

Tok Ku Paloh's Manual on Sufi Practices in *Ma'arij Al-Lahfan Li Al-Taraqqi Ila Haqaiq Al-'irfan*

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ABSTRACT

Performing *Sufi* practices is one of the ways of getting closer to Allah and achieving the level of gnosis (*ma'rifa Allah*). The objective of this article is to assess the *Sufi* rituals offered by Sayyid Abdul Rahman bin Sayyid Muhammad Zayn, known widely as Tok Ku Paloh. He was a famous *Sufi* figure in the Nusantara region based on his manuscript entitled *Ma'arij Al-Lahfan Li Al-Taraqqi Ila Haqaiq Al-'Irfan (The Ladder for the Thirsty to Achieve Ma'rifa)*. This is a qualitative study using the content analysis method based on the treatise. The study found that the *Sufi* rituals accomplished by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman Al-Aydarus were systematically presented, covering fundamental aspects in Islamic spirituality such as repentance (*tawba*), prayer (*du'a*), invocation (*dhikr*) and contemplation (*muraqaba*). This article is based on the premise that Sayyid Abdul Rahman Al-Aydarus has essentially highlighted one of the best manuals of *Sufi* practices to be revealed to the public in his time. Consequently, many of these *Sufi* practices are still practised in modern society today.

Keywords: *Dhikr, ma'arij al-lahfan, ma'rifa Allah, Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman Al-Aydarus, Sufism rituals*

INTRODUCTION

Gnosis (*ma'rifa Allah*) is the level at which a disciple achieves full knowledge of his Creator, the All Supreme. Gnosis here means to know the characteristics of Allah, *dhatiyya* and *ma'nawiyya*, that is, the characteristics that are obligatory and not impossible for Allah to possess. This is so because gnosis is the main element possessed by a religiously responsible

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Mukallaf or an individual who is sane and has reached pubescence in Islam. An individual performing numerous forms of exoteric (*al-zahir*) worship without the knowledge of and understanding gnosis would be offering worship that is not perfect because the aim of offering worship to Allah is to have a feeling of self-humility towards Allah, who possesses all the supreme characteristics that qualify Him as Allah, The Supreme Almighty.

Besides that, an individual can easily fall into the quagmire of treason and blasphemy without gnosis. In order to understand the concept of gnosis, religious scholars have stated that various forms of worship condoned by the *Sharia* (Islamic law) are the main instruments to achieve this aim. The literature shows that many tasawwuf religious scholars, such as Abu Talib Al-Makki (Al-Makki, 2005), Al-Qushayri (Al-Qushayri, 1991), Al-Ghazali (Al-Ghazali, 2011) and many more, emphasised various manuals on *Sufi* rituals in an effort to achieve gnosis. This research intends to elaborate on the manual for *Sufi* rituals by a famous '*shaykh*' religious scholar in Terengganu called Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman Al-Aydarus. This is due to the lack of research focussing on the views of Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman al-Aydarus on the element of completeness in achieving gnosis, which is found in manuals on *Sufi* rituals. This qualitative research uses the content analysis method based on a primary treatise, which is the sole piece of work left by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman Al-Aydarus, entitled *Ma'arij Al-Lahfan Li Al-Taraqqi Ila Haqaiq Al-'irfan* (Mahyuddin,

Stapa, & Badruddin, 2013) (*The Ladder for the Thirsty to Achieve Ma'rifa*) to understand his thinking on this subject.

Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman bin Sayyid Muhammad Zayn Al-Aydarus, better known by Malaysians as Tok Ku Paloh, was a famous 19th century religious scholar (*ulama*) from the state of Terengganu in Malaysia. His prowess was not only in religious knowledge but also in defending the Malay States as a warrior during the British era. He was born in 1236 *Hijrah* (1817), in Kampung Chabang Tiga, Kuala Terengganu (Bakar, 1991).

Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman al-Aydarus received his early education from his own father, popularly known as Tok Ku Tuan Besar. He was also tutored by Haji Wan Abdullah Bin Mohd Amin or also known as Tok Sheikh Duyong (d. 1889), who was an *ulama* and *mufti* (a Muslim scholar who is entitled to offer legal decrees or *fatwas*) to the Sultan, Sultan Omar. After his father's death, Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman moved to Mekkah to continue his education (Ahmad & Resad, 2014).

In Mekkah, Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman studied under two famous religious scholars of the time, namely, Sayyid Ahmad Zaini Dahlan (d. 1886) and Sayyid Abdullah Ali Al-Zawawi (d. 1924) (Mahyuddin et al., 2013). Under the tutelage of these teachers, he immersed himself in knowledge related to *Tafsir* (Interpretation), *Hadith* (the Way of Life of the Prophet, *Salla Allah Alayhi Wa Al-Sallam*), *tawhid* (monotheism), *Tasawwuf* (teachings on Sufism) and the Arabic language (Bakar, 1991). It has

been said that Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman was also tutored by Shaykh Muhammad bin Sulayman Hasbullah Al-Makki while in Makkah (Alwi, 2007). Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman was a pious *ulama* with deep religious knowledge. Hence, he shared his knowledge through sermons that were effective and imparted some food for thought to society. Besides sermons, he also penned his knowledge. As far as it is known, his only literary legacy was in the form of a scripture called *The Ladder for the Thirsty to Achieve Ma'rifa* (Omar et al., 2014). The scripture contains a summary of knowledge associated to *tawhid* (monotheism), *tasawwuf* (teaching on Sufism) and *tariqa* (*Sufi* path) (Alwi, 2007). Nevertheless, this scripture was not completed as there were a few topics mentioned in the preface but never elaborated on in the content. Thus, the view that estimates the date of the scripture as 1300 *Hijrah* is suspect. The scripture contains four main chapters. Chapter One explains *tawhid* (monotheism); Chapter Two elaborates on *ma'rifa* (gnosis); Chapter Three talks about the *Sufi* order and Chapter Four, which is incomplete (Omar et al., 2014), explains *haqiqah* (the truth).

Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman Al-Aydarus passed away on 1 *Zulhijjah* 1336 *Hijrah* (7 September, 1918) at the residence of his daughter, Tuan Kembang (Arridzo, 2011). He was laid to rest in Kampong Paloh, in a place called Bukit Makam (Yusoff, 2003). He was around 100 years old at that time, highlighting the fact that Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman Al-Aydarus was a religious scholar who lived to a ripe old age. His

demise was not only felt by the people of Kampong Paloh but also by the people of Terengganu. His legendary status associated with his command of religious knowledge is irreplaceable although a century has lapsed

METHODS

This is a qualitative research study using the content analysis framework based on the sole scripture left behind by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman Al-Aydarus entitled *Ma'arij Al-Lahfan Li Al-Taraqqi Ila Haqiq Al-'irfan*. The technique used to gather primary data was referring to the manuscript. While secondary data was obtained from manuscripts by other figures, previous research, journals, articles and books related to this topic were also consulted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman Al-Aydarus' Manual on *Sufi* Practices

When emphasising the manual on *Sufi* practices, Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman elaborated on a few important aspects in achieving his desired aim. He provided four main components that should be included in every manual on *Sufi* practices, which are *tawba* (repentance), *du'a* (prayers), *dhikr* (invocation) and *tafakkur* (retrospective reflection or meditation).

***Tawba* (repentance).** Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman emphasised *tawba* as the main component that every student must experience if he wishes to travel the road to spirituality. It is not only intended to cleanse

oneself of serious sins but the less obvious but yet unprofitable ones too, hence, to make *tawba* a part of one's life as a disciple of Islam. *Tawba*, according to Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman in his scripture is:

The basis for every cultivated feeling (*maqam*) and divinely bestowed feeling (*hal*) because *tawba* is like the solid ground of a sure foundation. A foundation does not stand firm except if it is on solid ground. Therefore, divinely bestowed feelings (*hal*) and cultivated feelings (*maqam*) would not be complete without *tawba* (Muhammad, 1882, p. 60).

Here, we notice in the definition of *tawba* provided by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman, *tawba* is said to be the heart of the individual Muslim's faith. For this reason, Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman correlates *tawba* to the terms "divinely bestowed feelings" (*hal*) and "cultivated feelings" (*maqam*).

It needs to be explained that the term "divinely bestowed feelings" (*hal*), according to Sufism, is a heartfelt feeling that blossoms with the bestowal from Allah, without any effort from the person regardless of the feeling, whether of happiness, sorrow, disappointment or otherwise. On the other hand, "cultivated feelings" (*maqam*) refer to feelings cultivated due to the efforts of the individual that have become inherent with that person and cannot be separated from him (Al-Qushayri, 1991).

In other words, if a person has feelings of patience when facing trials and tribulations, it is possible that his patience would run out. The non-permanent feeling of patience is termed *hal* by in *Sufi* thought. However, if someone makes an effort to be continuously patient in the face of trials and tribulations, eventually patience would become an inseparable part of that person's character. This is known as *maqam*.

However, Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman stated that *hal* and *maqam* would be incomplete and meaningless if they were not based on *tawba* (repentance). This means that although a person may possess patience, if his heart does not rest in *tawba*, the patience he displays is of little value. With that, it is only fitting that Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman uses the analogy of the ground being the foundation, in this case patience is the ground. This shows that the ground is the main pillar of the foundation. So too are *hal* and *maqam*, which would not be complete without *tawba*.

Al-Syarqawi believed that *tawba* could be classified into two strands. The first is *tawba* from all sins. The second is *tawba* in a rather specific sense, which is repentance from being careless (*ghaflah*) (Al-Syarqawi, 1992). Repentance from all sins is done when a disciple pleads for forgiveness from Allah for the sins he has committed and proclaims not to commit them again, while to repent from being careless, according to the writer, is not to indulge in activities that would cause us to be forgetful and disregard ourselves and eventually, Allah.

In addition, repentance is an act of returning to Allah by eradicating all sins directly from the heart, followed by obeying all of Allah commands and abstaining from His prohibitions. According to Ibn Abbas, the *nasuha* repentance involves the expression of regret from the heart, praying for pardon (orally) and preventing the limbs of one's body from committing sins in the future (Sa'id, 1998).

Another aspect asserted by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman that acts as a catalyst to repentance is *istiqamah* (steadfastness in carrying out Allah's commands). *Istiqamah* refers to a disciple's act of carrying out repentance spontaneously and continuously, that is, he should desire to be obedient and do good and abstain from prohibitions. This nature of being in a state of continuous repentance will become merged with one's character; this is termed *maqam*, which has taken shape in that person. A Muslim who possesses this nature of continuous repentance is said to be in *maqam tawba* or repentance.

In addition to the aspects of repentance and *istiqamah* (steadfastness), Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman also suggested that disciples should learn on their own (*tahdhib*) through the act of limited speech (talking) except in matters related to benevolence or welfare. Besides this, he also suggested complete abstinence from relying emotionally on living things and to preserve the stomach from consuming food that is *haram* (forbidden in Islam) and *shubhah* (doubtful if it is forbidden). He further added that one should reduce sleep, increase invocation in remembrance of

Allah and carry out acts of worship towards Him. Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman also stated that disciples need to increase effort and practice of rituals in order to continue to move closer to Allah after accomplishing the three aspects mentioned earlier. As far as possible, the students at this stage need to alienate themselves temporarily from any form of distraction from people in order for the heart to focus on remembering Allah.

Du`a (prayer). After the disciple has finished with repentance, the next component that needs focussing on in the journey to spirituality is prayer. The practice of praying is one of the elements in the manual of *Sufi* practices postulated by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman. Before praying, Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman suggested that disciples recite the *Al-Fatihah* three times and the *surah Al-Ikhlash* three times while invoking Allah and pleading with Him to present the blessings accrued by reading these verses to the Prophet Muhammad and fellow teachers (*mashayikh*). This is intended to pass on the blessings accrued from reciting the verses from the al-Quran to them and to invoke Allah so that fellow prophets and *shaykh* would pray that the wishes and intentions of the disciples' practices are achieved. Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman also stated that disciples should remember that death is a certain eventuality for all living creations of Allah and when the time of death arrives no one will be able to help except Allah. Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman gave this reminder so that disciples of Sufism would focus intensely on Allah in their worship and not

be preoccupied with temporal matters as death was a certainty. Not a single creature of Allah can predict the time of their death and that is why the disciples need to always be ready to meet death by way of increasing worship and obedience to Allah (Muhammad, 1882).

At this stage, the disciples would need an expert, not only to guide them, but also to be an intermediary (*rabitah*) between the disciples and Allah. The expert here is the *shaykh* who coaches and guides the disciples to ensure smooth implementation of the practices and achievement of the aims. The *rabitah* is a creation of Allah who helps someone to achieve relationship with Allah. In other words, a disciple will remember Allah by looking at any of Allah's creations and feel the existence and supremacy of Allah (Omar & Sa'ari, 2011). According to Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman, the *rabitah* in the context of these practices is the disciple's solemn view that his *shaykh* is the key and guide who will enable him to appreciate Allah.

The specific prayer advocated by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman in the Sufism practice manual to be recited by the disciples is, "*Illahi Anta Maqsudi Wa Ridaka Matlubi A'tini Mahabbataka Wa Ma'rifataka*" ("Ya Allah, You are all I need and Your blessing is what I seek. Bestow onto me Your love and Gnosis"). This prayer is to be read three times.

The essence of this prayer can be understood as every disciple needs Allah and His blessings in any initiative that is to be undertaken. This is important so that an

individual is always on the path of *Sharia* (Islamic Law) that has been laid out by Allah. The disciple can also train himself to abstain from the prohibitions of Allah; all he has to do is to deliver his sincere faithfulness and implement the commands of Allah. In addition, a disciple should seek Allah's compassion and gnosis so as to be always blessed by Allah.

Dhikr (invocation). After the disciple has finished his prayers, the next step according to the *Sufi* practice manual advocated by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman is to have a profusion of *dhikr* Allah. The practice of remembering Allah is a demand clearly stated by Allah in the al-Qur'an and elaborated on in the *hadith* by Rasulullah, as exhorted by Allah: "Therefore remember Me" (by praying, glorifying, etc. I will remember you, and be grateful to Me (for My countless Favours on you) and never be ungrateful to Me (*Al-Baqarah*, 2).

Among the invocation (*dhikr*) practices advocated by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman as stated in the scripture are *dhikr ism al-dhat* and *dhikr nafy wa ithbat*. Before particularising further on the concept and *kayfiyyat* (the way to) of both these invocations (*dhikr*), it would be appropriate if this article highlighted the codes or mannerisms that are required by a disciple before he arrives at the invocation (*dhikr*) stage.

After the disciple has performed repentance (*tawba*), he then has to perform ablution and be cleansed from ritual impurities (*najasah*) found on his body,

clothes or the place where the invocation will be performed. This situation would offer comfort and tranquillity to the disciple while performing the invocation. Then, he needs to face the *qibla* (the universal direction towards the Ka'ba in Makkah) and sit in a *tawarruk* (sitting position while prayer is being recited) position. Next, the disciple needs to expunge past memories or disturbing thoughts (*khawatir*) that could interfere with his invocation (*dhikr*). Thereafter, the disciple has to seek forgiveness from Allah by reciting *astaghfirullah* 25 times, followed by the surah *Al-Fatihah* (three times) and surah *Al-Ikhlâs* (three times). These recitals have to be *ihda'* (a sincere offering) to Rasulullah and the mashayikh. The disciple needs to imagine that after death there would be nobody to help him except Allah.

Next, the disciple recites, "*Ilahi anta maqsudi wa ridaka matlubi a'tini mahabbatak wa ma'rifatak*" ("Oh Allah, You are all I need and Your blessing is what I seek. Bestow onto me Your love and Gnosis") while placing both his hands on his knees. While doing this, his eyes are closed and his head bowed down and he holds his breath for a moment. Thereafter, his tongue is pressed against his palate, his lips are tightly shut and his whole body holds still. The disciple then performs silent *dhikr* exclusively repeating the word "Allah, Allah, Allah..." and imagines the meaning of the Divine's name to *latifa al-qalbi*, which is a spot around the nipple on the left chest area (Muhammad, 1882).

Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman also said that one must invoke by repeating the word Allah 5,000 in a day, which means to invoke it 1,000 every time one performs the obligatory prayers. Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman also suggested that the disciple should increase the number of invocations so that the disciple would not neglect Allah for even a second. In addition, this discipline is not allowed to shift from one *latifa* to another unless with prior permission from the *shaykh*. The disciple will experience seven stages of the *lataif* before implementing the next invocation of the word. Among the *lataif* that need to be experienced are *latifa al-qalbi*, *latifa al-ruh*, *latifa al-sirr*, *latifa al-khafi*, *latifa al-akhfa* and *latifa al-nafs* (Muhammad, 1882).

The disciple will then move to the *nafy wa ithbat* invocation stage. This invocation takes place after the disciple has performed the *ism al-dhat* invocation (Muhammad, 1882). This is because the *ism al-dhat* invocation is intended to abandon all heartfelt feelings except feelings for Allah, while the *nafy wa ithbat* invocation concentrates on strong and honest feelings towards Allah (Sidek, 2007). According to Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman, the *nafy wa ithbat* invocation can also be performed before or after the disciple performs *muraqaba* (meditation). This depends on the choice of the *shaykh* who is guiding the disciple.

The mode or way (*kayfiyyat*) of invoking *nafy wa ithbat* begins with the disciple being cautious about the mannerisms when invoking, just as he had

done while invoking before this, including his allegiance to Allah. Hence, the specialty of invocation is that self-realisation (*talqin*) is delivered by the *shaykh* himself and the clear benefit obtained from performing the *nafy wa ithbat* invocation, that is, the elimination of all forms of disturbing thoughts (*khawatir*) and the purification of the heart from all forms of distractions (*aghyar*). The disciple should then inhale deeply with the intention of eliminating disturbing thoughts that can impede him from remembering Allah and he should hold his breath below the navel. Next, he should silently pronounce the divine negation “*La*”. Then the disciple draws the sound from the area of the navel to the crown at the head. Then, pronouncing *kalimah* “*Ilaha*”, concentration is directed in an imagined line running from the crown of the head to the right shoulder blade. After that, the disciple drives the final refrain, “*Illa Allah*” in a lengthy fashion from deep down the heart and finally closes with the *kalimah* “*Muhammad Rasul Allah*” (Muhammad is the messenger of Allah). Next, he reads with his tongue, “*Ilahi anta maqsudi wa ridaka matlubi*”. The disciple should implement the invocation practices of *nafy wa ithbat* every day and as many as 111 times as the frequency should be an odd number (Muhammad, 1882).

Tafakkur (retrospective reflection or meditation). In the *Ma'arif Al-Lahfan*, Sayyid ‘Abdul Rahman mentioned the practices of *wuquf qalbi*. This practice is part of the *tafakkur* concept performed by

disciples before performing the *tafakkur* (*muraqaba*). *Wuquf qalbi* is a situation in which the disciples control their emotions when invoking, in order to fully focus on reciting the invocations and not to be distracted from the actual meaning of the invocations. In other words, it is a situation where the student puts his heart and soul in connotations of the recitation to Allah until he reaches the moment where his focus is only upon the thought of Allah in his heart.

For this reason, the disciple directs all his senses towards his heart, which is situated at the left side of his chest. This means that all the senses focus their attention on the heart that is performing the invocation while blocking all other irrelevant thinking or remembering. The complete performance of *wuquf qalbi* depends on the ability of the disciples to focus their thoughts on the meaning of the *kalimah* Allah recitation, which is repeated until it succeeds in blocking all other thoughts except that of Allah and trains the senses to focus on the emotions during invocation. This ability can be formed before, during or after invocation. The disciples may not achieve permanent thought of Allah without appreciating *wuquf qalbi*, which can only be felt by the disciples (Omar & Sa`ari, 2011).

After completing the *wuquf qalbi*, the disciples will move to the next stage of *tafakkur*, which is the *muraqabah* stage. When examined further, the word ‘*tafakkur*’ refers to thoughts about all the happenings related to the creatures of Allah, which eventually has the disciple feeling the existence, the greatness and the supremacy

of Allah (Mohammad, 2013). Hence, in *Sufi* terminology it is called *muraqabah*. In the manual of *Sufi* practices advocated by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman, the disciple has to go through the *muraqabah* stage, either before or after performing the *nafy wa ithbat* invocation. This again depends on the *shaykh* guiding the disciples. In the *Ma'arij Al-Lahfan* scripture, Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman mentioned that there two stages in *muraqabah* that need to be performed by the student, which are the *muraqabah al-ahadiyyah* and *muraqabah al-ma'iyah* (Muhammad, 1882).

The technique of practising *muraqabah al-ahadiyyah* is by fully focussing on the meaning of the monism of Allah until the disciple feels the element of the monism of Allah in his heart. In other words, the disciple focusses his thoughts only on the meaning of Allah the Almighty in his heart, without thinking about the other characteristics of Allah such as The Compassionate, The Merciful, The Sovereign and so on. What more if one thinks about matters such as food, work, property, family and so forth, since thoughts like this would inevitably disturb the concentration of the disciple's thought focussed on the Almightyness of Allah.

After the disciple has performed the *muraqabah al-ahadiyyah*, he may shift to the next stage, which is the *muraqabah al-ma'iyah*. *Muraqabah al-ma'iyah* means giving full attention of one's thoughts to Allah by feeling that Allah is with him wherever he is and in whatever situation he is in, so much so that just by looking

at Allah's creations would be enough to give one that feeling. For example, when a disciples looks at a bird flying in the air, he not only sees the physical attributes of the bird such as its wings, feathers and the ability to fly but he feels the existence of Allah and is deeply aware that Allah made the bird fly. Subsequently, the disciple becomes confident and convinced that Allah is behind the act of the bird flying. This is the meaning of 'togetherness' or being together with Allah wherever the disciple is. This can also be related to all creatures created by Allah.

CONCLUSION

Sufi practices are one form of practice that should be practised by a disciple not just to add to his list of non-mandatory practices but also to bring him closer to Allah. The manual on *Sufi* practices advocated by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman is a systematic and well-arranged manual. Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman taught his disciples *Sufi* practices with the intention of attaining actual *ma'rifa Allah*. In attaining *ma'rifa Allah*, a disciple needs to increase practices that depict loyalty to Allah. Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman understood that among the practices that depict loyalty are the *Sufi* practices that comprise four important components as basic practice and these are found in the manual of *Sufi* practices. The first is repentance (*tawba*). The writer understood that repentance was the first aspect before a disciple pursues the next stage of *Sufi* practices. This is because repentance is the main pillar in *hal* and *maqam*. The second stage deals with the

component of prayer. Prayer is the effort of a disciple directed towards Allah. It is a weapon of the *mukmin* who has found the sincere disposition of faithfulness towards Allah; a disciple who is weak and imperfect should seek help from Allah, the Almighty through prayer. Prayer here refers to *Ilahi Anta Maqsudi Wa Ridaka Mathubi*. The third stage is the invocation to Allah. The practice of invocation to Allah is a *Sufi* practice that reinforces the heartfelt thoughts of a disciple about Allah. There are two elements in the practice of invocation to Allah that were advocated by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman, which are *dhikr ism al-dhat* and *dhikr nafy wa ithbat*. Finally, the disciple experiences the *wuquf qalbi* stage, which is the process of controlling the emotions in order to devote one's emotions to Allah.

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