 290.

68. *Al-Riʿāya*, 365 = ed. Smith, 290.

This passage suggests that Muḥāsibī is aware of those who pursue the stations of the renunciant path. He has made it clear throughout *al-Ri'āya* that he condemns those who trespass God's commands in their ascetic practices. Here Muḥāsibī beckons those who praise these virtues to examine themselves, without contradicting the virtues themselves. Can we suppose that Muḥāsibī respects those whose piety values God's love and nearness, and yet keep his distance from them?

6.2.6 Muḥāsibī and Knowledge

One of the most important features of Muḥāsibī's religious devotion is his identification of three categories of knowledge in *Kitāb al-ʿilm*.⁶⁹ The first kind of knowledge concerns the commands and prohibitions of God in the realm of visible actions. This 'exalted and praised' knowledge is indispensable⁷⁰ for the Muslim community because by its regulations the Muslim can store up provision from this world for the Hereafter.⁷¹ Scholars should be cautious, Muḥāsibī warns, because arguments about these matters can become objects of base passion.

The second type of knowledge concerns the 'regulations of the Hereafter, which is inner worship (*al-ʿibādat al-bāṭina*)'. Muḥāsibī gives an extensive list of virtues here including waypoints like disapprobation, pious caution and patience, all discussed earlier in this thesis. In addition to this list of positive virtues, Muḥāsibī gives an even longer list of vices. This list is far more extensive than the diseases of the heart explained in *al-Ri'āya*:

The other set of divisions which head the categories of what is unlawful includes fear of poverty, discontent with what God has foreordained, rancour, indignation, envy, deceit, desire for greatness, love of rank, love of praise and honours, love of life in this world, conceit, anger, rage, haughtiness, love of leadership, enmity, hatred, greed, avarice, stinginess, covetousness, fright, pomposity, insolence, wanton-

69. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-ʿilm*; Librande, 'Islam and Conservation: the Theologian-Ascetic Al-Muḥāsibī'. For the influence of Muḥāsibī's schema on Tirmidhī, Radtke, 'Theologen und Mystiker in Ḥurāsān und Transoxanien', 557.

70. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-ʿilm*, 83.

71. Ibid., 82.

ness, glorification of the rich, disdain for the poor, pride, arrogance, rivalry in this world, vainglory, hypocrisy, ostentation, ...⁷²

The final kind of knowledge is the knowledge of God, only briefly described in this treatise:

The third kind of knowledge is the knowledge (‘ilm) of God, mighty and exalted is He, and His plan⁷³ (*tadbīr*) for His creatures. This is an ocean, the depth of which cannot be perceived. Only the scholars among the people of faith know it.⁷⁴

Kitāb al-‘ilm restates Muḥāsibī’s censure of reducing religious devotion to outward compliance with God’s commands and prohibitions. He interprets the Hadith beloved by Muslim scholars, ‘The scholars are heirs of the prophets,’ to indicate not one’s mastery of legal sources and procedures, but one’s possession of prophetic virtues.⁷⁵

He [God] conferred upon them his [the Prophet’s] inheritance only because of their knowledge (‘ilm) of his ways, his model, his path, his rank and their standing among men and among themselves because of this [knowledge].⁷⁶

Though certainly this knowledge includes God’s legal requirements, Muḥāsibī’s emphasis is on the inner qualities and virtues that belong to the second kind of knowledge, and not the first.

Though I agree with Librande’s thesis that Muḥāsibī was intent on conserving the primacy of the Quran and prophetic *sunna* in religious devotion, I find it equally important that Muḥāsibī links these traditional sources to the incumbency of virtue, his second category of knowledge. While Muḥāsibī would surely assert that

72. Librande, ‘Islam and Conservation: the Theologian-Ascetic Al-Muḥāsibī’, 135. Translated from al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘ilm*, 84.

73. Including his active management of the world.

74. Librande, ‘Islam and Conservation: the Theologian-Ascetic Al-Muḥāsibī’, 136. Arabic, al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘ilm*, 88.

75. Ibid., 94. Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* 3, ‘ilm 10, *bāb al-‘ilm qabl al-qawl wa-l-‘amal*. Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ* 39, ‘ilm 19, *bāb mā jā’a fi faḍl al-fiqh*.

76. Ibid., 93.

‘prophetic *sunnah*... is the guide for [t]his second kind of knowledge and its practice’,⁷⁷ the main argument of the treatise is that legal expertise in prophetic behaviour is of no value unless the scholar also strives toward prophetic character and virtue. Moreover, debating the legal status of hypothetical circumstances may be an indication that a scholar is following his corrupt desires (*nafs*) in his scholarship, rather than pursuing God.

One important question is how legal scholars like the followers of Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī responded to Muḥāsibī’s teaching on the inner dimension of worship. Though *Al-Risāla*, the Shāfi‘ī school’s earliest treatise, uses the phrase *‘ilm al-bāṭin*, it seems not to refer to the inner dimension of obedience, as in Muḥāsibī’s works. Rather knowledge has both inner and outer aspects.⁷⁸ This principle is part of its argument that legal rulings are possible even when ‘true’ (Lowry) or ‘inner’ knowledge (*‘ilm al-bāṭin*) is lacking, specifically in cases involving analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). I am not convinced by Radtke’s discussion that this passage establishes a connection between this *‘ilm al-bāṭin* and the inner dimension of obedience to God.⁷⁹ The phrase ‘God alone knows *al-bāṭin*’ does not refer to a person’s intentions or the inner posture of outward acts, but to knowledge that a person is unable to confirm with certainty. In this passage, a person can’t be blamed if his genuine attempt to establish the correct direction of prayer is in reality mistaken.⁸⁰ Here *al-bāṭin* probably means *fi mā ghāba ‘an-hu*—what is concealed and thus unknown. Radtke’s summary seems to head a different direction: ‘A person’s righteousness is not revealed by his interior (*Innere*), but by his works.’⁸¹ Despite the occurrence of the phrase *‘ilm al-bāṭin*, *al-Risāla* provides no discussion of the inner dimension of worship that is vital in Muḥāsibī’s religious devotion.

77. Librande, ‘Islam and Conservation: the Theologian-Ascetic Al-Muḥāsibī’, 134.

78. Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shafi‘ī, *The Epistle on Legal Theory*, trans. Joseph E. Lowry, Library of Arabic Literature (New York: New York University Press, 2013), §577-85.

79. As Radtke argues, ‘*ḥikma*’ in the East, which he equates with *ma‘rifa*. Radtke, ‘Theologen und Mystiker in Ḥurāsān und Transoxanien’, 559. See also Meier, ‘Ein wichtiger Handschriftenfund zur Sufik’, 103–4.

80. Al-Shafi‘ī, *The Epistle on Legal Theory*, §606.

81. ‘Für Šāfi‘ī ist die Gerechtigkeit eines Menschen aus seinen Werken zu erschließen, nicht aus seinem Inneren.’ Radtke, ‘Theologen und Mystiker in Ḥurāsān und Transoxanien’, 559.

Renard's interpretation of this treatise and its place in Muḥāsibī's overall treatment of mystical knowledge also has shortcomings.⁸² He is determined to find the 'Sufi path' in the writings of Muḥāsibī despite the historical challenges of substantiating a Sufi identity before the second half of the ninth century. Most troubling is his assertion that Muḥāsibī uses the term *ma'rifa* in the same way as later Sufis. For example, he describes Muḥāsibī's third kind of knowledge as 'a still higher level of awareness of God (*ma'rifa*) and His plans for all creation'. Yet in the two passages that discuss this third kind of knowledge Muḥāsibī uses the term *ʿilm* and not *ma'rifa*.⁸³

Renard differentiates the third type of knowledge from the second by restricting the third to those that are 'endowed with knowledge of the next life'. Yet Muḥāsibī calls the second kind of knowledge '*ʿilm aḥkām al-ākhirā*', 'knowledge of the regulations of the Hereafter'. Renard comments, 'Only those who are willing to undergo the discipline of polishing the mirror of the heart have hope of attaining *ma'rifa* as they await God's good pleasure in granting it.'⁸⁴ Renard's conclusion that Muḥāsibī establishes *ma'rifa* as a category for experiential or mystical knowledge of God is not established by *Kitāb al-ʿilm*.

A counterproposal might suggest that Muḥāsibī's *Sharḥ al-ma'rifa* establishes this understanding of knowledge and that Renard is drawing on this in his conclusions. In this work Muḥāsibī explores four essential topics that are the 'pillars of understanding (*ma'rifa*)': understanding God, understanding man's locus of desire (*nafs*), understanding the Devil, and understanding the nature of good deeds. I have chosen to translate *ma'rifa* here as 'understanding' because unlike *Kitāb al-ʿilm*, the treatise is not concerned with epistemological issues. Muḥāsibī is not trying to define or categorise 'knowledge' in this treatise, but to explain four concepts that are essential for anyone who 'strives in worship'.⁸⁵

82. John Renard, *Knowledge of God in classical Sufism: foundations of Islamic mystical theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004).

83. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-ʿilm*, 81, 88.

84. Renard, *Knowledge of God in classical Sufism: foundations of Islamic mystical theology*, 21.

85. Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-ma'rifa wa-badhl an-naṣiḥa*, ed. Aḥmad al-Shāmī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1993), 23. Contra Renard: 'Muḥāsibī elaborates on the four fundamental

To give Renard and others the benefit of the doubt: the first ‘pillar’ in *Sharḥ al-maʿrifa* is indeed *maʿrifat Allāh*—the knowledge of God. Muḥāsibī’s introduction is essential:

The explanation of an understanding (*maʿrifa*) of God is this: that your heart clings to God’s nearness to you and His watch care over you; to His power (*qudra*) over you, His observation [of you], and His knowledge of you. [Your heart clings to the fact] that He is the Guardian who preserves you, that He is One and has no partners in His dominion; that He is faithful in anything that He promises; that He fulfils anything that He guarantees; and that he is generous when anyone prays to Him or calls upon Him.⁸⁶

The section then discusses various attributes and actions of God and the necessity of being aware of all of these.

Renard’s discussion alludes to one other passage in this section:

You will not receive anything from this [*maʿrifa*] unless [you] meditate on God (*dhikr Allāh*)⁸⁷ and cut off any preoccupation that fixates on anything besides this. God is God, and He doesn’t disassociate your heart ... from the shame [you should have of] Him on account of his nearness to you.⁸⁸

Perhaps Renard bases his claim for Muḥāsibī’s *maʿrifa* as Sufi gnosis on this section. Indeed this may be an explicit passage that links *maʿrifa* of God and nearness to Him. This ‘understanding’ of God, however, is in parallel with three other principles, making it very difficult to substantiate that here Muḥāsibī intends the third category of the knowledge (*ʿilm*) of God that he mentions in *Kitāb al-ʿilm*.

As for the content of this understanding, the character and attributes of God, including His promises toward mankind, can be grasped through contemplation of Him. Careful examination of these excerpts, however, suggests that ‘nearness’ (*qurb*) here is not intended in the sense of an immediate perception or awareness,

types of knowledge...’, Renard, *Knowledge of God in classical Sufism: foundations of Islamic mystical theology*, 21.

86. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-maʿrifa wa-badhl an-naṣiḥa*, 30.

87. Only in one MS.

88. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-maʿrifa wa-badhl an-naṣiḥa*, 30–31.

but in the general sense that God scrutinises the activity of men. Meditating on God and His character results in shame because of the realisation that He observes one's private deeds—God's nearness here seems equated with this.

If in two works entitled *Kitāb al-ʿilm* and *Kitāb al-maʿrifa* Muḥāsibī fails to distinguish between *ʿilm* and *maʿrifa*, it seems unlikely that the Sufi development of *maʿrifa* as a technical term for mystical knowledge begins with Muḥāsibī. Renard's ultimate conclusion that 'Muḥāsibī's work represents perhaps the earliest major systematic effort to establish the foundations of Sufi thought as a legitimate religious discipline'⁸⁹ seems also exaggerated.

What is more likely is that Muḥāsibī, as far as we know, is the first Muslim scholar to systematically address the internal component of religious devotion and treat that understanding as a different kind of knowledge.⁹⁰ While the heart is surely the arena of the virtues and practices that belong to this internal dimension of devotion, it is uncertain that Muḥāsibī posits the heart as an instrument of perception that functions separately from the mind (*al-ʿaql*). Rather when discussions of understanding and knowledge include reference to the heart, Muḥāsibī's intent seems to be the origination of an obedient response in the heart. Unless a pure heart lies underneath one's external acts of keeping the law, one has not accurately understood God's requirements.

Muḥāsibī's contribution is his relentless argument for the recognition of the interior dimension of religious devotion. Perhaps later Sufis could connect this to their esoteric presentation of *maʿrifa* as timeless insight, but it seems more likely that this became an important component in the Sufi emphasis on *adab* and *akhlāq*. Though Shaqīq recognises the interior dimension of religious devotion, his short treatise does not develop this as an obligatory dimension of religion, nor lead the aspirant through steps to emend defects in the heart.

After Muḥāsibī, Kharrāz takes the interior dimension of devotion to God for

89. Renard, *Knowledge of God in classical Sufism: foundations of Islamic mystical theology*, 22.

90. Radtke argues that wisdom (*ḥikma*) was equated with '*ʿilm al-bāṭin* in Khurāsān. Radtke, 'Theologen und Mystiker in Ḥurāsān und Transoxanien', 557–58.

granted and integrates it into his description of the renunciant path. For example, concerning *ikhlāṣ* or purity of intention, ‘The explanation of sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*) is that the servant desires God in his every deed, action, or movement, whether outer (*ẓāhira*) or inner (*bāṭina*)—that in all these he desires nothing other than God alone.’⁹¹ Compare this with Muḥāsibī’s comment:

He has enjoined you to sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*) in them [his commands and prohibitions] and to hold an intention for the paths of His guidance according to the Book and Sunna. In all your actions, there must be nothing hidden within you (*fi ḍamīri-ka*) except God alone.’⁹²

Perhaps Kharrāz was familiar with Muḥāsibī’s *Kitāb al-maʿrifa*. At least two and perhaps three sections of *Kitāb al-ṣidq* address the same issues found there. Two of Muḥāsibī’s ‘pillars of knowledge’ are identical to waypoints in the renunciant path of Kharrāz: understanding the locus of desire (*maʿrifat al-naḥs*) and understanding the enemy (*maʿrifat ʿadūwi-ka*). Muḥāsibī’s topic of understanding the nature of good works is found in the Kharrāz’s section, ‘Truthfulness in what is permitted and pure’ within *The Book of Truthfulness*. Though Kharrāz has a fully developed concept of insight (*maʿrifa*), he can also use the term in the same sense as Muḥāsibī to refer to understanding or applied knowledge about specific topics.

Modern debates about the nature of (Christian) mysticism draw an essential relationship between encounters of God’s presence and epistemological issues surrounding the kind of knowledge that reports of these experiences rely upon. While Sufis like Kharrāz developed an esoteric usage of the term ‘*maʿrifa*’ that claimed direct access to timeless insight about God, claiming that usage for Muḥāsibī is problematic. Nonetheless, it is common for Muḥāsibī to use ‘*maʿrifa*’ as applied or experienced knowledge. That is to say that *ʿilm* or knowledge is the factual information about a given subject, while *maʿrifa* includes the assumption that this knowledge is understood and then applied. In this sense, one can learn ‘facts’ about the *naḥs* or the world, but when Muḥāsibī expects the reader to understand the relationship of

91. *Al-Ṣidq*, 17.

92. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-maʿrifa wa-badhl an-naṣiḥa*, 38.

those facts to life, he can use the term '*maʿrifa*' in the plain sense of 'understanding'. This distinction is subtle, but useful.

6.2.6.1 Contemplation of an Inner Realm

This review of Muḥāsibī's religious devotion has explored his writings for indications that his prescribed virtues, practices, and beliefs have some degree of orientation toward an awareness of God's immediate nearness. Muḥāsibī presents obedience to God's revealed obligations as the centrepiece of his religious devotion, and methodically builds a case for the inner dimension of those obligations. Virtue and vice are granted rudimentary epistemological status as a category of knowledge whose comprehension is obligatory, especially for scholars who teach God's requirements. Proficiency in these virtues and termination of opposing vices, along with a practical understanding of key concepts, grant the practitioner a new awareness of the future blessings that await him in the Hereafter and even a longing for them. Self-examination and related practices grant an awareness of God's oversight and guardianship of the believer.

The aspirant approaches God through obedience to God's expectations. He also has certainty that God approaches him and is watching him. The certainty of God's forgiveness at the moment of complete repentance brings him to realise that God has chosen him as His friend. This experience grants him a profound sense of joy. Occasional references to prayer and even private discourse (*munājā*) suggest that there is an intimate, and perhaps reciprocal dimension to the *walī*'s relationship with God. Yet that relationship is not described as the 'love of God', nor does love have a notable place in his path of salvation. Key terms like fellowship (*uns*), nearness (*qurb*), and longing (*shawq*) seem best explained as the contemplation of eschatological bliss or God's oversight, and not as the preparation for or experience of God's immediate nearness or presence.

Muḥāsibī's elaboration of an inner science of prescribed virtues and contemplation of God within the heart falls short of the mystical knowledge that Sufis associate with *maʿrifa*. He seems aware that there is a kind of superior knowledge about

God, but leaves that unexplored and ultimately absent from his religious devotion. Yet the significance of his justification for revealed prescriptions of virtues and elaborate exploration of the attainment of those virtues should not be overlooked. Though Sufis like Kharrāz ultimately reject Muḥāsibī's censure of mortifying desire through the restriction of all pleasure, they do recognise and promote this interior dimension of religious devotion as essential for the renunciant path. Perhaps his writings even legitimised this interior dimension, termed *ḥikma* by scholars in Khurāsān, so that it could become an essential component of *taṣawwuf*.

Reading *al-Ri'āya* as the standard text of Muḥāsibī's religious devotion makes it difficult to suggest that there is a salient orientation of his piety toward experiencing or describing the immediate nearness of God. He does acknowledge that knowledge of God is its own category, but none of his works explore this knowledge as the goal of religious devotion. Though he employs terms that are used by later Sufi authors to speak of intimacy and reciprocal love, his usage falls short of describing an interactive relationship with God. Muḥāsibī did expect God to transform the heart and rid it of corrupting self-love, and to some extent he would have identified this with God's proximity to His servants. His insistence that the inner dimension of worship and obedience is incumbent allows a slightly mystical flavour to his piety, especially in comparison to those who seemed to value only compliance to the external dimension of God's commands. Muḥāsibī lacks key features of the mystical piety pursued by later Sufis and it is a mistake to identify him as a mystic. In the final analysis Muḥāsibī preferred the comprehensive exploration of the incumbency of inner obedience over a mystical piety offered only to God's elite.

6.3 The Mystical Orientation of al-Kharrāz

There is unanimous consent that Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz was a mystic.⁹³ I have demonstrated that Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz encouraged aspirants to journey along the renunciant path toward the complete denial of the world and its pleasures. The virtues and practices of his piety reflect the conviction that the natural inclination of mankind's desires toward pleasure and prosperity in this world must be extinguished through ascetic practices. Each person's place on this renunciant path is scripted by the nature of his primordial relationship to God and His light. His growing preference for God and corresponding disinterest in the world indicate his insight (*maʿrifa*) into a connection he has to the permanence of eternal affairs outside world history.

In this section I will discuss the influence of Shaqīq al-Balkhī and al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī upon the piety of Kharrāz. This discussion necessitates reflection on the interplay of the ascetic and mystical dimensions of his religious devotion. The division of Kharrāz's piety into a distinct ascetic phase as preparation for the mystical 'waypoint of nearness' will become apparent.

6.3.1 Influences upon the Waypoints away from God

My analysis of Shaqīq al-Balkhī's piety concluded that his presentation of the renunciant path had a salient orientation toward the apprehension of the dynamic relationship that God shares with His friends. That journey consists of four stations that culminate in an experience of reciprocal love with God. Kharrāz continues in

93. Reynold A. Nicholson, 'A Historical Enquiry concerning the Origin and Development of Sufiism, with a List of Definitions of the Terms 'Şūfī' and 'Taṣawwuf,' Arranged Chronologically', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1906, 322–323; Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, 203–205; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 55; Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, 55–56; Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, 40–42; Christopher Melchert, 'The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E', *Studia Islamica*, no. 83 (1996): 51; Gerhard Böwering, 'Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy', in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. F. de Jong and Bernd. Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 51; Saab, 'Sufi Theory and Language in the Writings of al-Kharrāz'; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: a Short History*, 56–50; Sviri, 'The Self and Its Transformation in Şūfism', 204; Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 7–10.

this tradition but segments this path into two distinct phases: Shaqīq's disapprobation and fear are expanded to the 'stations away from God', systematically presented in *Kitāb al-ṣidq*; while the 'stations of nearness' are an expansion of Shaqīq's stations of longing and love.

His presentation acknowledges Muḥāsibī's censure of ascetic practices by clarifying that though the renunciant path requires denying oneself any pleasure, even in what God permits, it does not compromise God's revealed requirements in this higher standard. This requires Kharrāz to argue against Muḥāsibī's model of the rich and well-fed prophet by marshalling an excursus of Hadiths promoting simplicity and poverty.⁹⁴ Kharrāz seems also to modify Shaqīq's abandonment of profitable employment so that 'some' engagement in the pursuit of livelihood is possible, again suggesting Muḥāsibī's successful correction of renunciant trajectories. Yet a careful reading suggests this as a concession—the true renunciant is still better off relying directly on God rather than mediated provisions, thus avoiding any temptation to rely on the world.

Kharrāz's 'stations away from God' also indicate the influence of Muḥāsibī's identification of several concepts whose understanding is essential to the path of salvation. The aspirant must have an understanding (*ma'rifa*) of mankind's inclination to corrupted desires (*nafs*), of his sworn enemy, and of the nature of good works. Though the truest understanding of concepts like these is mystical and only attainable because of primordial conditioning, their place upon the path of salvation seems to link directly to Muḥāsibī's systemisation of the interior dimension of worship, through the 'regulations of the Hereafter' (*aḥkām al-ākhirā*).

This interior dimension of religious devotion meant for Muḥāsibī an understanding of God's requirements of the heart, linked in *al-Ri'āya* to the virtue of *taqwā*. This vigilance is directed at obeying God's commands through careful reflection on the condition of the heart to make sure that outwardly obedient acts remain uncontaminated by mankind's base desire for the world and its pleasures. Through cultivated contemplation and self-examination lapses in obedience can

94. See above, 4.5.3.6, p. 139.

be discovered and abandoned through repentance. This active contemplation of the motives behind moral actions is accompanied by meditation on God and His promises to mankind. With diligence, this orientation of religious devotion to contemplation and meditation produces a higher level of awareness that may resemble the broadest understanding of mysticism.⁹⁵

Kharrāz also acknowledges the incumbency of the interior dimension of worship upon common believers. Though the content of sincerity (*iḥsān*) is the expected fundamental Islamic doctrines, Kharrāz agrees with Muḥāsibī that perfunctory compliance to legal requirements is deficient. Perhaps Kharrāz even follows the pattern of Muḥāsibī in his placement of repentance at the beginning of the stations away from God, after sincerity. This might suggest that Kharrāz considers Muḥāsibī's teaching to belong to the lowest level of rudimentary faith. In other words, the ordinary believer joins the ranks of the renunciants once he repents of all his sins, as Muḥāsibī suggested.

Once the aspirant is upon the renunciant path proper—within the ranks of the stations away from God—he begins to weaken and subdue the source of his corrupt desires (*nafs*) as he moves towards the stations of nearness. Progress through these stations away from God depends upon reconnecting with the utter satisfaction that his spirit found in God within his primordial identity. Whereas the virtues and practices of Muḥāsibī move the believer toward perfected obedience to the internal and external commands of God, Kharrāz's path adapts many of the same virtues as steps in the process of purifying the heart of the world's contamination.

Once an aspirant is upon the renunciant path, his disapprobation of the world leads his heart toward religious devotion that supersedes the revealed requirements of God's law. The aspirant learns that God has only contempt for the created world and so he is compelled to rid his affection of those things that God holds in

95. Though McGinn insists that 'mystics continue to affirm that their mode of access to God is radically different from that found in ordinary consciousness, even from the awareness of God gained through the usual religious activities of prayer, sacraments, and other rituals'. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xix.

contempt. Despite Muḥāsibī's alignment of inner states and virtues with God's expectations of every believer, Kharrāz shifts that knowledge onto the renunciant path by linking it to the supererogatory abandonment of the world. The practice of repentance is not enough to bring the aspirant into friendship with God because it only brings him from the *ḥarām* to the *ḥalāl*:

They observed God's requirements,⁹⁶ ... but they demonstrated their love toward Him by declining what He had permitted them to take. They abandoned what he had forbidden in order to serve [Him], and [they abandoned] what he had allowed (*al-ḥalāl*) in order to draw near [to Him].⁹⁷

This quote is taken from the beginning of Kharrāz's 'waypoints away from God' and hints at the substantial development he brings to Shaqīq's presentation of the renunciant path. Aspirants are summoned to disapprobation of the world not simply to escape its potential evil, but to realign their hearts with God's contempt of it out of their love for Him. He does not wait for the 'stations of nearness' to introduce the aspirant to God's love.

A disciple who chose to sojourn beyond Muḥāsibī's repentance along the waypoints away from God accepted the rigours and rewards of the renunciant path. Even before Muḥāsibī, Shaqīq had promised that an elite rank of the renunciants would have 'God's love cast upon them' so that they entered into full friendship with God. Though the renunciant stage of Kharrāz's religious devotion has its primary orientation toward ascetic virtues and practices, it holds clear promise of preparing the aspirant for a privileged relationship with God, one characterised by love.

These 'stations away from God' have an incipient orientation toward the apprehension and experience of God's nearness. Kharrāz builds into their presentation not only the promise of God's nearness and love, but key vocabulary like *ma'rifa* and *ṣidq* that will become essential components of the stations of nearness.

96. 'Wa-ra'ū ḥaqq Allāh', echoing Muḥāsibī.

97. *Al-Ṣidq*, 27.

6.3.2 The Mystical Orientation of the Waypoints of Nearness

The esoteric treatises of Kharrāz make it clear that the waypoint of love is a critical milestone along the renunciant path. As I argued above (see 4.5.5.4, page 151) Kharrāz has expanded Shaqīq's stations of longing and love into an entire phase of religious devotion called the 'waypoints of nearness'.

As the designation 'waypoints of nearness' suggests, this phase of Kharrāz's path places a high value on the proximity that God's friend experiences with Him. Love, satisfaction, longing, and fellowship indicate that God's friend has been privileged with a unique status before God, and that he enjoys an interactive relationship with Him. In the following section I will discuss the characteristics of Kharrāz's mystical piety.

Kharrāz presents an esoteric path that invites the aspirant toward an intimate relationship with God. Practically, *Kitāb al-ṣidq* lays a foundation for a privileged experience of that intimacy so that those who became true renunciants can have the necessary conceptual framework to process their growing awareness of God's nearness.

Earlier scholars like Muḥāsibī took Quranic promises of God's nearness to mankind seriously, but there is little evidence that this meant believers could hope to have a direct experience of God's nearness. It is warranted to speculate that theological concepts of God's transcendent otherness might have kept Muḥāsibī from shifting the focus of his religious devotion from obedience to the direct experience of God. Even Kharrāz recognised that the waypoints of nearness were reserved only for those whose abandonment of the world had eliminated the corrupting influence of their *nafs*.

The implication is that a mystical shift in renunciant devotion had to develop a compelling grounds for promising even seasoned renunciants an awareness of God's proximity. Earlier renunciants like Shaqīq described a reciprocal love between God and the renunciant as a light that God cast on the renunciant's heart. This metaphor of GOD'S ACTIVITY IS LIGHT was common enough, and allowed a be-

liever to conceive of God's activity in the heart. Yet it failed to explain how the believer could be aware of that activity in his experience. If the mystical experience of a *zāhid* (renunciant) were to be offered as a compelling option for aspirants, mystical knowledge had also to be substantiated.

6.3.3 Timeless Insight

Though not via Muḥāsibī, Kharrāz becomes part of this development and verbalises the mystical belief that the awareness of God's nearness is grounded in insight obtained in the primordial state. Though Muḥāsibī was aware that information about God and His commands had to be internalised as part of genuine faith in God,⁹⁸ there is no indication that he connected it with the eschatological permanence of primordial origins.⁹⁹ Though not as a technical term, he described this 'understanding' as *ma'rifa* that was necessary for any committed believer, and not as a higher level of knowledge possessed only by God's friends.¹⁰⁰

Within *Kitāb al-ṣidq* the esoteric nature of Kharrāz's presentation allows him to use the word *ma'rifa* in a way that would suggest to the novice this progression from 'knowledge about' to 'an understanding of'. Once the renunciant is exposed to the advanced teaching of Kharrāz, however, it becomes certain that he would add to his concept of *ma'rifa* an awareness of its timeless origins.

As I have argued, Kharrāz likewise structures *Kitāb al-ṣidq* around the plain understanding of *ṣidq* as 'truthfulness'. The novice initially imagines that he is learning from Kharrāz the 'true' meaning of each of these waypoints. But once he finds himself in the experience of thankfulness for his detachment from the world, the path of Kharrāz would open up to reveal that this *ṣidq* is in fact fidelity to his identity as an *ārif*, one who is aware of his primordial grounding in God.

The *Book of Disengagement* is an extensive argument that the Quran substantiates the identity of God's friends outside of the temporal world because they possess

98. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-ʿilm*, 81, 88.

99. See 4.2.1, p. 113.

100. *Al-Farāgh*, 43.

primordial insight. Though it would appear that Sufi circles never agreed on a standard version of these events, they were built around the Day of Summons and the symbolic origin of humanity within the loins of Adam. This suggests a second breakthrough in promoting a vision of the availability of God's nearness within human experience. The renunciant who had quit the world out of longing for God could now imagine his spirit's place in the primordial saga when it had received *ma'rifa* from God.

The significance of the imaginative dimension of religious devotion should not be underestimated. Both Shaqīq and Muḥāsibī urge aspirants to imagine the events of the Last Day in descriptions of the waypoints of fear and longing. Muḥāsibī devotes the treatise *Tawahhum* to imagining the details of those final events. But for the renunciant who becomes aware of God's nearness, the active narrative at work in his imagination is his spirit's experience of God in the prehistoric realm. Being unencumbered by body or *nafs*, the renunciant could imagine his proximity to God with no danger of compromising God's otherness.

As the advanced renunciant came to possess timeless insight (*ma'rifa*) and was able to internalise his place in the primordial saga, he had a theoretical foundation for explaining his experience of God:

Those who are strongest in their religion and in their [primordial] insight (*ma'rifa*) [about God] are those who draw near to God. Their understanding of Him becomes their nourishment; sitting and conversing with Him [becomes] their intimate companion so that the door opens between them and God. There is no moment when they are cut off from His benefits.¹⁰¹

With this framework in place, God's friend could communicate an intimacy with God that vindicated even exaggerated renunciation of the world. At this point I suggest that the goal of Kharrāz's religious devotion has been met. God's friend has abandoned himself to the unconditional provision of God, with no attachment to the world. Because of his primordial insight he mourns in this world, yet is able

101. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 23. Cited above, 4.6, p. 152.

to rejoice in God. His spirit interacts with God in reciprocal love because it is bound to timeless transcendence.

6.3.4 Encounters of Rapture

Within this intimacy are occasions when the choicest of God's friends progress even further into discrete experiences of losing their awareness of the world to become enthralled with God in their timeless identity. The citation above continues: 'Some of them are perplexed; some of them are amazed; and some of them experience rapture.'¹⁰²

Rapture (*ṭarab*) is the description that Kharrāz uses for the overload of an 'ārif's organs of perception with his primordial insight of God. He uses the metaphors of both WAYPOINTS and RANKS to communicate the progress of God's select friend toward the temporary suspension of his awareness of the world around him. The 'waypoints of lasting insight' end with the passing away (*fanā'*) of a friend's earth bound identity so that he is only aware of God's knowledge of him in eternity. This description in *Disengagement* seems to situate God's friend in a posture of anticipation for an even nobler experience. Perhaps the chosen metaphor of WAYPOINTS suggests that there is some aspect of human involvement in this progression, however slight.

Luminosity uses ranks and esoteric language to progress beyond 'anticipation'. The 'Ranks of God's Elite' (see Table 4.5, page 156) is a complex ranking of God's friends as they become fully immersed in the permanence (*baqā'*) of God's eternal knowledge of them. With the exception of the final rank, the title and description of each rank is cryptic, with very little commentary to clarify what Kharrāz had in mind.

The final rank of mutual love (*ahl al-muḥābba*, form III participle) includes an extensive description of those whose identity and character have 'passed away' into the timeless majesty of God.

102. *Al-Ṣifāt*, 23.

He disclosed to them the reality of mutual love and so they devoted themselves to Him completely. So he settled them in a place that is no place and severed them from [created-?] subsistence¹⁰³—they will not find any subsistence there. Through [His] selection [of them] He devotes Himself to them. He opens up for them the hidden contents of His magnificence, the treasures of His essence, and the origin of His light. He grants them an explanation of His nearness (*qurb*) so that they see His dominion and majesty with the eye of nearness. Then defects they might have disappear and whatever attributes they might have (*mā hum bi-hi mawṣūfūn*) are removed. At that moment they disappear into His majesty.¹⁰⁴

Within an Islamic frame of reference, this description suggests that the highest rank of God's elite can find themselves in an altered state of consciousness. Without speculating about the metaphysical nature of this experience, this select friend seems to lose his own identity, at least temporarily. The most difficult phrase in this description follows: 'Their attributes pass into His attributes through their insight into His mystery.'¹⁰⁵ The VI form *talāḥaqa* has the idea of 'catching up and joining' someone else. Saab translates 'their attributes pass insensibly into His attributes'.¹⁰⁶ It is important to clarify that this process of 'joining' begins with the disappearance of the friend's own attributes—with anything he might have by way of his creation. Later authors like Junayd and Sarraj would expand and clarify the concepts of *fanā'* and *baqā'* to avoid any hint of pantheism or incarnation.¹⁰⁷

Without borrowing from later authors it is only clear that God's select friend is no longer aware of the contingencies of his earthly existence. He is aware only of being joined with the permanence of his primordial proximity to God. For Kharrāz this means that in these moments he is completely free from any thought of the world or his place in it.

As *Disengagement* clarifies, permanence (*baqā'*) can only be found in this timeless reality because 'everything will perish except his face' (*Al-Qaṣaṣ* 28:88). Khar-

103. Perhaps both material provisions and ontological contingency are in view.

104. *Al-Ḍiyā'*, 30.

105. '*Talāḥaqaṭ ṣifātu-hum bi-ṣifāti-hi bi-iṭṭilā'i-him 'alā gḥaybi-hi*'. *Al-Ḍiyā'*, 30.

106. Saab, 'Sufi Theory and Language in the Writings of al-Kharrāz', 145.

107. Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of Al-Junayd: a Study of a Third/Ninth Century Mystic* (London: Luzac, 1976), 81–87.

rāz argues that primordial insight (*maʿrifa*), the spirit (*rūḥ*), and friendship with God (*al-walāya*) are what will remain—'everything that is not God'.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps Kharrāz's opposing list gives some indication of what he intends by attributes (*ṣifāt*) in *Luminosity*. Mankind's *nafs*, innate character (*tabaʿ*) and heart will all pass away.¹⁰⁹

The destination of the renunciant path is the unity (*tawḥīd*) of God. 'How can they not belong to the people of wonders and marvels since they have journeyed to the sea of God's unity (*waḥdāniya*) and reached the source of His source (ʿayn ʿaynihi), and the origin of his unity.'¹¹⁰ Kharrāz's path requires more than acquiring knowledge about God. The ʿārif must seek God's secrets on his quest for the true essence and source of *tawḥīd*. The ultimate source of *maʿrifa* is God's unity, which determines the measure of light that *maʿrifa* will produce in a person's heart.¹¹¹

6.3.5 An Encounter of God's Unity

The quest for an awareness of God's immediate proximity significantly influences the beliefs, practices, and virtues of Kharrāz's religious devotion. Though he is able to veil the extent of this orientation from aspirants guided solely by *Kitāb al-ṣidq*, the renunciant path presented there clearly leads to abandoning the transience of the world for the permanence of the friend's origin in God's light before the world was created. Those friends were chosen by God to find their way through disappointment in this world to traces of primordial insight in the virtues and practices that they cultivate as they tame the source of their desires (*al-nafs*). Those virtues and practices become waypoints on their journey toward God.

Toward the end of this path they find themselves alienated from the world's desires and thankful for the intimacy they find with God instead. As they move into the stations of nearness their longing for intimacy with God increases and they become aware of God's nearness to them. They are taught that their understanding of God is rooted in the primordial saga of their selection and intimacy with God

108. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 245.

109. *Al-Farāgh*, 39

110. *Al-Ḍiyāʾ*, 30.

111. *Al-Farāgh*, 42–43.

before the world was created. That narrative strengthens their perception of God's nearness by grounding it in the *sine qua non* of their faith—the unity of God. Ideally, insight (*ma'rifa*) into their subsistence in God's unity beckons them to episodes of absolute immersion in their existence in God. In that moment they are aware only of God, having lost perception of their own human attributes.

6.4 The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism

Understanding religious devotion as a conceptual hierarchy provides a robust framework for addressing 'the transition of asceticism to mysticism' in the ninth century. One is hard pressed to find a direct quotation of the phrase until Peter Awn's 1987 article in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*.¹¹² A quorum of scholars can be cited who generalise that asceticism was widespread in the earliest phase of Islamic history, and that mysticism is not prominent before the late ninth century.¹¹³ It is likely if not certain that Nicholson, Smith, Arberry, and Massignon considered asceticism and mysticism to be categories of human religious experience. Their research often considered mysticism to be synonymous with Sufism within an Islamic context. 'The word "mystic," ... is represented in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, ... by "Sûfî".'¹¹⁴ Whether those scholars would have unconditionally adopted the phrasing of this transition is debatable, and modern discussions have redefined nearly every element in it.

One can safely state that modern scholarship unanimously recognises a shift in the meaning of *ṣūfīya* from early isolated renunciants to its tenth-century designation for circles of Islamic piety that resembled Junayd's mysticism—perhaps even in the ninth century. One can only speculate why circles that resembled the Baghdad mystics became known as *ṣūfīya*. Given the research presented in this

112. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. 'Sufism'.

113. Ignác Goldziher and Bernard Lewis, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 116–166; Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 3; Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*, 157; Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, 45–46; et al.

114. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 3.

thesis, I suggest that ascetic piety was central to their renunciant path, and that they or their followers found the designation *ṣūfīya* legitimising. In any case limited evidence only suggests that some renunciants were named *al-ṣūfī*,¹¹⁵ that later scholars were able to identify small, isolated networks that were called *ṣūfīya* or *mutaṣawwifa*,¹¹⁶ and that the Baghdad *ṣūfīya*, at whatever point they called themselves that, were not embarrassed by the earliest Sufis. As I discussed earlier, it is unhelpful to designate scholars who pre-date the mystical movements of Baghdad as Sufis except in cases where that designation seems to have been part of their name.

I also suggest it is a shortcoming to assume that the salience of mystical components among Baghdad Sufis somehow diminishes the ascetic components of their piety. I have shown that the mystical components of Kharrāz's piety actually preserved his ascetic commitment to abandoning anything that perishes. Can mystical *fanā* be separated from the commitment to disassociate from everything that God upbraids? *Disengagement* clearly demonstrates this important connection. Kharrāz adopted the renunciant path of Shaqīq, clarified its more extreme ascetic components in light of Muḥāsibī's criticism,¹¹⁷ and expanded his stations of longing and love into a mystical sequence of virtues. Perhaps earlier scholars were too quick to dismiss the ascetic dimension of Sufi piety out of affinity for their mysticism, but I doubt that any description of 'a transition from asceticism to mysticism' intended to communicate that the ascetic dimension of their piety was abandoned. The clear relationship between the religious devotion of Shaqīq and Kharrāz should dispel that possibility, if it yet lingers.

Sara Sviri's recent work suggests that she sees things differently:

115. Sviri mentions that a few 'Alid notables also wore wool and were named *al-ṣūfī*, perhaps even rich ones. I have not noticed that any of these rich 'Sufis' were included in the biographical dictionaries. Sviri, 'Sufism: reconsidering terms, definitions and processes in the formative period of Islamic mysticism', ¶10–13.

116. e.g. Radtke, *Neue kritische Gänge: Zu Stand und Aufgaben der Sufikforschung*, 260–279. Though possible, I fail to notice any early 'Sufi' groups (pre-Baghdad Sufism) that were not composed of renunciants.

117. See 5.3, p. 191.

It is evident that asceticism and mysticism represent two separate and independent trends within Islam, at times at odds with one another and at times interwoven into one another. Each trend has created its own literary corpora, its own social affiliations, its own theoretical paradigms and its own ethical and behavioral codes.

Her primary argument seems to be that ‘diachronic, linear paradigms’ are insufficient for the early Islamic period. She is correct that there is significant diversity in the way designations are used in this early period, like *ṣūfīya*, but I am uncertain why this prevents the categorisation of its religious devotion or historical descriptions of how ideas about it developed. Limited sources often limit conclusions, but this doesn’t seem to be the argument she is making. The interaction of Kharrāz with his non-Sufi predecessors Shaqīq and Muḥāsibī makes it very difficult to dismiss the possibility of documenting a diachronic development of ideas in the ninth century.

As for categorisation, understanding asceticism and mysticism as part of the conceptual network of religious devotion significantly clarifies the issues she raises. As long as a salience of mystical features can be demonstrated within a person’s religious devotion, there is justification for calling him a ‘mystic’.¹¹⁸ Her observation that ‘mysticism in Islam existed before it became known as Sufism’¹¹⁹ is mostly correct. There were mystical components within some instances of religious devotion before Baghdad Sufism. One may even argue that divine love is the salient mystical feature of Shaqīq’s renunciant path—perhaps the example she had in mind. But her determination that Shaqīq’s ascetic practices were temporary and mostly insignificant¹²⁰ suggests that she means with her statement that this pre-Sufi mysticism could not have existed alongside ascetic components of religious devotion.

I am sure that the ascetic components of Shaqīq’s piety have prominence and that he was a renunciant. He remained a *zāhid* even after he reached the waypoint

118. I have already clarified why this does not imply that they practised ‘mysticism’—this approach makes no claim to explain what they called themselves.

119. Svirī, ‘Sufism: reconsidering terms, definitions and processes in the formative period of Islamic mysticism’, ¶17.

120. See 2.3.1, p. 29.

of love. The ascetic and mystical components of his piety are ‘interwoven’, but I see no reason to treat these as separate ‘trends’. And despite the mystical components of his piety, the orientation of that piety seems to me to be clearly ascetic.

The situation of Kharrāz, clearly associated with the *ṣūfīya*, is different. Despite his reliance on Shaqīq’s renunciant path, a distinct mystical phase of his piety can be identified. Moreover, at least among advanced disciples, his religious devotion is clearly oriented toward pursuing an awareness of God’s nearness. Nonetheless, the depth of these mystical components remains hidden from readers of *Kitāb al-ṣidq*. Moreover, like Shaqīq, advanced disciples never lose the light of disapprobation. Though ascetic virtues and practices cease to be difficult, the one brought near to God doesn’t quit those ascetic habits. Kharrāz’s understanding of *maʿrifa* and the primordial saga underscore the insignificance of the world’s pleasures and possessions. Yet again, these two facets of religious devotion are inseparable.

I too am not thoroughly satisfied with the expression ‘a transition from asceticism to mysticism’ because its terms are not well-defined and its wording might suggest the end of asceticism.¹²¹ However, as long as the conceptual hierarchy of religious devotion is understood, why contest that the mystical components of Sufi devotion have a developmental relationship to the renunciant path, and that eventually those mystical components became the identifying mark of Sufi piety? Are we forced by this statement to disregard their ascetic legacy or the continued centrality of the renunciant path in their religious devotion? We can even admit that there were mystical components in Shaqīq’s piety, as long as we recognise that this mystical orientation was (1) less salient than his asceticism, (2) that these mystical components have only a family resemblance to Sufi mysticism, and (3) that those mystical components should not be associated with nor labelled ‘Sufi mysticism’. I am also hesitant to assert with confidence that the first generation of Baghdad Sufis stopped identifying themselves as renunciants. I doubt that they used the designation *ṣūfīya* to draw attention to the mystical orientation of their piety.

121. Though I still wonder if any living scholar believes that.

I acknowledge that my revised interpretation of this catch phrase has less potential for capturing broad sociological currents in the spirit of the paradigms of Troeltsch¹²² and Weber.¹²³ Mueller's interpretation of Weber suggests his project established asceticism and mysticism as polar 'archetypes of religion or faith'¹²⁴, though Weber's discussion of Islam is very limited. By divesting these categories of any 'transcendental' content, mystics became associated with social forces of 'solidarity, mediation and harmony'.¹²⁵ Ascetics, on the other hand, became associated with 'personal freedom, rebellion and radicalism'.¹²⁶ I doubt that many scholars had this kind of sociological framework in mind when they discussed a transition from asceticism to mysticism.¹²⁷

The idea of a transition from asceticism to mysticism has become a provocative statement that begs clarification. Further elaboration of the conceptual hierarchy of religious devotion and its application to a broader spectrum of early religious scholars will provide better evidence to evaluate its accuracy and usefulness. My suggested interpretation of 'the shift of asceticism to mysticism' is this: In the ninth century, the religious devotion of an increasing number of Muslim renunciants gives prominence to mystical virtues, beliefs and practices.

122. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: Harper, 1960).

123. Among others, Max Weber and Talcott Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003).

124. Gert H. Mueller, 'Asceticism and Mysticism. A Contribution Towards the Sociology of Faith', in *International Yearbook for the Sociology of Religion 8: Sociological Theories of Religion/Religion and Language*, ed. Thomas Luckmann Günter Dux and Joachim Matthes (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1973), 78.

125. *Ibid.*, 83.

126. *Ibid.*

127. Radtke criticises Melchert for his use of Weber's categories, Radtke, *Neue kritische Gänge: Zu Stand und Aufgaben der Sufikforschung*, 257; written in response to Melchert, 'The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E'. Melchert clarifies positions taken in the 1996 article in Melchert, 'Baṣran Origins of Classical Sufism'. For a modern discussion of Weber's sociology of religion, see Robert N. Bellah, 'Max Weber and World-Denying Love: A Look at the Historical Sociology of Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 2 (1999): 277–304. For a brief critique of Weber in comparison with alternative models, see Richard Valantasis, 'A Theory of the Social Function of Asceticism', in *Asceticism*, ed. Richard Valantasis Vincent L. Wimbush (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1995), 545. For comments on the suitability of sociological categories for Sufi studies, see Baldick, *Mystical Islam : An Introduction to Sufism*, 171.

6.5 Conclusion

With notable exceptions,¹²⁸ modern scholars have considered Shaqīq al-Balkhī, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, and Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz to have been mystics. Within modern scholarship fundamental differences of approach complicate an assessment of their place within mysticism. I have attempted to work past this controversy by restricting my discussion to the religious devotion of these scholars as indicated by their writings and a critical reading of traditions attributed to them. I have suggested that a belief, practice, or virtue of a Muslim scholar's religious devotion can best be considered mystical when it claims an immediate awareness of God's proximity. In this model, the Muslim scholars I have examined would be considered mystics if the mystical components of their piety have salience within their religious devotion. This approach facilitates a careful analysis of their writings and does not expect research to posit their religious experience.

The short treatise of Shaqīq suggests an awareness of God's proximity through its heavy reliance on the metaphor GOD'S ACTIVITY IS LIGHT. He assures the aspirant that he will experience God's light in each stage of his religious devotion until his heart becomes illuminated with the 'strongest of lights'—God's love. Though Shaqīq does not address the epistemological status of this experience, his descriptions promise the aspirant an intimate relationship with God. Though there is scant evidence that he equated his experience of God's love with proximity to Him, his descriptions of God's manifest activity in the heart suggest conceptual equivalence. Within his writings, these mystical tendencies never culminate in episodes of direct awareness, suggesting that his religious devotion is not a good example of mystical piety. Moreover, the mystical orientation of his piety is secondary to the pursuit of denying the world and its pleasures. As an early representative of the renunciant path, Shaqīq incorporates important mystical features into his religious devotion. But labelling him a mystic gives too much prominence to secondary features of his piety that fall short of an immediate awareness of God's nearness.

128. Van Ess, Melchert, and perhaps Karamustafa.

The religious devotion of Muḥāsibī has its primary orientation toward obedience to God's revealed commands. The volume of his writings allow instances where terms like intimacy, love, and even nearness appear. Though Muḥāsibī recognises that these terms are an important part of religious devotion not his own, they are almost absent from the definitive statement of his piety in *al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*. He incorporates inner virtues as a compulsory part of obedience to God, even granting this kind of knowledge epistemological status, but never associates this teaching with esoteric knowledge reserved for God's elite. Muḥāsibī insists that God is the most important witness of mankind's actions and thoughts, but the knowledge of this supervision seems never to be equated with the perception or awareness of it. His method of attaining absolute obedience to God requires that the believer acknowledge God's activity in his heart, but this passivity is not described as intimacy or love. Language of drawing near to God means that the believer obeys God; and language that God draws near to man means that He guides him. God's friend rejoices in God's choice of Him, but there is no hint that God's secrets have been unveiled or that he passes into a heightened awareness of God. Research in this thesis underscores the conclusion of Van Ess that Muḥāsibī is not a mystic.

Kitāb al-ṣidq, Kharrāz's public manual of devotion, invites the aspirant to journey along a renunciant path toward God's proximity. His esoteric works reveal a complex framework of primordial knowledge that anchors the identity of God's friend outside the temporary pleasures of life in this world. Treading the renunciant path allows God's friend to understand that primordial identity and immerse himself in God's proximity. As he progresses, he is drawn to occasions of intense focus when his awareness and identity are consumed by his spirit's permanence in God. Though the renunciant path is a critical part of his religious devotion, it is this immediate awareness of God's proximity that is prominent. Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz is a mystic.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

Ninth-century renunciants developed the extended metaphor of the renunciant path as an integral part of their commitment to share God's reproach of the world. Before the boundaries of Islamic jurisprudence had hardened, early renunciants like Shaqīq expressed this commitment by renouncing gainful occupation and using hunger to diminish their desires. His followers would give up ordinary participation in the world in their pursuit of God's love and intimacy.

This renunciant path relied upon practices and virtues that were not considered to be incumbent upon ordinary Muslims. The cultural heritage of late antiquity surely contributed to granting respect and status to masters of this path, though within Islamic cultural models. Ordinary people believed that God had chosen these renunciants as His friends and that they had a unique relationship with Him. In simple terms, God loved them.

Whether actually formulated by Shaqīq or by his disciples, *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt* provides evidence that early ninth-century renunciants were comfortable pursuing God's love. This language of intimacy is the most salient mystical characteristic of their religious devotion and bears a family resemblance to the Sufi mystical orientation of nearness. Nonetheless, ascetic components of their piety had greater prominence within their religious devotion so that their identity as renunciants (*zuhhād*) was not blurred by this mystical tendency.

Though the outward dimension of Shaqīq's renunciant path was strong, the actual path toward God's love was a series of inward virtues: disapprobation, fear,

longing, and ultimately love. Though evidence is limited, the cultivation of these kinds of virtues seems linked in *Faḍā'il al-Balkh* to *ḥikma* (wisdom), where Shaqīq and other renunciants are labelled *ḥukamā'*. The veneration of *ma'rifa* within Sufi literature may have eventually obscured the significance of virtue and the inner dimension of worship.

Despite the growing recognition that this 'knowledge of the heart' was essential for success on the renunciant path, earliest evidence of religious devotion that aimed toward systematising God's revealed commands neglects its significance. While Muḥāsibī discusses legal theory alongside his systemisation of the inner requirements of God's revealed commands, *al-Risāla* provides no account of how one's inner attitudes or intentions might influence obedience to God. There seems to be an implicit claim within *al-Risāla* to address the comprehensive requirements God's religion,¹ yet none of Muḥāsibī's diseases of the heart are mentioned—though he demonstrates that they are established by the Quran and Sunna. Even if further research locates the discussion of these issues elsewhere, their absence here is notable.

Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī refuses to excise inner morality from his exposition of God's requirements. In *Kitāb al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh* he argues that God will condemn believers who pursue selfish interests despite their outward compliance to His commands. Though he recognises the virtues of the renunciant path, he castigates those who fail to practise the virtues they promote. Absolute obedience to God requires the proper diagnosis and treatment of the diseases of the heart, vices like ostentation and pride. Muḥāsibī categorises this wisdom as a distinct form of knowledge and gives it epistemological status in *Kitāb al-'ilm*. Without knowledge of this inner dimension of worship, mankind is unprepared for the Hereafter. Even those who memorise Prophetic traditions or know the intricacies of legal reasoning can invalidate their obedience if they neglect it. This knowledge of the interior is incumbent.

1. e.g. Al-Shafī'ī, *The Epistle on Legal Theory*, §16.

Though Kharrāz also distinguishes between the inner (*al-bāṭin*) and the outer (*al-zāhir*), wisdom as knowledge of this inner dimension becomes absorbed into the more important pursuit of *maʿrifa*. With Kharrāz the renunciant path is reinforced by a conviction that the world is perishing. The world's pleasures, provisions, and even its knowledge will all perish. God does not abandon his friends in this perishing domain, but has established their identity in His eternal knowledge of their primordial commitment to Him. The 'truthfulness' (*ṣidq*) of inner knowledge depends upon its connection to primordial insight, and the renunciant acquires it through loyalty (*ṣidq*) to his primordial covenant with God.

What has gone unnoticed is the failure of Muḥāsibī's project to anchor knowledge of the heart within the requirements of revealed commands. Continued developments within Islamic jurisprudence increasingly ignored it, while Sufis assimilated it into their pursuit of *maʿrifa*. Because of his contribution to the knowledge of the heart, they accept Muḥāsibī as one of their own, yet they seem content to keep that knowledge on the renunciant path, beyond what is incumbent for ordinary believers.

Shaqīq, Muḥāsibī, and Kharrāz were all committed to practices that would develop single-minded focus on pleasing God. Their religious devotion depicted progress toward this goal as a series of virtues upon the path of salvation. Muḥāsibī parts ways with renunciants who orient this knowledge of the heart around ascetic practices that go beyond the requirements of the Quran and Sunna. This challenge is significant enough that Kharrāz reinforces the renunciant path against Muḥāsibī's challenge, verifying that the ascetic dimension of the renunciant path maintains salience in Sufi religious devotion. A case has been made that the rejection of the world is behind their goal of experiencing *fanāʾ* and has an important relationship to the development of mystical components within Sufism. In this light, the mystical features of Sufi devotion are not easily separated from its ascetic pursuits.

Muḥāsibī's strong censure of supererogatory acts on the renunciant path yields another important conclusion. Despite some association with traditions of love mysticism, Muḥāsibī's religious devotion shares neither the ascetic nor mystical

dimension of Sufi piety. Yet his close association with Sufis like Junayd is undisputed, and he occupies an unchallenged place within Sufi biographical dictionaries and manuals. They considered him one of their own. Though subsumed under insight (*maʿrifa*) by Sufis, Muḥāsibī's careful exposition of the science of the heart was incorporated into Sufi thought. Though assimilated into their categories, they appreciated his warning that external religious devotion could hide corrupting vices. Historically, it appears that the cultivation of inner virtues can be differentiated from the ascetic orientation of the renunciant path. Because Sufis shared this value with Muḥāsibī, they eagerly incorporated him into their tradition. This makes it difficult to reduce their religious devotion to its ascetic and mystical components. The transition (*intiqāl*) of the heart from self-centred vice to God-focused virtue is the essential feature of their shared religious devotion.

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