

## ONENESS OF BEING, INDWELLING, AND UNION

### INDWELLING AND UNION [HŪLŪL AND ITTIHĀD]

From among the most egregious of claims that the biased partisans level against the esteemed Sufis is their ignorant and slanderous accusation that the Sufis believe in indwelling [hulūl] and union [ittihād]. This belief means, namely, that Allah ﷻ, indwells within all parts of the creation: in the seas, mountains, stones, trees, humans, animals, etc. It could also mean that the creation is in fact the Creator; that all that exists and can be perceived with the senses in this universe is the Entity of Allah, far Exalted is Allah above all this!

There is no doubt that this doctrine is clear and explicit disbelief that is against the doctrine of the entire Umma. Seeing that the Sufis have been the people of realization in *islām*, *imān*, and *ihsān*, it is not fitting that they would descend to such a low level of disbelief and misguidance. It is incorrect for a fair and just believer to recklessly accuse them of disbelief without benefit of ascertaining the matter and sifting through the facts or even understanding the Sufis' intent. A fair-minded person should become acquainted with their true doctrine that they clearly and explicitly mention in their primary books, such as: *al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyya*, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, the *Epistle of al-Qushayrī*, and others.

Perhaps some biased partisans against the Sufis will retort by saying: “This declaration of the Sufis innocence from the doctrine of indwelling and union is only for the sake of fleeing from reality or it is a biased defence of the Sufis based upon bigotry and vain desires. Why don't you provide proof from their own words, clearing them of these charges?”

In order to clarify this obvious reality, we shall present a sample of the words of the Sufis affirming their innocence of the charges levelled against them, accusing them of believing in union or indwelling, as well as their warnings given to the people, cautioning them from falling into this heretical doctrine.

Al-Sha'rānī رحمه الله said:

By my life, if the idol worshippers were not audacious enough to claim that their idols were Allah incarnate—saying on the contrary that they only worshipped the idols to bring them closer to Allah—how could it be imagined that the friends of Allah could claim union with the Real (Allah) according to how it is understood by those of weak intellect? This is high impossible with respect to them—may Allah be pleased

with all of them. There is not a single saint except that he knows that His (Allah's) Reality is completely dissimilar from all other realities, and that it is completely out of the realm of the creation's knowledge for He is All-Encompassing over them.<sup>670</sup>

Indwelling and union can only take place between things of the same genus, while Allah ﷻ is not a genus that would enable union between Him and other genera, so how can the Pre-eternal subsist within the contingent; the Creator within the creation? If it is the subsistence of an accident [*araḍ*] within a substance, well, Allah ﷻ is not an accident. If it is the subsistence of a substance [*jawhar*] within another substance, well, Allah is not a substance. Since indwelling between the creation itself is impossible—hence, a person cannot make two men into one because of their separate essences—the disparity between the Creator and the creation, the Maker and the made, between the Necessary cause of existence, and the contingently existent is even greater *a fortiori* due to the ultimate dissimilarity between the two realities.

The scholars and realized Sufis have never ceased explaining the falsehood, clarifying the corruption, and warning from the misguidance found in this belief of indwelling and union. Shaykh Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī رحمه الله said in his *al-'Aqīda al-Ṣuḡhrā*: “Far exalted is the Real (Allah) from contingent beings indwelling within Him or He indwelling within them.”<sup>671</sup>

In his *al-'Aqīda al-Wuṣṭā* he said: “Know, that Allah ﷻ, is One according to consensus. The station of the One is far exalted above Him indwelling in anything, having anything indwell within Him or having union with anything.”<sup>672</sup>

In *Bāb al-Asrār* he said: “It is not permissible for a Gnostic to say: ‘I am Allah,’ even if such a person reached the ultimate heights of closeness [with the Divine]. Allah forbid that a Gnostic utters such a statement. Rather, he should say: ‘I am the lowly slave in my journey and rest.’”<sup>673</sup>

In section one hundred and sixty nine of his *Futuḥāt* he said: “Never will the Pre-eternal be a locus for the subsistence of contingent beings, and never will He subsist within a contingent thing.”<sup>674</sup>

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<sup>670</sup> *Al-Yawāqīt wal-Jawāhir*: 1/83

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid*

In *Bāb al-Asrār* he said: “He who believes in indwelling [*ḥulūl*] is sick [*ma’lūl*], for the belief in indwelling is an incurable sickness [*lā yazūl*] and none believe in indwelling save the atheists, just as the one who believes in it is from the people of ignorance and waste [*fuḍūl*].”<sup>675</sup>

He also said: “The contingent beings are never free of contingencies, so if the Pre-eternal subsisted within the contingent, the belief of the anthropomorphist would be correct, hence, the Pre-eternal does not subsist [in another] nor do other things subsist within Him.”<sup>676</sup>

In section five hundred and fifty nine of his *Futuḥāt*, he said after speaking at great lengths: “This shows you that the world is not the Real (Allah) incarnate, nor has the Real subsisted within it, for if it was the Real incarnate or if He subsisted within it, He, the Exalted, would not be Pre-eternally non-contingent or the Originator.”<sup>677</sup>

In section three hundred and fourteen, he said: “If it were correct that a person could rise above his humanity and a king [could rise] from his kingdom, and indwell within his Creator, the Exalted, it would be correct [to believe in] the altering of realities and the Deity no longer being the Deity—the Real would be creation and the creation would be the Real. No one would have confidence in any knowledge and that which is rationally impossible would become rationally necessary, hence, there is no way to alter the realities.”<sup>678</sup>

In the poetry of Ibn ‘Arabī there are lines that negate indwelling and union, such as his statement:

*Abandon the belief of those whose scholar said  
That the One Deity is indwelling  
Indwelling is impossible and none believe it  
Save the scatter-brain who is grossly ignorant of Him  
And His Reality and Sacred Law  
So worship your God and with Him associate none!*

In section two hundred and ninety two, he said: “From the greatest of proofs negating the indwelling and union imagined by some is for you to rationally know that the moon does not contain anything from the light of the sun and that the sun has not transferred to it,

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<sup>675</sup> Ibid

<sup>676</sup> Ibid

<sup>677</sup> Ibid

<sup>678</sup> Ibid

rather the moon is only taking its place [at night]. So, similarly, the creation contains nothing of his Creator within it and nor does it indwell within Him.”<sup>679</sup>

The author of the book, *The Way of Guidance: Refuting Those Who Believe in Union and Indwelling*, said: “Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn al-Marāghī narrated to me saying: ‘I was once with Shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī—the student of the great Shaykh, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī—and I conferred with him regarding these unionists [believers in Divine Oneness]. I found him to be severe in his rebuke of them and he prohibited their path, saying: “Does that which is made indwell within the Maker?”’”<sup>680</sup>

As for the words of the esteemed Sufis that seem to suggest in their outward meaning, a belief in union and indwelling, these words are either interpolations, as proven by the above mentioned quotes in which they explicitly declared this to be a misguided belief, or they did not intend this particular vile belief and foreign way, yet the biased partisans understood their ambiguous statements in light of this incorrect understanding and subsequently accused them of heresy and disbelief. As for those firmly grounded in knowledge and the people of precision and fairness among the scholars, they understood the words of the Sufis according to the correct meanings that are in conformity with the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jamā‘a and they grasped their proper interpretation that fits with the faith and piety for which the Sufis have been known. The ‘Allāma, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī رحمه الله said in *al-Ḥāwī lil-Fatāwī*:

Know, that the expression ‘union’ has appeared in some of the statements of the verifying scholars as an allusion to the reality of Divine Oneness. According to them, union is an intense form of Divine Oneness. Divine Oneness entails knowing the Single and One, so as a consequence [of these words] this confused some people who did not understand their allusion, thus causing them to apply it in its wrong place, and by this they fell into gross error and destruction... [T]he basis of union is therefore impossible and false. It is rejected by way of the Sacred Law, the rational faculties, and the customary understanding according to the consensus of the Prophets, the Shaykhs of the Sufis, and the rest of the scholars among the Muslims. This is not the way of the Sufis; rather, it was only the belief of a faction of extremists due to their lack of knowledge and success from Allah ﷻ. By this belief, they resembled the Christians who said regarding ʿĪsā b. Maryam ﷺ that he

<sup>679</sup> Ibid

<sup>680</sup> *Al-Ḥāwī lil-Fatāwī* of al-Suyūṭī: 2/134

indwells with the God-head. As for the one whom Allah guards and protects with His Divine care, he does not believe in union or indwelling. If the expression ‘union’ appears from him, by that he only means the effacement of his ego and affirmation of the Real, Exalted is He.

It is possible that ‘union’ takes on the meaning of effacing opposition [to the Sacred Law], leaving conformity [to it] to remain, effacement of the soul’s portion of the world and keeping one’s longing for the Hereafter, effacing the blameworthy qualities and keeping one’s praiseworthy traits, effacing doubt and keeping one’s certitude, and effacing heedlessness and keeping one’s remembrance.

As for the statement of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī رحمه الله: “How glorified I am and how tremendous my stature,” this statement was made by way of quoting the Divine. This is similar to the one who said: “I am the Real.” It is not to be thought that these Gnostics believed in indwelling and union, for that is not thought of by one who is lacking in intellect, much less those who have been distinguished with unveilings of certitude and witnessing. It is not to be thought that the intelligent ones who were distinguished among the people of their epoch with sound knowledge, righteous works, spiritual struggles, and guarding the limits of the Sacred Law fell into the error [of believing in] indwelling and union as the Christians were in error regarding their belief in ʿĪsā b. Maryam ﷺ. This [belief] only occurred within Islam by way of the ignorant would-be Sufis. As for the Gnostic verifying scholars, Allah forbid they believe in this...

[S]o the upshot of all of this is that the expression ‘union’ is a homonym. It can be employed according to the blameworthy meaning that is the brother of [akin to] indwelling—which is disbelief—and it can be employed as a word synonymous with annihilation [*fanā*] which is a word that the Sufis developed in their nomenclature. There is no harm when it comes to words used in technical nomenclature [*lā mashāḥata fī al-iṣṭilāḥ*]; for no one is prevented from using a word if the meaning is correct and it contains nothing blameworthy in the Sacred Law. If that was unlawful, it would not be permitted for anyone to even say the word ‘union’, yet you say: “Between Zayd and me there is a union.”

How often did the scholars of Ḥadīth, the jurists, the grammarians and others use the word ‘union’ in relation to the sciences of Ḥadīth, jurisprudence, and grammar! The scholars of Ḥadīth say: “The routes of this Ḥadīth are united [*ittahada*].” The jurists say: “The types of walking are synonymous [*ittahada*].” The grammarians say: “The acting governor is united in both meaning and outward expression.” When the word ‘union’ comes from the realized Sufis, they only intend the meaning of annihilation [*fanā*] which is the effacement of the self and affirmation that the command belongs solely to Allah ﷻ—not the blameworthy meaning that causes the skin to shiver. Sīdī ‘Alī b. Wafā pointed this out in his rhyming poem:

*That I believe in indwelling and union they think of me  
Whereas my heart is empty of everything but the Divine Oneness*

So he declared his innocence from the belief of union that means indwelling. Elsewhere, he said:

*And the meaning of union is  
For you to know that all matters are Mine [Allah's].*

Here, he mentioned that when they use the word 'union', it means submitting all matters to Allah and abandoning all self-desire and choice along with Him, as well as facing His Divine decree without opposition and without ascribing anything to others besides Him.<sup>681</sup>

Al-Sha'rānī quoted from Sīdī 'Alī b. Wafā ʾAllah who said: "The meaning of 'union' found in the words of the Sufis is when the servant is annihilated in the will of the Real, the Exalted. It is said: "Between so-and-so and so-and-so there is union," when each of them conforms to the will of the other:

*And the meaning of union is  
For you to know that all matters are Mine [Allah's].*<sup>682</sup>

The 'Allāma, Ibn al-Qayyim ʾAllah said in his book, *Madārij al-Sālikīn; Sharḥ Manāzil al-Sā'irīn*:

The third level of annihilation: the annihilation of the elite among the saints and those brought nigh. This is annihilation from desiring the 'other' from the one who is struck by the lightning of desiring other than Him; one who travels the path of union [*jam*] according to that with which He is pleased with and loves. Such a person is annihilated in what his Beloved wills away from his own desires—not to mention the desires of others. What he and his Beloved will are in union—and by this, I mean that which is willed in relation to the religious command, not that which is willed in relation to the universal decree—so the two things that are willed have become one...

[T]here is no union that is rationally correct except for this; union in knowledge and information. So the two things that are willed, the two things that are known, and the two things that are mentioned all become one, whilst there remains a clear disparity between the two wills, knowledge, and information. So, the peak of love entails union between what the lover wills and what the Beloved wills and the annihilation of the lover's will in what the Beloved has willed. This union and annihilation is the union and annihilation of the elite of the

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<sup>681</sup> *Al-Ḥāwī lil-Fatāwī*: 2/134

<sup>682</sup> *Al-Yawāqūt wal-Jawāhir*: 1/83

lovers. They were annihilated in the worship of their Beloved away from worshipping anything besides Him. They were annihilated in love of Him, fear of Him, reliance and hope in Him, seeking aid from Him, and seeking from Him away from loving anyone else. He who is realized in this annihilation loves none but for the sake of Allah. He does not detest anyone but for His sake. He does not take a friend or enemy but for His sake. He does not give but for the sake of Allah. He does not hold back from or give except for the sake of Allah. He hopes in none but Him. He seeks aid in none but Him—his entire religion, both its outward and inward form is all for Allah. Allah and His Messenger are more beloved to him than all else besides them; he does not love those who oppose Allah and His Messenger even if they are the closest of creation to him, nay, rather:

*He takes in enmity those who show enmity  
From all of the creation in their entirety  
Even if it be the close intimate beloved one*

The reality of that is his annihilation from the desires of his own ego and self-portions for the sake of attaining the Good pleasure of his Lord, the Exalted, and observing His rights. That which gathers all of this together is the testimony of ‘*There is no god but Allah*’ [when said] with knowledge, gnosis, practical implementation, genuine spiritual state, and proper intention. The reality of this negation and affirmation that the testimony is composed of is annihilation and subsistence; for one to be annihilated from worshipping other than Him in knowledge, conviction, and devout worship, and for one to subsist by worshipping Him alone. This annihilation and subsistence is the reality of Divine Oneness that was agreed upon among the Messengers—may the prayers of Allah be upon them—and with which the Books were revealed and for which the creation were created and on account of which the legislations in the Sacred Law were made. Based on it, the Market place of Paradise was established and upon it, the creation and the command were based...

[T]his is one of the areas in which many of the people of spiritual aspiration erred—and the protected one is he who is protected by Allah. Help, success, and safety is sought from Allah.<sup>683</sup>

In another place he said:

If he is absorbed in the higher annihilation, which is annihilation from desiring any other, then no other thing that is willed remains in his heart, crowding out what is religiously, legislatively, prophetically, and Qur’ānically willed. Rather, the two willed things are in union; what the

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<sup>683</sup> *Madārij al-Sālikin*: 1/90-91

servant wants is exactly what the Lord wills. This is the reality of true and sincere love and in it there occurs the correct union; the union of what is willed, not a union in the One who wills or the will itself.<sup>684</sup>

Despite the fact that Ibn Taymiyya was an opponent who possessed severe enmity against the esteemed Sufis, still he declared their innocence from the accusation of believing in union. He interpreted their words in a sound and correct way. As for his declaration of their innocence, he said:

There is no one from among the people of gnosis in Allah who believes that the Lord, the Exalted, indwells within him or anything else of the creation or is with Him in union. If anything of the sort is heard being quoted from some of the major Shaykhs, then [it should be known] that most of that is lies forged by people of slander among the pantheists and liberals who were misled by Satan who had them join ranks with the Christians.<sup>685</sup>

He also said:

All of the Shaykhs who are followed in the religion are in unanimous agreement regarding the same things the *salaf* and the Imāms of this Umma agreed upon, namely, that the Creator, Exalted is He, is not a part of the creation and nothing of His Essence is within His creation, nor is there anything of the creation within His Essence, and that it is obligatory to single out the Pre-eternal from the contingent and distinguish the Creator from the creation. Their words to this affect are too numerous to be possible to mention here.<sup>686</sup>

As for his interpretation of their words, he said in his *Majmū' al-Rasā'il*:

As for the statement of the poet:

*I am the One who I desire  
And who I desire is me*

Here, the poet only intended the metaphorical spiritual union [*ittihād ma'nawī*], such as the union of one beloved with another in which one of them loves what the other loves, hates what he hates, says as he says, and does as he does. This is a simile and a likeness, not a union

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<sup>684</sup> Ibid

<sup>685</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*: 11/74-75

<sup>686</sup> *Majmū' Rasā'il Ibn Taymiyya*: p. 52



between two entities. When one is completely engrossed in his beloved to the point where he is annihilated in him and unable to see his own self, such as the statement of the poet:

*By you I have disappeared from myself  
And consequently thought that you were me*

Then this type of conformity is the union that is allowed.<sup>687</sup>

From these reliable texts it becomes clear to us that every mention of the word 'union' within the words of the esteemed Sufis means only this correct understanding that is in conformity with the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jamā'a. It is not valid for us to give meanings to their words that are in opposition to what they themselves explicitly declared regarding their adoption of the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jamā'a. The fair minded individual can do nothing more than have good thoughts of the believers and interpret their words according the upright Sacred Law.

#### **ONENESS OF BEING [WAḤDA AL-WUJŪD]**

The investigating scholars differed regarding their positions towards the realized Gnostics who believed in the 'oneness of being'. Among such scholars were those who misunderstood their words and hastily accused the former of disbelief and misguidance. Among them as well were those who chose not to embroil themselves in leveling accusations, seeking rather to ascertain the matter and go back to the Sufis in order to know their intent. These Gnostics, despite their erudition in this matter, did not research the issue in such a way that would remove the confusion of the theoretical scholars, for they spoke of this issue and wrote it down for themselves and their disciples, not for others who did not witness this oneness. For this reason, there was a need for clarification so as to put at ease the hearts of the scholars among the people of acquiescence.

Among the scholars who investigated this issue and understood its intent was the Sayyid, Muṣṭafā Kamāl al-Sharīf. He said:

'Being' is one, for it is an essential attribute of the Real, Glorified and Exalted is He. It is necessary, so its multiplicity is invalid [impossible]. That which is brought into being is contingently possible, and that is the world [*ālam*: all that exists], thus, considering its reality, it can have multiplicity. Its existence is only through the One whose ontic existence is necessary. If this [world] is no longer, then 'being' remains

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid