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A Critical Review of Shamsuddin Azeemi's "Murāqabah" through the Lens of the Qur'ān and Hadīth

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Abstract

Meditation is an ancient practice that allows people to think about the existence and the main purpose of their lives. It has various forms and is associated with the different religions. Meditation in Islamic societies/cultures is linked with Sufism (Mysticism). During meditation Sufis follow certain practices; most of which are common among different Sufi Schools (*Silsila*) including Murāqabah. This research article critically analyses the famous practice of Murāqabah, also presented by Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi, in his manuscript "Murāqabah: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation." Azeemi states that Murāqabah is one of the ways of achieving closeness to Allah and attaining gnosis (*ma'rifa Allah*). Azeemi has presented Sufi rituals systematically covering the fundamental aspects of meditation (mysticism) that comprises prayer (*Du'a*), contemplation (Murāqabah), and invocation (*Dhikr*). Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi's book is a complete manual containing detailed guidelines regarding Murāqabah and its various forms with emphasis that practicing Murāqabah will help "to attain closeness to Allah". According to the Holy Qur'ān and Hadith, closeness to Allah can be obtained by offering *Salah*, *Tahajjud* and sitting for *Itikāf* in the month of *Ramazan*. The critical analysis through the lens of the Holy Qur'ān and Hadith shows that neither is the term "Murāqabah" mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān and Hadiths nor is there any evident proof for the diverse rites and rituals associated with the practice of Murāqabah. It is a term coined specifically by the Sufis, along with its various forms and rituals.

Keywords: *Dhikr*, Murāqabah, the art and science of sufi meditation, spirituality, contemplation

Introduction

Murāqabah is a form of Sufi technique or meditation. Different religious scholars' studies and professors' researches show that there are various forms and techniques of Sufi meditation. The purpose of Sufi meditation is to help in improving the focus of the mind and its development. In fact, 'Meditation' is a universal term that stems from the Latin word

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meditatum, which means “to ponder.”¹ It allows people to think regarding the existence and the main purpose of their lives. Studying the history showed that meditation is an ancient practice that was first developed in India around 5000 to 3500 BCE.² The oldest Buddhism text shows the terms Dhyāna or Jhāna used for mind training, are also translated as meditation.³ The prehistoric origin shows that meditation was practiced by religious people and wandering ascetics. In the 6th century B.C.E., Siddhartha Gautama started meditation for attaining enlightenment. He shaped a methodology and practiced it under the name ‘Buddha.’⁴ He was believed to have achieved enlightenment after spending a decade of his life teaching meditation to a thousand people. Furthermore, three more religions became part of mediation like Jainism, Taoism, and Confucianism, respectively. These religions promoted purification, self-discipline, non-violence, and contemplation.⁵ In the 10th and 14th centuries, the Christians developed their form of meditation, based on the silent contemplation of God. This form of meditation was known as Hesychasm.⁶ In Judaism, the meditation is identified as Kabbalah, which means both reveal and receive. This process is used for spiritual development.⁷

The ‘Sufism’ concept is associated with Islam and was founded 1400 years ago. Unlike the most existing meditation techniques mentioned above, Sufi meditation is spiritual by nature and the purpose of which is to attain Allah’s mercy.⁸ Many religious people and scholars have practiced meditation in their lives such as Abu Talib al-Maki (d.386H), al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī (d.464H), Al-Ghazālī (d.505H) and Shahāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī (d.632H), and many more. The various scholars’ teaching regarding Murāqabah shows a basic concept and a techniques related to practicing it, but no in-depth analysis is available. Nevertheless, Al Ghazali’s study of contemplation is nearest to the concept of Murāqabah.⁹ The primary objective of all Sufi practitioners is to remember Allah with the whole heart and soul (*rūḥ*). On further research, many different orders of Sufism are found, each of which follows different exercises and techniques.

¹Rathore Sangya, and U. V. Kiran, “Effect of Meditation among College Going Students,” *International Journal of Home Science*, no. 4 (2018): 1

²Giovanni, “The History of Meditation (A 5,000 Years Timeline),” *Live and Dare*, <https://liveanddare.com/history-of-meditation>

³Tilmann Vetter, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of early Buddhism* (Brill Archive, 1988).

⁴Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 33.

⁵Tammanna Kuberappa Tukol, *Yoga, Meditation and Mysticism in Jainism* (Shri Raj Krishen Jain Memorial Lectures, 1978).

⁶Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Prayer of the Heart in Hesychasm and Sufism,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31, no. 1-2 (1986): 195-203.

⁷Boaz Huss, “The New Age of Kabbalah: Contemporary Kabbalah, the New Age and Postmodern Spirituality,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 6, no. 2 (2007): 107-125.

⁸Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 75.

⁹Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm Al-Dīn* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1980), 4:397-398.

The current study discusses Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi technique of Murāqabah through the lens of the Qur'ān and Hadīths. The work of Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi has become a *silsala* today similar to the *silsala* of Naqshabandi, Qalandri, etc. *Silsala*¹⁰ is an Arabic word, meaning chain, sequence or connection, used in the progression of the Sufi order; where a master transfers his *Khilafat* to his descendent.¹¹ The primary purpose of choosing Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi's work was that any analysis to this field and *silsala* has been absent and none of the previous researches elucidate on his particular style of mediation. With no research literature present regarding his work, most of the information was obtained from his book, his website and social media. The collection showed that the majority of the compliments were given by his son, who is a firm supporter of his father's preaching and teaching and a few comments and compliments were made by his followers. The current article highlights whether the meditation techniques proposed by Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi represent the real picture of Islam or not. The tenacity behind this article is not to defame any personality or the work. With all due respect, the in-depth analysis is conducted first, to find the reason and logic associated with these Murāqabah techniques. Secondly, to present the Islamic teaching regarding this subject in the light of the Qur'ān and Hadīth.

1.1 Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi

Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi is a famous religious scholar who has been active in the field of Murāqabah. He was born in India, in the District Saharanpur on 17th October 1927 in the town of Anbaith Pirzadgan. He has been the chief editor of monthly *Rohani Digest* Karachi and *Rohani Digest* International. His lineage traces back to Hazrat Ayub Ansari (RA), the famous host, and companion of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). He has written many books on spirituality (Murāqabah) and was involved in the establishment of fifty-three eighty Murāqabah halls worldwide. He served under the spiritual master Qalandar Baba Auliya for sixteen years. He has written more than 70 books that have been translated into other languages: English, Thai, Arabia, Persia, Pashto, and Sindhi. He also compiled a remarkable book on the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) *Muhammad-ur-Rasol Allah* (SAW) and other notable books are Color Therapy, *Ehsān-o-Tasawaf*, Parapsychology, Murāqabah (*The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation*) and many more.¹² Azeemi states "Muraqaba is the name of that contemplation (*tafakkur*) through which man is able to gain

¹⁰J. Milton Cowan, and Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: Arabic-English* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1979).

¹¹Riazul Islam, *Sufism in South Asia: Impact on Fourteenth Century Muslim Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹²Murāqabah Hall, "Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi," (n.d), <https://azeemis.wordpress.com/khawaja-shamsuddin-azeemi/>

the knowledge (*ilm*), which is the primordial knowledge of his Ego, Self or Soul. After gaining that knowledge, any man can gain access to his Ego or Soul.”¹³

1.2 Murāqabah and Qur’ān on attaining Ma’rifa Allah

Murāqabah (contemplation or meditation) is a discipline that is found in the field of Sufisim (mysticism). It is a continuous process in which a *Mumin* (believer) trains himself for achieving *Ma’rifa* Allah. *Ma’rifa* Allah (Gnosis) is a way to achieve full knowledge about Allah Almighty, the Supreme one and the Creator of the World. Gnosis is to identify the characteristics of Allah, which only belong to Allah and are only possible for Him to display, like *dhatiyya* and *ma’nawiyya*.¹⁴ The believer observes every single deed or act and calculates every second of his life to please Allah. The Holy Qur’ān is the final word of Allah sent to provide guidance. “The revelation of The Book is from Allah, the Mighty, the Wise.”¹⁵ There are several verses of the Qur’ān that provide guidance about achieving ‘*ma’rifa* Allah.’ Allah Almighty mentions *tafakkur*¹⁶ (thinking) several times in the Qur’ān. These verses urge people to think about the universe, the creations within it and the purpose of the creations. This will eventually lead man to think about his own purpose of life and to find the ways to achieve it.

Allah asks, “Have they not seen birds above them spreading and closing their wings, with none holding them except the Merciful One? He oversees everything.”¹⁷ Again Allah mentions, “Do (these nonbelievers) not observe the camels: how they were created? And the heaven, how it has been raised high? And the mountains, how they have been set firm? And the earth, how it has been spread out?”¹⁸ Abul Alā Mawdūdī explains these verses as follows:

How did the camel possessing precisely the same characteristics as needed for the beast required by the desert dwellers of Arabia come into being? How did the sky come into being? The sky whose atmosphere is filled with air to breathe in, whose clouds bring rain, whose sun provides light and warmth in the day, whose moon and stars shine at night.' How did the earth spread out on which man lives and passes his life, whose products fulfill all his needs and requirements on whose springs and wells his life depends? How did the mountains rise up from the surface of the earth, which stand fixed with earth and stones of different colors and a variety of minerals in them? Has all this happened without the artistic

¹³Khwaja Shamsuddin Azeemi, *Muraqaba: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation* (Plato Publishing Inc., 2005).

¹⁴Rahimah Embong, S. H. Omer, and Faszli Adam, “Techniques of Practicing Muraqaba by Sufis in Malay Archipelago,” *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 7, no. 5 (2017): 2222-6990.

¹⁵Al Qur’ān: Az-Zumar 39:1.

¹⁶*tafakkur* is to understand the greatness of Allah Almighty through observation of the universe, which is a manifestation of God’s attributes. Intellectual development takes place when a believer ponders over the Creator and His creation.

¹⁷Al Qur’ān: Al Mulk 67:19.

¹⁸Al-Ghashiya 88:17-22.

skill of an All-Powerful, AI-Wise Designer? No one with an intelligent and rational mind can answer this question in negative. They will have to acknowledge that each one of these things was impossible, without an Omnipotent; an All-Powerful, Wise Being to create these things, hence there is no reason to deny the Hereafter.”¹⁹

Another ayah in the Holy Qur’ān states: “You see the mountains, thinking them to be firmly fixed, but in reality they (are in constant motion) and pass by (with the movement of the earth) like the passing of the clouds. (And so will they be crumbled on Doomsday so as to take on the form particular to the other world.) This is the pattern of God who has perfected everything.”²⁰ These verses again stress on observing the artwork and thinking of the creator of the art. A person both requires and is forced to think wisely and apply exemplary *tafakkur* (thinking deeply) about the Creator of the world’s architecture.

1.3 The Terminology of ‘Murāqabah’

The Arabic word ‘Murāqabah’ represents Sufi meditation. The purpose of this exercise is to cleanse one’s basic character and develop a modest character in its place. The concept of Murāqabah is usually found in Sufi order in the form of *ṭarīqas*.²¹ The terminologies which are used for meditation are usually unfamiliar for the non-native persons, such as *Tadhakkur*, *Murāqabah*, *Taffakur*, and *Muhasabah*. Ibn Al-Qayyim says that meditation is an integral part of one’s preparation for the life hereafter by *Tadhakkur* (remembering), *Tafakkur* (reflecting), *Ta’umul* (meditating), *Istibsār* (pondering), *Tadabbur* (deliberating), *I’tibār* (contemplating), and *Nathr* (examining).²² These words represent different forms and shades of meditation. Ibn Al Qayyim states, “It is called ‘reflection’ because it is the utilization of thought and its procurement during it. It is called ‘remembrance’ because it is the fetching of knowledge which must be considered after being distracted or absent from it. It is called ‘meditation’ because it is repeatedly examined again and again until it becomes evident and uncovered in one’s heart. It is called ‘contemplation’ — taking lessons — because one takes a lesson from it to apply elsewhere. It is called ‘deliberation’ because it is examining the conclusion of matters, their endings, consequences, and deliberating on them.”²³

1.4 Murāqabah and Islamic Mindfulness

All these practices and types of meditation call the believers towards mindfulness of Allah and remembering His blessings upon them. The objective of all these practices is to free the heart and mind from threatening feelings and thoughts respectively. Islamic

¹⁹Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān (Tafhim al-Qur’ān)*, Vol., 14: Juz Amma-Surah 78 (Al-Naba) to Surah 114 (Al-Nās). (Lahore: Kube Publishing Ltd., 2018), 168.

²⁰An-Naml, 27:88.

²¹Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvi, *A Sufi Study of Hadīth* (London: Turath Publishing, 2010), 41.

²²Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Madārij Al-Sālikīn Bayna Manāzil Īyāka Na’budu Wa Īyāka Nasta’in* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabī, 1996), 3:156.

²³Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Miftāḥ Dār Al-Sa’ādah*, 1:182.

mindfulness involves the awareness of basic Islamic creed, ethics, laws, and one's psychological make-up. In the Islamic framework, mindfulness is the virtue of Murāqabah, a word derived from the base "to observe, and watching thoughtfully."²⁴ The basic ideology of Murāqabah is that Allah, who is the master of resurrection, is watching the believer all the time. A person is responsible to Allah for his/her own deeds, thoughts, inner states, feeling, and actions. As Allah says in the Holy Qur'ān, "Remember that God knows what is in your souls, so be mindful of Him."²⁵

Murāqabah is the contentment of worshipping Allah as per the proper understanding of Allah's name which conveys His Perfect Knowledge. Ibn Al-Qayyim writes in his chapter of muraqabah. "Murāqabah is to be devoted to the names of the Watcher (*Al-Raqīb*), the Guardian (*Al-Hafīth*), the Knowing (*Al-'Alim*), the Hearing (*Al-Samī'*), the seeing (*Al-Basīr*). Thus, whoever understands these names and is devoted to fulfilling them will acquire Murāqabah."²⁶

Murāqabah is a state in which the follower examines one's relationship with Almighty Allah in mind, body, and heart. The basis of Murāqabah is that Allah knows one's action, considerations, thoughts, feelings, and inner state of mind by watching one all the time. As Allah says in the Qur'ān, "Remember that God knows what is in your souls, so be mindful of Him."²⁷ The purpose of Murāqabah is to attain complete knowledge about *al-Ihsān* (spiritual excellence). As Prophet Muhammad (SAW) defined in *Hadith-e-Gabriel*, spiritual excellence is "to worship Allah as if you see Him, if you do not see Him, remember He can always see you."²⁸

Sheikh Al-Tuwajjiri elucidates, "Spiritual excellence is the essence of faith, its spirit, and its perfection by perfecting presence (*al-hudūr*) with Allah Almighty, and mindfulness of Him (*muraqabatihī*), encompassing fear of Him, love of Him, knowledge of Him, turning to Him, and sincerity to Him."²⁹ "The fruit of Murāqabah aside from the reward of eternal Paradise in the Hereafter is a state of tranquil calmness leading to contentment in this life, "The means leading to stillness (*al-sakinah*), produced by the servant's acquisition of Murāqabah for his Lord, glorious and exalted is He, to the point as if one can see Him."

²⁴Hans Wehr, and J. M. Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: (Arabic-English)*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Spoken Language Services, 1994), 408.

²⁵Al Qur'ān: Baqarah 2:235.

²⁶Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Madārij Al-Sālikīn Bayna Manāzil Īyāka Na 'budu Wa Īyāka Nasta 'in*, (1975), 2:66.

²⁷Al-Baqarah 2:235.

²⁸Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Bayrūt: Dār Ṭawq al-Najjāh, 2002), 1:19 #50.

²⁹Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Al-Tuwajjirī, *Mawsū'at Fiqh Al-Qulūb* (Ammān: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawlīyah, 2006), 2:1997.

All positive spiritual and mental states derive from Murāqabah, “for it is the foundation of all the deeds of the heart.”³⁰

2. Research Methodology

The methodology used is qualitative with focus on the content analysis. A complete in-depth reading of the Khwaja Shamsuddin Azeemi manual, *Murāqabah: The Science and Art of Sufi Meditation* was conducted, followed by the extraction of the different techniques and forms of Murāqabah stated by Khwaja Shamsuddin Azeemi. Moreover, their association to Islamic teachings and whether they are mentioned in the Holy Qur’ān and the Hadīths have been explored and discussed.

3. Analysis of Information

Shaykh Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi discusses Murāqabah in his book *Murāqabah: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation*. An excerpt from Azeemi’s book is, “When we try to learn a new skill or try to gain knowledge about a specific subject, we follow a guideline or a system, which demands that we pay attention to the subject to fully understand it. Our mind becomes curious to know the where, how, and what of it.”³¹ Furthermore, he says that “Murāqabah is the name of that contemplation (*tafakkur*) through which a man can gain the knowledge (*ilm*), which is the primordial knowledge of his Ego, Self or Soul. After gaining that knowledge, any man can gain access to his Ego or Soul.”³²

He also mentions the people who claim that religion does not discuss Murāqabah. His response is, “When we look into the teachings of Scriptures including the Qur’ān (Koran), we find that their main message is for us to contemplate. Contemplation means to explore with all the mental capabilities the numerous signs scattered all over the universe. The second main institution of religion is prayer (*salāt*). *Salāt* is a very broad term, which literally means to form a connection. Here it means that through contemplation a person is able to form a connection with the Divine. Contemplation is *Muraqaba*. Through obligatory religious acts, the most desired inward state is the station of *ihṣān* (higher awareness).”³³ Azeemi also quotes the Hadīth: “The Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) has defined *ihṣān* in these words: When you perform *Salāt*, offer it in such a way as if you were beholding God or that He were watching you.”³⁴

Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi declares when someone achieves the highest level of *Ihṣān* (spiritual excellence) through contemplation, this is indeed the way of achieving

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Khwaja Shamsuddin Azeemi, *Muraqaba: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation* (Plato Publishing Inc., 2005).

³²Ibid.

³³Khwaja Shamsuddin Azeemi, *Muraqaba: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation*, 42-43.

³⁴Ibid., 43.

gnosis of Allah. For more emphasis on his point of view, he quotes a few verses related to contemplation from the Holy Qur'ān which are as follows.

Those who remember Allah standing, and sitting and on their sides and they reflect on (the) creation (of) the heavens and the earth, "Our Lord, not You have created this (in) vain. Glory be to You, so save us (from the) punishment (of) the Fire.";³⁵ "And indeed, We adorned the lowest heaven with 'stars like' lamps, and made them 'as missiles' for stoning 'eavesdropping' devils, for whom We have also prepared the torment of the Blaze. Those who disbelieve in their Lord will suffer the punishment of Hell. What an evil destination!"³⁶

In Surah Rahman, Allah Subhan wa Tallah mentions, "O' throng of humans and Jins! If you have the power to cross the boundaries of the universe, then do so. You could not except through Sultan (spiritual ability)."³⁷

All the verses above discuss the level of faith (Imān). This faith compels believers to observe. Sufi Saints always recommend Murāqabah to attain the highest level of observation. Shaykh Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi focuses and informs, "In human cognition, there exists a light that can observe the inner dimension (*bātin*) of any outward object (*zahir*) or the hidden state (*ghayb*) of a being. The observation of the hidden realm (*ghayb*) could declassify any being of the outward (*zahir*). In other words, when we witness the hidden reality of any being then its outward form could no longer be hidden from us. Through this process, the limits of the outward are revealed to the human consciousness and it becomes increasingly possible to learn where the outward had originated."³⁸

The concept of meditation is found in almost every religion around the globe, in Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.³⁹ There are several examples showing that Allah's messengers used to perform contemplation for recognizing Allah's signs profoundly. Azeemi denotes the contemplation of Hazrat Abraham as follows: "When the Prophet Abraham was growing up, there came a moment during the search for the truth when he became deeply contemplative. During this gnostic phase of the search for the Beloved, his mind at first turned to the outward objects and toward the very thought of who his Creator was and where He was. That became a focal point of his quest. The depth of the awareness finally created a way towards gnosis and he directly received the Divine Guidance (*hidaya*)."⁴⁰ In the Qur'ān (Koran), the quest of Abraham is mentioned in Surah al An'ām.

Further he gives the example of Moses, he states "After freeing the Israelites from the slavery of Pharaoh, Moses on his way towards the Promised Land spent some time in the

³⁵Al Qur'ān: Al'Imrān 3:191.

³⁶Al-Mulk 67:5-6.

³⁷Al-Rehman 33:55.

³⁸Azeemi, *Muraqaba: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation*, 20.

³⁹Halvor Eifring, ed., *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Cultural Histories* (A & C Black, 2013).

⁴⁰Azeemi, *Muraqaba: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation*, 20.

Sinai Desert. There he left his brother Aaron in charge of the community and went towards what is known today as Mount of Moses (*jabal al musa, koh-e-tūr*) on God's Will. There, he spent forty days and forty nights and received the Torah.⁴¹ Similarly, He quotes an example of Cave of Hira, the excerpt from his book narrates, "A major turn in the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) came when he started to retreat monthly for few days at a cave around three miles away from the city of Mecca. After spending a few days there on his own he would return to his home and family in Mecca. He would take with him food and water as well. Food consisted of dates and crushed beans. Evidently, he was going there to achieve mental concentration, as this happened before the declaration of Prophethood and at that time there existed no system of prayer among the small number of monotheist Arabs for praying to the True God. According to the Sufi point of view, he was using the retreat to practice Murāqaba. During his stay, his mind would contemplate the mysteries of the Universe and the Divine Essence. When that concentration reached its zenith, he started witnessing the unseen."⁴² These examples suggest that Azeemi relates these examples to prove that the prophets of Allah practiced Murāqabah.

Furthermore, Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi discusses numerous techniques to perform Murāqabah, the concept of *kashf* (reveal),⁴³ spiritual journey, classification of Murāqabah,⁴⁴ posture style for Murāqabah, the timing and place for Murāqabah, materials that can be helpful for Murāqabah,⁴⁵ exercises to improve concentration and focus,⁴⁶ Murāqabah of coloured lights⁴⁷ and *Tasawur* (Imagination) during Murāqabah.⁴⁸ The Murāqabah experts also taught their students various methods of performing Murāqabah, the Murāqabah of *kashf ul quboor* (vision of the grave). The purpose of this is to reveal life after death. Similarly, students perform Murāqabah with different colours of light to observe the effect of pure light, which is called nūr.⁴⁹ Murāqabah is performed in stages when a student completes one stage; he progresses to the next stage. The students practicing Murāqabah of imagination are required to think about their *shaykh*. All these specialized Murāqabah awaken the hidden abilities of the student, which enable the student to rise and get better benefits from these abilities.⁵⁰

He describes meditation as "Everyone from birth to death spends their life in two conditions. In other words, in human consciousness, there are two types of conditions that exist in every moment-of our life. One of these states is waking up and the other is sleeping

⁴¹Ibid., 49.

⁴²Azeemi, *Muraqaba: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation*, 50.

⁴³Ibid., 84-90.

⁴⁴Ibid., 97.

⁴⁵Ibid., 99-102.

⁴⁶Ibid., 108.

⁴⁷Ibid., 117.

⁴⁸Ibid., 102.

⁴⁹Ibid., 136-139.

⁵⁰Ibid., 154-155.

or dreaming. In a waking state, they are trapped in Time and Space, and during their sleep, they are free from space-time constraints. This freedom of space and time is achieved through Murāqabah by changing the state of sleep from dreaming to a waking state. Because during the time of Murāqabah, a person experiences the same condition as in a dream or dreams."⁵¹ Furthermore, he says "it seems that the person performing the Murāqabah is just sitting in a pose with their eyes closed. However, closing the eyes and adopting a particular posture does not serve the purpose. In fact, Murāqabah is the angle of perception through which a person performing Murāqabah frees himself from external (*zahir*) feelings and begins his journey into internal (*bātin*) feelings."⁵²

Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi emphasizes colors; he states that colors play a pivotal role in the field of emotion and feelings. Moreover, he adds "when the color of the room is red, it creates a feeling of burden or heaviness but if the same room is colored blue then peace and serenity is felt. Greenery and colorful flowers help us to get rid of mental and physical fatigue. However, when the same trees become leafless during autumn our feelings change as well."⁵³ Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi further states that, "In the spiritual sciences, the color code is intentionally changed in a student so that his or her mind could come close to the subconscious senses. Continued practice of Murāqabah also helps in improving coloration in the senses. It is imperative that changes in the colors must be done solely to improve or to awaken any specific skill."⁵⁴

Furthermore, he discusses the two stages of the spiritual journey. In the first stage, the student witnesses the event and reaches the Divine Throne (*Arsh Elahii*)⁵⁵, and receives *Sifaat Elahiya (Tajalli)*⁵⁶. According to Sufism, this concept is called *Sayr Afaaq*⁵⁷ (journey towards Heavens). When a student observes God's enlightenment, then the journey of the inner self starts, which is called *Sayr Anfas* (Journey of Self). At this level, the student sees beyond the Divine Throne in the form of *Tajalli*. To add more emphasis to his point of view, he quotes the following verse from the Qur'ān, "We will show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that this Qur'ān is the truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is a Witness over all things?"⁵⁸

Another form of Murāqabah is *Tassawar Rasūl*; the student imagines that he is in *Masjid e Nabawi* and feels the light from the city of Madina. The student imagines that he

⁵¹Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi, *Muraqaba: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation*, 7.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 117.

⁵⁴Azeemi, *Muraqaba*, 118.

⁵⁵Ibid., 116.

⁵⁶Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi, *Muraqaba: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation*, 88-90.

⁵⁷Ibid., 117.

⁵⁸Al Qur'ān: Fussilāt 41:53.

or she is sitting with Prophet Muhammad (SAW.), and Prophet Muhammad (SAW.) is watching him.⁵⁹

The complete analysis includes excerpts taken from the book of Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi. All these concepts of Murāqabah will be discussed one by one in the following section.

4. Findings and Discussion

After studying the various Qur'ānic Verses and Hadiths quoted in the book. It represents that not a single verse or Hadith has been found that mentions the word "Murāqabah." Islam does not deny seclusion, but the way the Khwaja Shamsuddin Azeemi has presented Murāqabah is questionable. The Islamic teaching that can be assumed nearest to Murāqabah might be Salah in the first place, followed by *Dhikr* (remembrance) and *Taddabur* (prudence). Islam promotes both the concept and the objective of prayer to attain Allah's mercy and inclination. "Seek help with the *Salāt* and fortitude: no doubt, *Salāt* is a hard task but not for those obedient servants."⁶⁰

It is essential to focus on the conditions and reasons behind the seclusion performed by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the cave of Hira. The religious scholars have different views regarding this: some say this was done before the Prophet-hood. After Prophet-hood, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) did not go for seclusion; instead, he preferred *Tahajjud*. The highest form of prayer is *Tahajjud* which is highly recommended for believers to attain closeness to Allah Almighty. After getting *Nabuwwat* (Prophet-hood), Prophet Muhammad (SAW.) performed *Tahajjud* on a daily basis. As mentioned in the Qur'ān, "And in some parts of the night (also) offer the Salah with it as an additional prayer for you. It may be that your Lord will raise you to *Maqām Mahmūd*."⁶¹

Several Hadīths describe the importance of the worship at night, reported by Abu Hurayra (RA) that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Our Lord, the Blessed and Exalted, descends to the lowest heaven every night when a third of the night remains. He says, 'Who is calling on Me so that I can answer him? Who is asking Me for something so that I can give to him? 'Who is asking Me for forgiveness so that I can forgive him?'"⁶²

The phrase "*Maqām Mahmūd*"⁶³ praiseworthy position" is used only one time in the Qur'ān. Allah promises the believers about the most significant reward which can be achieved through *Tahajjud*. It is a sort of trading with Allah. Offer *Tahajjud*, Allah will raise your position. Each religion does meditate in its specific domain like Sufi do *dhikr*

⁵⁹Khwaja Shamsuddin Azeemi, *Muraqaba: The Art and Science of Sufi Meditation*, 156.

⁶⁰Al Baqara 2:45.

⁶¹Al Isra 17:79.

⁶²Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Al-Bukhārī, *Jami as Sahih Bukhari*, "Al-Adab al-Mufrad," (Dar al-Salam, 2003), hadīth no, 1145.

⁶³Al-'Isra' 17:79.

(remembrance) of Allah. The Zen Buddhists perform meditation in their specific mystical way. Majority of the Muslims perform *Tahajjud*, to connect with Allah. Sufis have various forms of *dhikr*. Catholics have rosaries. The mainstream Muslims have *Tahajjud*, that they use and can use to connect with Allah and spend long hours in His presence. *Tahajjud* complies with Allah's command when Allah says in the Qur'an "And for part of the night, prostrate yourself to Him, and glorify Him long into the night."⁶⁴

Another form of seclusion is *Itikāf* (isolation) in the last ten days of *Ramazan*. This form of worship is associated with *Ramazan*, and it is contingent on the last ten days of *Ramazan* in which, believers are not allowed to participate in worldly affairs instead, they have to stay in the mosque and spend ten days according to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) *Sunnah*. This seclusion form is also completely different from the form of *Murāqabah* discussed in Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi's book and shows that it was not practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW); hence, it is not a part of any Hadīths or *Sunnah*.

If any form of *Murāqabah* is used to cure a disease and people receive positive results from it, then this act is considered as "Mubāh." Mubāh are those acts which are religiously permissible they do not come under the category of major sin.⁶⁵ The *Murāqabah* of Colored lights discussed by Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi declares that when a follower is asked to sit in a position and imagine the blue light is falling from the sky and travelling into the body spreading positivity. The performer of *Murāqabah* will get positive energy and will be cured from depression and psychological issues. Such techniques that are used cure any disease, are allowed, and come under the category of Mubāh (permissible acts).

The activities that come under Mubāh and from which a Muslim's Imān is protected are permitted. Currently, the techniques used for *Murāqabah* can be placed in the category of Mubāh because these acts do not affect believer's faith. It is essential to remember that all these activities are not part of Islamic teaching and do not have any connection with worship or the revealed knowledge of scripture (Holy Qur'an). Additionally, such practices should be considered as a therapeutic techniques rather than a part of Islamic practices. If anyone associates these activities to Islam and takes them as obligations then, it must be discouraged. *Deen-e Islam* was completed when the Holy Qur'an was revealed and the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was declared the last messenger. Allah says in Qur'an: "This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion. But whoever is forced by severe hunger with no inclination to sin - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."⁶⁶ When Allah says that the Prophet (SAW) is a role model, it means we, the Muslims, have to follow his teaching and way of worship. Allah declares in the Holy Qur'an "Believers, do not advance before Allah and His Messenger, and fear Allah. Verily Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing"⁶⁷ and,

⁶⁴Ad-Dahr 76:26.

⁶⁵John Haywood, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (Arabic-English)*. (1980), 246-248.

⁶⁶Al Mai'dha 5:3.

⁶⁷Al Hujurat 49:1.

“O you who have believed, obey God and obey the messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you should believe in God and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best result.”⁶⁸

These verses indicate that believers are not allowed to add or deduct anything from the teaching, which is celestial, and has been completed. The person who tries to damage the real picture of Islam is actually committing *Bid'ah* (innovation). There are two types of innovation, one is good innovation, and the second is not allowed. The innovations used for the betterment of Islam as well as all Muslim of the world and are unanimously agreed upon are categorized as good innovation. This innovation is allowed because the Muslims derive benefits from it. On the other hand, innovations with ambiguity and not followed by the majority of Muslims are categorized as the innovation that is not allowed. According to *Sahih Muslim*, “Whosoever introduced a beneficiary action in Islam will be rewarded for his practice as well as for the practice of the people who follow him, without lessening their reward. Whosoever introduced a bad practice in Islam will take the sin for it as well as the sin of the people who follow him, without lessening their sin.”⁶⁹

Imam Shafiee (May God have mercy on him) explains that the meaning of innovation according to Islamic law is, ‘that which contradicts the book of God and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the actions of the companions and those who came after them, or what has been established by general agreement of the scholars. This is what is to be known as an innovation that is falsehood. As to the second meaning of innovation, then [if this form of innovation is] good and does not contradict any of the above mentioned, then this is not an innovation that is blameworthy. It was said by Umar ibn Al-Khattab after he established the *Taraweeh* as a communal affair that ‘the best of innovations is this,’ meaning that this innovation was not found prior to him, and if it had been found earlier then there would be nothing in it to be rejected.’⁷⁰

Moreover, a Hadith describes the meaning of innovation as, “The worst of things are those that are newly invented; every newly-invented thing is an innovation and every innovation is going astray, and every going astray is in the Fire.”⁷¹ This Hadith clearly defines that, all those techniques which are used for meditation (Murāqabah) cannot be the part of Islam. If someone tries to give them the name of Islamic teaching, then they are innovating which is not allowed.

Another marked point of contradiction observed in the manual was the use of Islamic terminology for meditation. The different techniques were named as *Arsh Elahii*, *tadjalli Ellahi*, *Arshe Bareen*, etc. This should be avoided as the use of Islamic terminology will create misconceptions that these acts are religious acts. The non-Arab Muslims and people who do not speak Arabic may affiliate these practices to be a part of Islam, giving rise to

⁶⁸An Nisa 4:49.

⁶⁹Muslim b Hajjaj, *Sahih al-Muslim*, “The Book of Faith,” Hadith no 431.

⁷⁰Fakhr al Din Razi, *Manaqib al-imam al-Shafi'i* (Beirut: Dar 1993), 1/469.

⁷¹Muslim b Hajjaj, *Sahih al-Muslim*, “The Book of Prayers,” Hadith no., 867.

the mistaken belief that Islamic religion permits such activities. As they may not be having a full understanding of the religion, such conception can be misleading. With this said, it is the duty of every Muslim to read the Holy Qur'ān in Arabic and learn Arabic so that the Qur'ān can be understood better. It is essential for people to question and analyze any new theory, practice or technique that is not mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān.

5. Conclusion

Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi describes Murāqabah as an essential step to reach the comprehensive state of *Ihsān* (spiritual excellence). The state of *Ihsān* shows the relationship with Allah. As Allah mentions in the Qur'ān, "Surely in the remembrance of Allah, do hearts find rest."⁷² Another place He says: "So remember Me. I will remember you."⁷³ When a person wants to polish his belief, he must look unto Allah. It is an essential need of a Muslim to be mindful of Allah at all times by keeping track of every good or evil deed. The believers have to learn to obey the commandments of Allah and show their gratitude towards their Creator. Allah addresses believers: "I swear by the self-accusing soul."⁷⁴ This verse clearly describes the pure soul. Muḥāsabah means self-examination, criticizing oneself about his deeds. Developing a consistent practice of carrying out Muḥāsabah can help a believer achieve a pure soul. Muḥāsabah supports Murāqabah (meditation) because when a practitioner performs Murāqabah, they are inspecting himself and doing Muḥāsabah. Muḥāsabah braces Murāqabah (meditation) because when a practitioner performs Murāqabah, he/she is observing himself/herself and doing Muḥāsabah. As a human, we have been created as servants of Allah. The servants are always ready to follow their master without any negligence because they know that every action they perform will be held accountable in front of Allah. Being a servant, it is our utmost responsibility to follow the instructions given by Allah Almighty.

The article analysis shows that Khawaja Shamsuddin Azeemi has described Murāqabah in great detail. Still, it cannot be considered worship in Islam, as it is not stated in the Holy Qur'ān and was not practiced or mentioned by the Holy Prophet in any of the Hadiths. Instead, as a whole or some forms and techniques of Murāqabah should be categorized under Mubāh and should not interfere with the divine laws or the believers' faith. Secondly, the terminology used for the techniques itself misguides the believers, especially non-Arab Muslims, and might connect the practice to Islam. The Murāqabah mentioned can be used as a means or a source to develop a sense of responsibility. It can be done to improve concentration and focus in a believer. Still, it is essential to remember that the word 'Murāqabah' does not exist in the Holy Qur'ān or Hadīths. The purpose of Murāqabah, to achieve the state of *Ihsān*, can be done in the form of *Tahajjud*, *Itikāf*, and Prayer (*Salah*) as declared in the Holy Qur'ān by Almighty and practiced by Muhammad (SAW). Only

⁷²Ar Ra'd 13:28.

⁷³Al Baqarah 2:152.

⁷⁴Al Qiyamah 75:2.

these forms of worships will be accepted, and the believers will be rewarded with the superior rank in *Jannah* (Heaven).

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