Sufi Orders Authorization in Ibnu 'Ajībah Interpretation of The Qur'an

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Abstract: This study examines the sufi exegesis of Ibnu 'Ajībah (1747–1809 CE) within the framework of institutionalized sufi orders *(ṭarīqah),* positioning his work, *al-Baḥr al-Madīd fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Majīd*, as a culmination of the mature sufi interpretative tradition. By applying Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, the authors analyze how Ibn 'Ajibah's socio-historical context marked by Morocco's political instability and the ascendancy of the Syāzilī-Darqāwī Sufi order shaped his integration of esoteric *(bāṭin)* and exoteric *(ẓāhir)* Qur'anic meanings. The research highlights two core dimensions of his exegesis: (1) the authority of the spiritual leader *(mursyid)* as an indispensable guide for disciples, rooted in Qur'anic verses such as QS al-Mā'idah/5: 35 and QS al-Naḥl/16: 43, and (2) the institutionalized disciple-master relationship, legitimized through rituals like the oath of allegiance *(bai'ah)* and modeled on prophetic covenants (e.g., QS al-Fatḥ/48: 10). The study argues that Ibnu 'Ajībah's tafsir transcends earlier Sufi traditions by systematically embedding the hierarchical structures of the *Ṭarīqah* into Qur'anic interpretation by situating Ibnu 'Ajībah's work within the socio-religious dynamics of his era, this research underscores the role of institutionalized Sufism in redefining Qur'anic exegesis, offering fresh insights into the interplay between spiritual authority, textual hermeneutics, and Sufi institutionalization in the late pre-modern Islamic world.
Keywords: Sufi Exegesis; Ibnu 'Ajībah; Sufi Orders; Spiritual Authority

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji tafsir sufi Ibnu 'Ajībah (1747–1809 M) dalam kerangka tarekat sufi yang terlembaga, dengan menempatkan karyanya, *al-Baḥr al-Madīd fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Majīd*, sebagai puncak dari tradisi interpretasi sufi yang telah matang. Dengan menerapkan teori hermeneutika Gadamer, penulis menganalisis bagaimana konteks sosial-historis Ibnu 'Ajībah yang ditandai oleh ketidakstabilan politik di Maroko dan meningkatnya dominasi tarekat Syāziliyah Darqāwiyah membentuk integrasinya antara makna esoteris *(bāṭin)* dan eksoteris *(ẓāhir)* dalam tafsir al-Qur'an. Penelitian ini menyoroti dua dimensi utama dalam tafsirnya: (1) otoritas pemimpin spiritual *(mursyid)* sebagai pembimbing yang sangat diperlukan bagi para murid, yang berakar pada ayat-ayat al-Qur'an seperti QS al-Mā'idah/5: 35 dan QS al-Naḥl/16: 43, serta (2) hubungan institusional antara murid dan guru, yang dilegitimasi melalui ritual seperti baiat *(bai'ah)* dan dianalogikan seperti perjanjian kenabian (misalnya, QS al-Fatḥ/48: 10. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa tafsir Ibnu 'Ajībah

melampaui tradisi sufi sebelumnya dengan secara sistematis mengintegrasikan struktur hierarkis tarekat ke dalam penafsiran al-Qur'an. Dengan menempatkan karya Ibnu 'Ajībah dalam dinamika sosial-keagamaan pada masanya, penelitian ini menekankan peran tasawuf yang terlembaga dalam memvalidasi otoritas spiritual dalam tafsir al-Qur'an, serta menawarkan wawasan baru tentang interaksi antara otoritas spiritual, hermeneutika tekstual al-Qur'an, dan institusionalisasi sufi dalam dunia Islam pra-modern akhir.

Kata Kunci: Tafsir Sufi; Ibnu 'Ajībah; Tarekat Sufi; Otoritas Spiritual

Introduction

During the transition from the seventh to the eighth century, the development of Sufism had reached a standstill, with no new doctrinal concepts emerging. Although scholars such as al-Kashani (739H / 1321 AD) and 'Abd Karīm al-Jili produced various works, their ideas largely reiterated or elaborated on the thoughts of earlier figures like Ibn 'Arabī and Jalāluddīn Rūmī. This stagnation may have led Jamal J Elias to assert that Sufi exegesis had attained a level of doctrinal maturity, both in theory and practice. Consequently, he classifies Ibnu 'Ajībah's commentary as belonging to the final phase of the Sufi interpretative tradition.[1]

Scholars when dealing with Sufistic genre tafsir tend to refer to the classification of sufistic tafsir in the conception of al-Żahabī, according to which Sufi tafsir consists of two; namely *ṣūfī naẓarī tafsīr* and *ṣūfī Isyārī tafsīr*. Al-Żahabī's classification refers to the classification of Sufism which consists of two *taṣawuf 'amalī* and *falsafī*. The character of falsafi Sufism is identical to the theoretical basis of its teachings. While sunni-amali Sufism is purely based on the practice of *zuhud* as a form of devotion to Allah.[2] For Instance Aḥmad 'Abdullāh al-Qarshī, Ruslani reveals in his introduction to this tafsir that the special features of this tafsir are in its *Isyārī* meaning. While highlighting how Ibnu 'Ajībah talks a lot about *maqāmat* (Stoppings in Sufi concepts), he also cites two types of Sufi tafsir classification initiated by al-Żahabī.[3] Analyzing the typology of interpretative traditions by al-Żahabī presents significant challenges due to the lacks a coherent perspective and fails to account for the historical development of the genre. His classification predominantly favors interpretations rooted in the Salafi

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[1] Jamal Elias, "Sufi Tafsir Reconsidered: Exploring the Development of a Genre," *Journal of Qur'Anic Studies*, January 1, 2010, https://www.academia.edu/887650/Sufi_tafsir_reconsidered_Exploring_the_Development_of_a_Genre.

[2] Muḥammad Ḥusain Al-Żahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Mufassirūn, Volume II,* (Al-Qāhirah: Dār El-Ḥadīs, 2025), h. 251.

[3] Ibnu 'Ajībah Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr Al-Madīd fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Majīd*, Volume I (Libnān : Dār al Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2005). h. x.

paradigm.[4] Theoretical Sufi exegesis *(nazari)* holds that the Qur'an contains only an inner *(bāṭin)* meaning, while allusive Sufi exegesis *(isyārī)* asserts that the Qur'an encompasses both inner and outer *(zāhir)* meanings. Here, Al-Żahabi expresses skepticism toward the perceived deviations in *nazari* exegesis, much like his rejection of the exegetical model proposed by Ibn 'Arabī.[5]

Another scholar, Alexander Knysh, critically examines the originality of Ibn Ajibah's work, suggesting that it represents a reformulation of Ibn Arabi's ideas. Nevertheless, Knysh acknowledges Ibn Ajībah's methodological approach in integrating both the inner and outer dimensions of meaning without creating a rigid dichotomy between the two level meanings.[6] Maria Massi Dakake, echoing Kynsh, observes that Ibn 'Ajībah's Sufi-oriented tafsir methodically integrates esoteric and exoteric meanings, harmonizing linguistic, historical, and hadith-based analysis with mystical insights in a structured approach.[7]

This study aims to present a new perspective on Ibn 'Ajībah's exegesis by positioning it within the final stage of Sufi interpretative tradition. This phase marks the full maturation and institutionalization of Sufism, particularly through the establishment of *Ṭarīqah* (Sufi orders). Accordingly, this research contends that Ibn 'Ajībah's tafsir, *Al-Baḥr Al-Madīd fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Majīd*, functioned as a medium for advancing the sufi order movement. The study further argues that this distinguishes Ibn 'Ajībah's Sufi exegesis from earlier Sufi tafsir traditions, which had not yet been influenced by the structured frameworks of emerging sufi order institutions. However, Sufi interpretation itself was born out of the civilization of fufism. The Sufi tradition is very rich and internally diverse. For this reason, it is necessary to see specifically which teaching elements are most dominant in a Sufi interpretation.

This study employs Gadamer's hermeneutic theory to frame its analysis, emphasizing his view of experience as a historical and dialectical process rooted in tradition, dialogue, and temporal context. Gadamer contends that knowledge arises not

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[4] Walid A. Saleh, "Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of Tafsīr in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, October 2010, https://doi.org/10.3366/E146535911000094X.

[5] Al-Żahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Mufassirūn, Volume II,* h. 261.

[6] Knysh Alexander, "Esoterisme Kalam Tuhan: Sentralitas al-Quran Dalam Tasawuf.," *Jurnal Studi Al-Quran* 2, no. 1 (2007).

[7] Maria Massi Dakake, "Hermeneutics and Allegorical Interpretation," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Science, and Technology in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford Univercity Press, 2014).

from subjective perception but as a dynamic "event" shaped by collective historical perspectives. He rejects individual interiority as the sole source of meaning, arguing instead that understanding is conditioned by interconnected historical frameworks. Human experience, he asserts, is inherently situated within a historical continuum, where the dialogue between past and present enables an evolving interpretation of reality. Ultimately, meaning emerges from the interplay between the observer and the layered traditions that constitute their interpretive horizon.[8]

The research also will address the following topics: (1) the authority of the *mursyid* (spiritual leader) in the Sufi order and (2) the relationship between the disciple and the Sufi leader. In this context, the author will identify and analyze the Qur'anic verses cited by Ibn Ajibah to support and promote the teachings of the Sufi order.

Ibnu 'Ajībah: His Tafsir Works And Socio-Political Conditions

Ibnu 'Ajībah's life is commonly divided into three phases: (1) Childhood (1747–1765 CE / 1160–1178 AH), (2) Adolescence (1765–1794 CE / 1178–1208 AH), when he pursued knowledge, and (3) His intellectual peak (1794–1809 CE / 1208–1224 AH), during which he became a productive Sufi teacher and attained a distinguished spiritual rank.[9] At 40, he traveled to Fes to study various disciplines under renowned scholars, specializing in Hadith under Tawadi bin Saudah. He also studied tafsir, inheritance law (*farā'id*), and linguistics. Later, he returned home with his teacher to produce his scholarly works.[10]

Ibnu 'Ajībah, in particular, drew inspiration from the teachings of Syaikh Darqāwī, whose real name was Abū al-Ma'āli al-'Arab bin Aḥmad al-Ḥasanī. He founded the Darqāwī branch of the Shadhiliyah order, which emphasized simplicity, accessibility, and adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah. This order focused on fulfilling religious obligations and cultivating character following the example of the Prophet Muhammad. Like other Sufi orders, *Syāziliyah* centered on the practice of dhikr, as referenced in Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 152, *"fażkurūnī ażkurukum" "Remember Me, and I will remember you"*. Although Darqāwī was a branch, its core teachings remained

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[8] Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika & Pengembangan 'Ulumul Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawasea Press, 2017).

[9] Nūr al-Dīn Nas al-Faqih, "Ibnu 'Ajibah Sya'ir al-Magribī" (Sayyid Muḥammad bin 'Abdullāh, 2025).

[10] Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr Al-Madīd fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Majīd*.

aligned with the *Syāziliyah* order.[11]

Ibnu 'Ajībah, renowned for his vast knowledge, received great praise from scholars due to his dedication to learning. In the book *Ṭarīqa Syāziliyah al-Kubrā*, he is described as a noble descendant, a fountain of spiritual wisdom, a prominent Sufi master, and a saint devoted to helping others. Born in Morocco, Ibnu 'Ajībah grew up amid political turmoil. From the 10th to the 16th century, the country faced instability due to civil conflicts. Prolonged power struggles led to wars, draining the economy and depleting national resources.[12]

This crisis affected not only Morocco's central regions but also its rural areas, disrupting agriculture. Fortunately, Sufi teachers played a role in recovery by encouraging their students to cultivate barren lands, transforming them into thriving agricultural centers.[13]

Moroccan culture is deeply intertwined with religious traditions, making Sufism highly influential in society. According to Kenneth, this heritage of practical religious teachings has shaped Morocco into a tolerant and democratic nation. This is reflected in a moderate Islamic approach that harmonizes islamic jurisprudence *(fiqh)* and Sufism. Moroccan religious thought is based on three main pillars: Sunni Ash'ari theology, Maliki jurisprudence, and the mystical teachings of al-Junaid. [14]

The influence of Sufism in Morocco dates back to the Idrisid Dynasty (779–988 CE) and grew stronger with the widespread circulation of Imam al-Ghazali's monumental work, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. This book was praised for integrating Sufism and jurisprudence, which had long been seen as opposing disciplines. However, during the *Murabbitūn* Dynasty, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* was burned due to concerns that it encouraged deviant Sufi practices that could undermine religious doctrine. Fortunately, in the *Muwaḥḥidūn* era, Sufism regained its momentum and was reaccepted into Moroccan society.[15]

The practical Sufi tradition in Morocco gave rise to great figures such as Ubbād

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[11] Ma'mūn Gharīb, *Abū Ḥasan Al-Syāżilī: Ḥayātuhu, Tasawwufuhu, Talāmiżuhu Wa Awrāduhu* (Al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Gharīb, 2000).

[12] Al-Ḥasan bin Muḥammad, *Ṭarīqah Al-Syāżiliyyah al-Kubrā* (Al-Qāhirah: Maktabah Al-Fasiyah al-Miṣriyyah, 1928).

[13] Fransisco and Rodriguez Manas, "Agriculture, Sufism and the State in Tenth/Sixteenth Century Morocco," *Bulletin of The School of Oriental and African Studies* 59, no. 3 (n.d.): 1996.

[14] Kenneth Honerkamp and Michael D. Calabria, *Moroccan Islam: A Unique and Welcome Spirit of Moderation and Tolerance* (Georgetown University: Center For Contemporary Arab Studies, n.d.).

[15] Nas al-Faqīh, "Ibnu 'Ajībah Syā'ir al-Magribī."

al-Randī (729 AH), Muḥammad bin Sulaimān al-Jazūlī, and Aḥmad Zarūq al-Tazlī (899 AH). These scholars taught the *Syāżiliyah Sūfī* order, which embraced the integration of Sufism and islamic jurisprudence. As a result, Morocco became home to many Sufi scholars, jurists, and Hadith experts. This integration led to the famous saying: *"Whoever studies fiqh without Sufism becomes a fasiq (immoral person). Whoever practices Sufism without fiqh becomes a zindiq (heretic). But whoever combines both is on the right path."* In the 12th century, Morocco was in political turmoil under the rule of Sultan Ismail. Wars caused by colonial conflicts led a young Ibnu 'Ajībah, then six years old, to assist his teacher, Syaikh Ibnu 'Arabī al-Darqāwī. However, according to Zubair, these political upheavals had no impact on Ibnu 'Ajībah's works, as none of his writings indicate involvement in political affairs.[16]

Ibnu 'Ajībah's perspective is highly exclusive and can only be understood by a select few. He emphasized that the Qur'an does not merely possess an apparent *(ẓāhir)* meaning but also contains an inner (batin) meaning, comprehensible only to those whose hearts have been illuminated by Allah. However, he clarified that the existence of a hidden meaning does not contradict the outward meaning; rather, it must always be preceded by a proper understanding of the *ẓāhir.* As a foundational principle of Sufi thought, Ibnu 'Ajībah cited a well-known Sufi hadith: *"Li kulli āyātin ẓāhirun wa bātinun wa ḥāddun wa muttala"* (Every verse has an apparent meaning, an inner meaning, a boundary, and a profound interpretation). [17]

In the introduction to his tafsir, Ibnu 'Ajībah stated that his motivation to write an interpretation that integrates both outward meanings and mystical insights came from his two teachers, Sayyid al-Buzidi al-Ḥasanī and Maula al-'Arabī. Therefore, this work was not solely his own initiative but was largely inspired by his mentors. He expressed his hope that this tafsir would largely benefit.[18]

Ibnu 'Ajībah placed great emphasis on the necessity of strict qualifications for interpreting the Qur'an. A Qur'anic interpreter must possess expertise in various fields, particularly in zahir knowledge, to fully grasp the principles of Islamic law before delving into the batin meaning. Additionally, a Qur'anic interpreter must study under a

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[16] Zubair, "Ibnu 'Ajībah Wa al-Majaz Fī Tafsīrihi al-Baḥr al-Madīd: Sūrah Yāsīn Namudhajan" (Algeria, University of Abou Bekr Belkaïd-Tlemcen, 2015).

[17] Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr Al-Madīd fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Majīd.*, Volume I. h. 15.

[18] Al-Ḥasanī, h. 19.

spiritual teacher who also possesses a deep understanding of sharia law. Ibnu 'Ajībah asserted that:[19]

> "And know that the Great Qur'an has an outward *(ẓāhir)* meaning for those who master outward knowledge *(ahl al-ẓāhir)*, and it also has an inner *(bāṭin)* meaning for those who master inner knowledge *(ahl al-bāṭin)*. The interpretation of *ahl al-bāṭin* will not be understood or felt except by themselves. Their words are not valid unless they first acknowledge the exoteric *(ẓāhir)* meaning and then present the esoteric *(bāṭin)* meaning with refined expressions and precise guidance. Whoever has not attained such knowledge should accept it and not hastily reject it, for the knowledge of spiritual tastes *(azwaq)* is beyond the limits of reason and cannot be known merely through transmitted reports *(tawātul al nuqūl)*.

Ibnu 'Ajībah passed away on 7 Syawwal 1224 AH while visiting the tomb of his teacher, al-Buzaidī, after contracting the plague *(Ṭā'ūn)*. He took his last breath in his teacher's village and was later brought back to Tetouan for burial.[20]

Sufi Order Dimmension In Ibnu 'Ajībah Interpretation

The tradition of esoteric *(bāṭin)* interpretation in Sufi schools developed through two primary influences: internal and external. Internal influences stem from the personal spiritual experiences of the Sufi interpreter *(mufassir)*, which shape their understanding of symbols and implicit meanings within the Qur'anic text. However, its exclusive nature accessible only to those who share similar spiritual states poses challenges for academic study. To trace this influence, one approach is to analyze the Sufi tradition *(ṭarīqah)* adhered to by the interpreter, as specific schools of Sufism often reflect the spiritual dynamics they embody. External influences, meanwhile, arise from socio-historical contexts, cultural environments, and linguistic frameworks that shape the interpretive process. Despite the inevitability of the interpreter's subjectivity, Sufi exegesis strives to harmonize inner *(bāṭin)* dimensions with linguistic principles, ensuring the conveyed spiritual essence remains intelligible to readers.[21]

For example, the interpretations of Ibnu 'Ajībah a prominent figure of the Syāziliyya Ṣūfī order reflect external influences tied to his historical context. As a sheikh within an institutionalized Sufi order *(ṭarīqah)*, he emphasized a spiritual hierarchy: the master *(syaikh)*, the disciple or seeker *(murid)* and *al-'aḥd* (the covenant of initiation). In this framework, the sheikh's role transcends mere advice; he becomes

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[19] Al-Ḥasanī, h. 16-19.
[20] Al-Ḥasanī, Volume I. h. 8.
[21] Arsyad Abrar, *Memahami Tafsir Sufi: Sejarah Sumber Dan Metode: Studi Terhadap Tafsir al-Sulami Dan al-Qushairi* (Ciputat: Cinta Buku Media, 2015).

the absolute guide for the disciple *(sālik),* who is deemed "lost" without such guidance. This contrasts with early Sufi practices, which were more individualized, with teachers merely correcting disciples' errors.[22]

Through his exegetical work, Ibn 'Ajībah affirms the necessity of structured spiritual initiation within the ṭarīqah as the path to divine truth *ḥaqīqah*. This institutionalization of Sufi teachings marks a shift from elitist, individual practices to a systematic, communal framework, where the disciple's reliance on the sheikh becomes pivotal to spiritual success. Thus, his authority as a Sufi scholar is not only rooted in his personal biography but also in the integration of inner experience, socio-historical context, and the institutional structures of the *ṭarīqah*, all of which inform his interpretive methodology.

The Authority Of The Spritual Leader *(Mursyid)* **In Sufi Order.**

In the Sufi tradition, a spiritual guide known as a *Syaikh*, *Mursyid*, or *al-'Arif* holds a significant role and status. This aligns with the essence of Sufism, which focuses on drawing closer to Allah through spiritual discipline *(riyādah)* and increased worship. It is believed that this journey becomes more effective under the guidance of a teacher.[23]

Imam al-Ghazali, a prominent Sufi scholar, emphasized the necessity of having a teacher for those pursuing the Sufi path. He stated that a student *(murid)* greatly depends on a *Syaikh* as a mentor and guide toward the right path. This is because the path of faith is often obscure, whereas misleading paths are numerous and appear clear. Consequently, anyone without a guiding teacher risks going astray, as they may be led by Satan instead.[24]

The verse that Ibn 'Ajībah uses as justification for the necessity of spiritual initiation through a teacher or Shaikh is found in Sūrah al-Mā'idah/5:35. Textually, Ibn 'Ajībah interprets this verse as a command to seek a means *(wasilah)* to attain Allah's pleasure, which is realized by drawing closer to Him through complete obedience. Additionally, he understands this verse as an instruction to strive earnestly (*jihad*) in combating the enemies of Allah, both visible *(al-zāhir)* and unseen *(al-bāṭin).* The

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[22] Mulyadi, *Menyelami Lubuk Tasawuf* (Jakarta: PT Gelora Aksara Pratama, 2006).

[23] Rosihan Anwar, *Akhlak Tasawuf* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2010).

[24] Abu Wafa Al-Ghanimi Al-Taftazani, *Tasawuf Islam:Telaah'a Historisdan Perkembagannya* (Gaya Media Pratama, 2002).

ultimate goal is to reach *(wuṣul)* Allah and attain His divine grace *(karāmah).* Ibn 'Ajibah emphasizes the crucial role of a teacher, who is believed to shape an individual's character, as he elaborates below:

> *There is no better means (wasilah) than befriending the knowledgeable ones (al-'Arifun), sitting with them, serving them, and obeying them. It is obligatory to follow them. Whoever seeks another way to attain the Divine Presence will find it foolishness in the science of the spiritual path (tariqah). From Ibn 'Umar and al-Zujjaj: 'If a person is granted access to the knowledge of the unseen ('ilm al-Ghaib) without having a teacher (ustadz), then nothing is truly revealed to him.*[25]

Ibnu 'Ajībah reinforces his perspective on the necessity of a teacher by citing the statement of Ibrahim Ibn Syaiba, who asserts that spiritual maturity cannot be attained without undergoing disciplined training *(riyāḍah)* under the guidance of a *Syaikh.* Such a teacher is a refined individual who consistently offers counsel and direction. Even if a person has mastered various fields of knowledge and has connections across different social strata, without adhering to the etiquette taught by a teacher and paying attention to their guidance, they merely expose their own flaws and ignorance. Such an individual is deemed unfit to serve as a leader or manage societal affairs *(mu'āmalah).*[26]

Unlike his two predecessors, al-Syirāzī does not associate this verse with the authority of a spiritual teacher. He interprets *wabtagu wasīlah* as the path to piety. Al-Syirāzī understanding of this verse appears to be influenced by al-Qusyairī, though he does not mention him explicitly. He interprets *ibtighā' wasīlah* as drawing closer *(taqarrub)* to Allah through acts of *iḥsan* in response to life's experiences.[27] Meanwhile, Ibn 'Arabī sees this verse as containing three divine commands to His servants. First, believers are instructed to attain piety through self-purification *(al-tazkiyah).* Second, they must seek *wasīlah* by emptying themselves of negative traits *(al-taḥliyah).* Lastly, they are called to strive in the way of Allah by erasing their individual attributes until they reach *fanā fī al-żāt* (annihilation in His essence) and ultimately attain *baqa'* (eternal subsistence) in His attributes and essence.[28]

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[25] Al-Hasani, *Al-Bahr Al-Madid fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Majid.* Volume II. h. 174

[26] Al-Hasani.

[27] Ruzbihan al-Baqlī Syirāzī, *'Arais al-Bayān Fī Ḥaqāiq Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2008).

[28] Ibnu 'Arabī, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* Volume I (Beirut: Dār al-Yaqza al-'Arabiyah, n.d.). h. 328.

Another example highlighting the importance of spiritual initiation through a teacher can be seen in Ibnu 'Ajībah's interpretation of Sūrah al-Naḥl/16:43. Ibnu 'Ajībah elucidates the inner dimension of this concept, linking it to two forms of spiritual propagation: the general call *(da'wah 'āmmah),* associated with prophethood *(risālah)* and carried out by messengers, and the specific call *(da'wah khaṣṣah)*, tied to saintly authority *(walāyah)*, entrusted to righteous humans. While the former represents the universal prophetic mission, the latter—embodied by spiritual masters—is described as the "Prophetic Mystical Education" *(Tarbiyah Nabawiyyah al-'Urfiyyah)*, guiding seekers through personalized, transformative discipleship. Both paths, though distinct in scope and method, are divinely ordained and fulfilled by human agents.[29]

Ibn 'Ajībah reaffirms the crucial role of *Syaikhs* in guiding and delivering religious teachings, much like the prophets before them, who were, after all, ordinary human beings. This understanding is essential, as *S Syaikhs* are often associated with supernatural abilities *(tarbiyah al-ghaibiyah)*. However, Ibn 'Ajibah emphasizes that if a *Syaikh* possesses such mystical qualities, the primary criterion should be their knowledge of both spiritual realities *(ḥaqīqa)* and Islamic law *(syarī'a)*. Without this foundation, supernatural abilities could be misleading. He further asserts that one can only grasp the true essence of a *syaikh* humanity by recognizing their human qualities and that spiritual purification can only be attained through a close spiritual connection with a *syaikh*.[30]

Within the same framework, Ibn 'Ajibah interprets the term *ahl al-Zikr* as referring to *al-'arifunā bi Allāh* those who possess deep knowledge of God. These individuals hold authority in shaping the inner dimensions of faith, including the secrets of *tauhid* and the awareness of elements that can corrupt the heart, such as ego and uncontrolled desires. The *'Arif* comprehend these matters because they are *ahl al-dhawq* (people of direct experience) and *ahl al-kashf* (people of spiritual unveiling), signifying their direct experiential knowledge of the spiritual realm.[31]

Ibn 'Ajībah's interpretation reflects Sufi doctrines closely associated with sufi order, which are undoubtedly influenced by his own perspective and background. This discussion suggests that his exegesis is not entirely a direct divine inspiration *(faydi)* but

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[29] Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr Al-Madīd fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Majīd.* Volume IV. h. 27.
[30] Al-Ḥasanī.
[31] Al-Ḥasanī.

also involves the independent reasoning (ijtihad) based on textual understanding of the verses. Borrowing Annabel Keeler's expression, Sufi exegesis does not merely reflect spiritual capacity *(hal)*; it also encompasses doctrine, teachings, mystical insights, and the exegete's intellectual responsibility. In the two previously discussed verses, Ibn 'Ajibah's interpretation signifies his role as a *tariqah* master.

The Relationship of Disciple and Master in Sufi Order

One of the fundamental components of a Sufi order is the presence of a disciple *(salik)*, who is required to pledge allegiance *(bai'ah)* before a *mursyid* and commit to practicing the prescribed *wirid* (spritual spell) and devotional acts with sincerity. The ritual of *bai'ah* in the Sufi tradition is strongly grounded in the Qur'an and is believed to originate from humanity's primordial covenant with Allah, as mentioned in Sūrah Al-A'rāf/7: 172. Historically, this ritual was reaffirmed by the Companions of the Prophet through their pledge of allegiance during the Treaty of Hudabiyyah, as recorded in the Qur'an in Sūrah al-Fatḥ/48: 10.[32]

As is customary in his exegetical approach, Ibn 'Ajībah begins his interpretation by elucidating the textual meaning of the verse. Broadly speaking, the verse recounts the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, also known as *Bai'āt al-Ridwān* due to the divine approval it received. This pledge symbolized the unwavering loyalty of the Companions to the Prophet, and according to Ibn 'Ajībah, it correlates with Sūrah al-Nisā'/4: 80.

In this context, he interprets the phrase *yadu Allāh fawqa aydīhim* as an affirmation that the pledge made by the Companions to the Prophet is tantamount to pledging allegiance to Allah. The term *yad* (hand) in this verse is understood as a form of *al-tashbīḥ al-mubālaghah* (an exaggerated metaphorical expression). Consequently, the verse conveys the idea that, metaphorically, Allah's hand is above the hands of those who pledged allegiance to the Prophet at that time. For those who uphold their pledge, the ultimate reward is paradise and all it encompasses.[33]

Ibn 'Ajībah's interpretation, which aligns with the doctrines of the Sufi order, becomes particularly evident in the latter part of his exegesis. He asserts that this verse illustrates the state of *fana fī Allāh* (annihilation in God) attained by the Prophet

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[32] Forum Karya Ilmiah Purna Siswa 2011 Raden, *Jejak Sufi : Membangun Moral Berbasis Spiritual* (Lirboyo Press, 2011).

[33] Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr Al-Madīd fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Majīd.* Volume VII. h. 136.

Muhammad (peace be upon him) until he reached *baqa'* (subsistence in God). According to Ibn 'Ajībah, this state is not exclusive to the Prophet but is also experienced by his rightful successors. However, he extends the concept of *khilāfah* beyond the Prophet's Companions to include *al-'arifuna billāh* those who have reached the spiritual stations of *fana'* and *baqa'*. These individuals are regarded as the heirs of prophetic education *(al-tarbiyah al-nubuwwah)* throughout every era.[34]

He further posits that pledging allegiance to these spiritual figures is equivalent to pledging allegiance to Allah, and gazing upon them is likened to witnessing the divine presence. Conversely, renouncing the *bai'ah* is considered self-destructive, whereas fulfilling it results in immense spiritual rewards, including the perpetual vision of Allah's sacred essence *(syuhūduhu 'alā zātihi al-muqaddas)* and elevation to the esteemed rank of *ahl al-muqarrabīn* (those brought near to Allah).[35]

In summary, Ibnu 'Ajībah likens the companions' oath of allegiance *(bai'ah)* to the Prophet to a disciple's commitment to a master within the Sufi order. In Sufi tradition, following a spiritual guide is not merely an obligation but also necessitates specific qualifications. A disciple must choose a master who possesses exemplary character, profound knowledge, and legitimate spiritual authority through an unbroken chain *(silsilah)* tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad. If these prerequisites are not met, the sufi disciple holds the right to disengage from the master.

Sufis generally take the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) and Prophet Khidr in Sūrah Al-Kahf/18:66-67 as a model for the etiquette *(adab)* of a student toward their teacher. This story represents the esoteric dimension of Islam, emphasizing reverence and veneration for the teacher.[36] Ibn 'Ajībah adopts a similar view in his Quranic commentary, affirming that this verse inspires Sufis in shaping a student's conduct toward their master. This attitude is manifested through silence and respect. Even if a Sufi master appears to commit a wrongdoing, the student must perceive it as a test of sincerity and patience that refines their spiritual growth. According to Ibn 'Ajībah, a true student is one who honors and emulates their teacher in all circumstances.[37]

For him, such an attitude is understandable because it pertains to inner, intangible

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[34] Al-Ḥasanī.

[35] Al-Ḥasanī.

[36] Hosein Nasr, *The Garden of Thruth : The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (USA: HapperCollins Publisher, 2005).

[37] Al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr Al-Madīd fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Majīd*. Volume IV, h. 181.

aspects of spirituality, unlike the exoteric dimensions of Islamic law *(syarī'ah)*, which can be grasped through study and empirical observation. He then cites Wartajibi, who argues that the trials Allah imposed on Prophet Musa while accompanying Khidr were meant to solidify his steadfastness *(istiqāmah)* in following the righteous path and to strengthen his commitment to islamic jurisprudance through the guidance of teachers. In this context, a teacher must serve as a role model for students and become the focal point of devotion within the sufi order *(ṭarīqa)*.

However, from a differing perspective, Ibn 'Ajībah also quotes Ibn al-Bina, who disagrees with using this verse as a basis for the obligation to follow a spiritual teacher. According to Ibn al-Bina, a teacher's actions may not always align with a student's understanding. If disagreements arise, a teacher should not force a student to continue following them, nor is the student absolutely obligated to remain. Thus, Ibn al-Bina rejects interpretations that cite this verse as evidence for the necessity of learning from an "expert in divine truth" *(al-ahl al-ḥaqīqah)*.

Another verse legitimized by Ibn 'Ajībah regarding the doctrine of the Sufi student-teacher relationship is found in QS al-Naṣr/110: 1-3. Ibn 'Ajībah interprets these verses as a symbol of a student's success in attaining divine assistance *(naṣrullāh)* during their spiritual journey. He interprets *al-Fatḥ* (victory) as the attainment of the station of *fana'* (annihilation of the self), where a student comprehends the secrets of divine realities and witnesses humanity flocking to the path of Allah. In this state, the servant is commanded to "glorify the praise of your Lord" *(fasabbiḥ bi ḥamdi rabbika),* which he explains as the purification of Allah *(tanzih),* i.e., seeing nothing but Him within His dominion.

In this verses explanation, he also cites al-Qusyairī, who interprets divine assistance as the state of *fana'*, in which human attributes dissolve, resulting in a purified soul. Meanwhile, the victory refers to a servant's closeness to Allah, marked by the state of *al-Jam'* (unity), the perfection of divine knowledge *(ma'rifah),* likened to a human's innate thirst to know their Lord.[38]

Other Sufis, such as al-Syirāzī and Ibn 'Arabī, in their exegetical works, also legitimize these verses as describing the spiritual conditions experienced by a Sufi. However, the difference lays in the fact that Ibn 'Ajībah's interpretative narrative aligns

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[38] Al-Ḥasanī. Volume 8, h. 366.

more closely with the initiation creed of Sufi orders, where he repeatedly emphasizes the indispensability of a sufi guider teacher.

Conclusion

The study of Ibn 'Ajībah's interpretation of the Qur'an within the institutionalized framework of Sufi orders reveals the significant role of Sufism in shaping Qur'anic exegesis. His work, *Al-Baḥr Al-Madīd fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Majīd*, stands as a culmination of Sufi interpretative traditions, integrating both the esoteric *(bāṭin)* and exoteric *(zāhir)* meanings of the Qur'an. By applying Gadamer's hermeneutical approach, this study highlights how Ibn Ajībah's interpretations were deeply influenced by his socio-historical context, particularly the political instability in Morocco and the rise of the *Syāzilī-Darqāwī* order. His tafsir does not merely reflect mystical insights but also institutionalizes Sufi teachings within a structured religious framework.

One of the central themes in Ibn 'Ajībah's interpretation is the authority of the spiritual guide (*mursyid*) within the Sufi order. He views the role of the *mursyid* as indispensable for spiritual seekers, drawing on Qur'anic verses such as sūrah Al-Mā'idah/5:35 and sūrah al-Naḥl/16:43 to justify the necessity of a mentor in the mystical journey. His perspective reinforces the hierarchical structure within Sufi orders, where disciples must submit to the authority of their guide to attain spiritual enlightenment. This institutionalized spiritual relationship marks a shift from earlier, more individualized Sufi traditions to a system where spiritual progress is regulated through formal mentorship and initiation rituals.

Another key aspect of Ibnu 'Ajībah's tafsir is his emphasis on the institutional bond between the disciple and the master, particularly through the ritual of *bai'ah* (pledge of allegiance). By drawing parallels between the prophetic pledge in QS al-Fatḥ/48: 10 and the Sufi disciple's commitment to their guide, Ibnu 'Ajībah reinforces the legitimacy of Sufi orders as extensions of prophetic tradition. His interpretation suggests that submission to a spiritual guide is not merely a personal choice but a divinely sanctioned path to spiritual fulfillment. This aligns with broader Sufi doctrines that stress the necessity of spiritual discipline, mentorship, and communal practice in achieving divine proximity.

Furthermore, Ibnu 'Ajībah's exegesis underscores the dual nature of Qur'anic interpretation, advocating for a balanced approach that integrates both rational *(ẓāhir)*

and mystical *(bāṭin)* insights. Unlike some earlier Sufi exegetes who emphasized only the esoteric dimension, Ibnu 'Ajībah systematically bridges the gap between legalistic interpretations and mystical experiences. His approach validates the institutionalization of Sufi knowledge, demonstrating that spiritual insights must be rooted in proper scholarly training and adherence to Islamic law.

In conclusion, this study highlights how Ibnu 'Ajībah's Qur'anic interpretation extends beyond personal mystical experience to serve as a foundational text for institutionalized Sufi orders. His work legitimizes the structured transmission of Sufi teachings and reinforces the necessity of spiritual authority within the mystical path. By placing his tafsir within the socio-religious dynamics of his time, this research provides new insights into the interplay between spiritual authority, Qur'anic hermeneutics, and institutionalized Sufism in the late pre-modern Islamic world. Ultimately, Ibnu 'Ajībah's legacy continues to shape contemporary understandings of Sufi exegesis, illustrating the enduring relevance of his interpretative framework in the study of Islamic mysticism.

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