

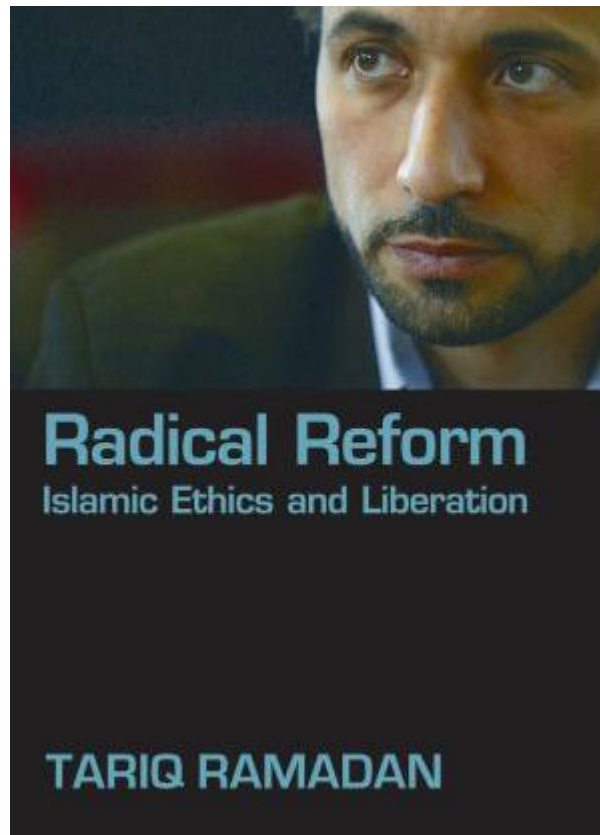
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Tariq Ramadan endorses the manual of sharia *Reliance of the Traveller (Umdat al-Salik)*
(pp. 302-303)



RADICAL REFORM

Islamic Ethics
and Liberation

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2009

shirk (association) or to superstition, and which ascribes to him the role of an infallible saint or of a necessary intermediary between the pupil or aspirant (*al-murid*) and God (whereas Islam makes it clear that the relationship must be individual and direct). Others offer their followers highly surprising lightening of religious practice: no compulsory ritual prayers, paying *zakāt* to other beneficiaries (including sometimes the *shaykh* himself or his circle), relatively easier practices of fasting, and entirely revisionist codes related to behavior and dress. Exclusionary discourse can also be denoted in some Sufi trends, claiming that their way is the only faithful one, excluding all others. Today, some schools combine all those features and promote a Sufism that it is difficult to relate to Islam. One can understand the fears of some '*ulamā'* and *fuqahā'* and their attempts keep such deviations from being considered as Islamic and sometimes encouraged in the West because they are supposed to represent the open, modern face of an Islam of the heart (and no longer an Islam of norms).

Because of such fears, some *fuqahā'* nevertheless reacted too strongly, criticizing and rejecting Sufism as a whole for being a fundamental distortion of Islam's teachings. Yet, many mystical traditions, from the very beginning, insisted on scrupulous faithfulness to Islam's teachings. They may have developed specific language, their own terminology, a particular method of spiritual education, or determined for their followers the steps, stations, and states of mystical initiation, but this was meant to be followed in addition to ritual practice, while the rules prescribed by the texts were never to be substituted or curtailed. Such traditions as *al-Qādiriyyah*, *ash-Shādhiliyyah*, *an-Naqshbandiyyah*, the *Tijāniyyah*, or the *Murids* were initially, with their respective founders, very strict and respectful of Islamic practices and norms; later, some of their secondary followers and some of *their* offshoots did sometimes fall into excess and distortions, but it would be unfair to condemn Sufi traditions as a whole. In the course of the history of Islamic civilization, mystics—for instance, the Prophet's Companion Abū Dhar al-Ghifārī—played the central role of recalling the heart of Islam, its essence, and the goals of spiritual education.

Most of the great jurists of Islam were affiliated with Sufi circles, and the master work of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī in the twelfth century, *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Ihyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn*), reconciles the orders of spirituality and of law. So does the work of

'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilāni (died 1166), *Sufficient Provision for Seekers of the Path of Truth* (*Al-Ghunīa li Tālibi Tarīq al-Haq*), or that of Shāfi'ī scholar Ahmad ibn Naqīd al-Misri (died 1368), *Reliance of the Traveler* (*'Umdat as-Sālik wa 'Uddat an-Nāsik*), that couples presentation of the law and rules with fundamental Sufi spiritual teachings.⁹ Very early on, Indian scholar Ahmad as-Sirhindī (died 1624)¹⁰ had challenged the idea that consisted in distinguishing between the fields of knowledge and action, between *al-'aqidah* seen as including the principles of faith (*arkān al-īmān*), *ash-shar'iah* dealing specifically with laws, and *al-haqiqah* seen as the path to intimate knowledge of God. For as-Sirhindī, in keeping with the discussion developed throughout this study, *ash-shar'iah* encompasses the dimensions of gnosis, the education of the heart and the elevation toward the One. *Al-ma'rifah*, intimate knowledge of God—that is, The Truth—lies at the heart of the *shar'iah*: it is its essence and light, and *al-haqiqah* and *ash-shar'iah* stem from one *'aqidah*, which is a single clear creed. This approach has the advantage of again citing several truths to which Muslims must return—spiritual education, the demanding task of reforming and transcending oneself that is the essence of Islamic mysticism, and also of Sufism—and that represents the heart of Islamic teachings. In light of those teachings, with growing knowledge, following the Way (*ash-shar'iah*) absolutely mandates that exertion (*jihād*) of the self on itself—that is, on the ego. This practice and its requirements constitute the circumstance and light of commitment to the Way. Moreover, they represent the best ways of struggling against the formalistic reduction repeatedly mentioned in the book. Restoring education and continuing a spiritual quest at the center of the understanding and implementation of the *shar'iah* mean resolving to reconsider the priorities and goals of human action and of ethics. This perspective may seem paradoxical, but remains fundamentally true: it is by emphasizing intimate individual experience that Islam can reconcile with the common universal quest.

It is important to reconcile the *shar'iah* with all forms of mysticism and with Sufism by restoring the latter to its proper position, provided normative principles are respected (no sacralization or worship of the *shaykh*, no accepted breaches of practice, no encouraged superstitions). Moreover, Sufism should be reconciled with ethics, so that the goals of self-transcending are concretely allied with the higher goals as regards presence and action in the world and