

## UNVEILING SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE: Sheikh Muhammad Waly al-Khalidy's Role in Naqshbandiyah Sufi Order in Aceh

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**Abstract:** This article critically explains the concept and practice of the spiritual initiation (*rābiṭah murshid*) of the disciple and the role of Sheikh Muhammad Waly al-Khalidy in the Naqshbandiyah (Sufi) order in Aceh. Employing a qualitative method along with a hermeneutical approach the research found that the role of the guide is at the core of spiritual training and education. The spiritual connection between the student and the teacher is an intimate bond that allows the latter to guide the former in his efforts to become a perfect human being. The findings of this study differ from those of J. Spencer Trimmingham, Julia Day Howell, and Mulyadhi Kartanegara who assumed that the authority of the spiritual guide is overemphasized and no longer necessary once the *sālik* reached his path. However, according to Muhammad Waly, a true sheikh has natural authority, and this authority is justified and does not intrude upon the Shari'ah as it has been done during the reading of *Naẓam of Obat Hati* (Medicine of the Heart) containing the names of the *murshids* and *kbulafa'* of the Sufi order.

**Keywords:** *Rābiṭah murshid*; Sheikh Muhammad Waly al-Khalidy; Sufi order; Education.

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### Introduction

The process of Islamization of the archipelago was carried out by Sufi sheikhs who followed various approaches to spread the spiritual teachings of their sufi order (*tarekat*). These important figures were active all across the archipelago and were able to spread the teachings of Islam in Aceh, Java, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, West Sumatra, South Sumatra, Palembang and other areas. According to Azra, it was these itinerant Sufi sheikhs who planted the seeds of Islam in the region, and not the Muslim traders from Gujarat in India.<sup>1</sup> In Aceh several such *tarekat* were able to establish themselves, such as the Shaṭṭāriyyah, Rifā'īyyah, Ḥaddādiyyah, Qādiriyyah, Idrīsiyyah, and Naqshbandiyyah orders. The local branch of the Shaṭṭāriyyah order was founded by Sheikh Abdurrauf al-Singkili as an extension of its Middle East network, followed by the Haddadiyah order developed by Tgk. Haji Hasan Krueng Kalee as a *murshid tarekat*,<sup>2</sup> while the Naqshbandiyah order was established by Sheikh Muhammad Waly al-Khalidy bin Teungku Haji Muhammad Salim bin Malim Palito (1917–1961) through the transmission of Sheikh Abdul Gani al-Kamfari.<sup>3</sup> This *tarekat* path opened by Sheikh Muhammad Waly has been preserved to this day.

Today, the Naqshbandiyah congregation in Aceh is a genealogical network connected to Haramain (the cities of Makkah and Media) that migrated to Minangkabau with the help of Sheikh Ismail al-Khalidy. Sheikh Ismail al-Khalidy introduced this *tarekat* in Minangkabau in the nineteenth century via the east coast of West

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<sup>1</sup> Azyumardi Azra, "Indonesian Islam, Mainstream Muslims and Politics," in *Paper Voor Taiwanese En Indonesian Islamic Leaders Exchange Project* (Taiwan: The Asia Foundation, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat*, trans. Farid Wajidi (Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing, 2012). Abdul Manan, "The Influence of Tarekat Syattariyah toward Political and Social Aspects in the Regency of Nagan Raya, Aceh-Indonesia", *International Journal of Advanced Research (IJAR)* 5, no. 7 (2016): 258-267. DOI: 10.21474/IJAR1/4714.

<sup>3</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1992).

Sumatra through Singapore and Riau to serve as a link between prospective students of the Naqshbandiyah order and the Zawiyah Jabal Qubais managed by Sheikh Sulaiman al-Qirimi and Sheikh Sulaiman al-Zuhdi. Sheikh Muhammad Waly helped extend the genealogical network of transmission of Naqshbandi (Sufi) order that has been introduced by Sheikh Ismail al-Khalidi.<sup>4</sup> In the early twentieth century, Sheikh Muhammad Waly became the central figure of the Naqshbandiyah al-Waliyah order based in Dayah Darussalam, Labuhanhaji. There was also the network of Dayah Darussa'adah and Tanoh Abee. The students from Dayah Darussalam, Labuhanhaji strongly supported the development of Islamic boarding schools in Aceh until today.

This research was carried in the Labuhanhaji district due to several factors. The first factor is the existence of the Islamic boarding school (*daya*) of Darussalam located in Blang Poroh village, Labuhanhaji District, South Aceh. This *dayah* was founded by Sheikh Muhammad Waly as a Naqshbandiyah center to spread its teachings through annual *suluk* activities and events (i.e., Ramadan, Zulhijjah, and Maulid). Another factor is the shrine of Sheikh Muhammad Waly which is visited by those seeking blessings (*barakah*). The shrine is situated near the mosque in the Dayah complex of the village and easily accessible by the public. The practice of visiting the shrine or performing *ziyarah* is a spiritual practice because *barakah* is not a material benefit. People visiting the grave are guided by their faith and due to their love for the sheikh,<sup>5</sup> with the intention of enriching their lives spiritually and socially and to receive spiritual strength from it.<sup>6</sup> This tradition is supported by the whole village community, who have accepted the sheikh as a spiritual teacher (*mursid*).<sup>7</sup> The third factor is the concentration of *dayah* in this district where Islamic education is highly valued, and the profound influence of their leaders (*teungku*) who are expected to provide guidance in religious as well as worldly

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<sup>4</sup> Muhibbuddin Waly, *Zikir Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah al-Waliyah dan Nadham Silsilahnya* (Banda Aceh: Taufiqiyah Sa'adah, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Abdul Manan, *The Ritual Calendar of South Aceh, Indonesia* (Muenster: Wissenschaftliche Schriften der WWU Münster, 2015: 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Abdul Manan, *Ritual Kalender Aneuk Jamee di Aceh Selatan*, Revised Edition (Banda Aceh: Bandar Publishing, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Hasan Basri, *Praktik Suluk di Kalangan Nelayan Desa Blangporoh, Kecamatan Labuhan Haji Kabupaten Aceh Selatan* (Banda Aceh: Pusat Penelitian Ilmu Sosial dan Budaya Universitas Syiah Kuala, 1998).

matters in Acehese society.<sup>8</sup> In the colonial wars, for instance, the military leadership of the Acehese passed into the hands of the religious leaders. Being acutely aware of their influence Hurgronje argued that the Dutch should suppress the *teungku* and limit their activities to strictly religious matters<sup>9</sup>

Several studies on the role of the Naqshbandiyah al-Waliyah order focused on Labuhan Haji in South Aceh and MPTT (Council for the Study of Tauhid Tasawuf) as well as other issues which are closely related to this *tarekat*, for example, Neo-Sufism, Shariatism, and Ulama Politics.

Wirianto portrayed Sheikh Muhammad Waly as the founding father of the village,<sup>10</sup> a leading educator and *murshid* in the community, and a staunch opponent of the Darul Islam/TII (Tentara Islam Indonesia or Indonesian Islamic Army) movement which he considered it as a heinous rebellion (*bughat madhmimah*) against the legitimate leader. In this he was backed by two Aceh ‘*ulama*’, Teungku Haji Hasan Krueng Kalee and Habib Muda Seunangan.<sup>11</sup> Besides his role in politics and education, Sheikh Muhammad Waly also led the Naqshbandiyah *tarekat*.<sup>12</sup>

Kurnia examined the educational concept of inner purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*)<sup>13</sup> as reflected in the ideas of Sheikh Muhammad Waly. Moreover, this study also observed how *suluk* practices are used in the *tarekat* as an introduction to the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad SAW to adopt his attitudes and morals (*akhlāq*). Concerning the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, the *murshid* is entrusted with the psycho-spiritual

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<sup>8</sup> James T. Siegel, *The Rope of The God* (California: University of California Press, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> Christian Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehese*, trans. A. W. S O’Sullivan, vol. 2 (Leiden: Late EJ Brill, 1906).

<sup>10</sup> Abdul Manan, “The Ritual of First Infant Bathing in Aceh: An Ethnographic Study in West Labuhan Haji, South Aceh”. *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 2 (2019), 1-21. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v3i2.5466>. The Syaikh’s descendent were quite often asked to name the baby born in the Villages, see Abdul Manan, “Naming Acehese Babies”, *Mankind Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2022), 687–711. <https://doi.org/10.46469/mq.2022.62.4.7>.

<sup>11</sup> Dicky Wirianto, “Pendidikan Tasawuf Syaikh Muhammad Waly” (Aceh--Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Aceh, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Indonesia*.

<sup>13</sup> Rusdi Kurnia, “Sheikh Muhammad Walī al-Khalidī’s Idea about the Education Concept of Tazkiyatun Nafsi,” *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal): Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2019).

education of the aspiring *sālik*. This very intimate form of training allowed the student to progress safely and guidedly, supported by constant *dhikr* to raise the level of sensitivity and inner awareness and draw closer to Allah.

Zukhdi evaluated the contribution of Sheikh Muhammad Waly in the dissemination of Shafi'ite teachings (*fiqh al-madbbhab*) through his students from Dayah Darussalam, Labuhan Haji, who are the new generation of religion teachers spreading out into the remote areas in Aceh, such as Teungku Adnan Mahmud Bakongan and Tuanku Idrus Batu Basurek Bangkinang.<sup>14</sup> The role of Sheikh Muhammad Waly greatly affected the spread of Shafi'ite *fiqh* in Aceh.

Shadiqin approached the legacy of Sheikh Muhammad Waly through the lens of spiritual authority and social change in Aceh.<sup>15</sup> This study examined the causes and course of disputes among the *tarekat* teachers and highlighted the role of the spiritual network in disseminating religious values and ideas in Aceh in form of a spiritual network authority consisting of a main patron (*mursbid 'ām*), patron (*mursbid*) and clients (*jama'ab*). Similarly, he discussed the important role of the *mursbid* in spreading the religious teachings of the *tarekat* in Aceh.<sup>16</sup>

Misbah approached the topic of religious propagation (*da'wah*) through the Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid Tasawuf by Syaikh Haji Amran Waly al-Khalidy in Aceh. His dissertation attempted to identify the factors responsible for the rise of MPTT (Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid Tasawuf or Council for the Study of Tauhid Tasawuf) in Aceh, its development and its spread across South East Asia. The findings indicated that MPTT was a response to the political shifts occurring after the reform of 1998, the Tsunami tragedy of 2004, and the peace agreement between the Republic of Indonesia and GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or Free Aceh Movement) in 2005.<sup>17</sup> The urgency of main teaching developed by

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<sup>14</sup> Muhammad Zukhdi, "Dinamika Perbedaan Madzhab dalam Islam: Studi terhadap Pengamalan Madzhab di Aceh," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 17, no. 1 (2017) 121-149. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v17i1.1024>.

<sup>15</sup> Sehat Ihsan Shadiqin, "Otoritas Spiritual dan Perubahan Sosial: Jaringan dan Kontestasi Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah Syaikh Muda Waly di Aceh" (Yogyakarta--Program Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> T. Lembong Misbah, *Gerakan Dakwah Sufistik: Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid-Tasawuf Abuya Syaikh Amran Waly al-Khalidi di Aceh* (Yogyakarta: UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2016).

MPIT as framing its movement was to offer the idea of *Sufi tawhīd* to achieve more unity among the different and often antagonistic Muslim groups in Aceh.<sup>18</sup>

Lastly, Ichwan explored the phenomenon of neo-Sufism, Shariatism, and ‘ulama politics’ in Aceh, focusing on the confrontation between Sufi *ulama* and Shari‘ah ‘*ulama*’ in Aceh. Specifically, this article discussed the conflict between MPU (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama or Consultative Ulama Council), HUDA (Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh or Association of Acehnese Dayah Ulama), and MUNA (Manjelis Ulama Nanggroe Aceh or Ulama Council of Nanggroe Aceh) on the one hand and the neo-Sufi group MPIT led by Abuya Sheikh Amran Waly, on the other.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike the previous studies mentioned above, this study critically examines the concept and practice of spiritual initiation (*raḥīṭah murshid*) as described in the works of Sheikh Muhammad Waly al-Khalidy in the Naqshabandiyah al-Waliyah Sufi order, focusing on the relationship between *murshid* and *salik*. The concept of *raḥīṭah murshid* is a specific term coined by Sheikh Muhammad Waly himself. Specific attention is paid to his views on the duties of the *murshid* in instructing the *salik*, the teaching methods he employs, and the effect of calling upon the *murshid*.

### **Biography of Sheikh Muhammad Waly**

Sheikh Muhammad Waly is counted among the highly influential *ulama* in the twentieth century who influenced Islamic thought and was actively involved in the political disputes under the Soekarno regime. Alongside Teungku Haji Muhammad Krueng Kalee and Teungku Haji Muhammad Hasballah Indrapuri he opposed the DI/TII movement in Aceh.<sup>20</sup>

Sheikh Muhammad Waly was born in Blang Poroh village situated in the Labuhan Haji district in South Aceh in 1917 and died aged 43 on March 20, 1961.<sup>21</sup> During his lifetime he was known as

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<sup>18</sup> Wirianto, “Pendidikan Tasawuf Syaikh Muhammad Waly.”

<sup>19</sup> Mochammad Nur Ichwan, “Neo-Sufism, Shariatism, and Ulama Politics,” in *Islam, Politics and Change*, ed. Kees Van Dijk and Nico JG Kaptein (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016), 221–241.

<sup>20</sup> Dicky Wirianto, “Abuya Muda Waly al-Khalidy,” *Kalam: Jurnal Agama dan Sosial Humaniora* 4, no. 1 (2017): 128–148.

<sup>21</sup> Kurnia, “Sheikh Muhammad Wali al-Khalidi’s Idea about the Education Concept of Tazkiyatun Nafsi.”

Abuya Muda Waly al-Khalidy in recognition of his deep religious knowledge and mastery of several religious disciplines, which he acquired at a young age. He was born as the youngest son of Teungku Sheikh Haji Muhammad Salim bin Malin Palito who had migrated from Batusangkar, Koto Baru in West Sumatera and arrived in South Aceh as a *da'i* and religious teacher, encouraged by his uncle Sheikh Abdul Karim or Tuanku Peulumat who had married a local.<sup>22</sup>

As was common at the time, the young Muhammad Waly was first instructed by his father, Teungku Haji Salim and then attended Sekolah Dasar Pemerintah Hindia Belanda or *Vervolks-School* in Dutch. At home he gained the basic knowledge of Islam like *tamhūd*, *fiqh* and Arabic language, while completing a public school education before enrolling the local Dayah al-Jami'ah al-Kairiyah headed by Teungku Muhammad Ali Lampisang, a scholar from Aceh Besar and a contemporary of Abu Hasan Krueng Kalee.<sup>23</sup>

Muhammad Waly continued his formal education at Dayah Bustanul Huda managed by Sheikh Mahmud originally from Lhoknga, Aceh Besar. In this *pesantren*, Sheikh Muhammad Waly studied the classic Shafi'ite textbooks (*kitab*) like the *I'ānat al-Ṭālibīn* (help for the Science Claimants), *Ṭahrīr* (liberation) and *Maḥallī* (the name of the book attributed to the name of the author, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī) in *fiqh* and the *Alfīyah* and *Ibn 'Aqīl* in Arabic language. Following this he went to Aceh Besar and became a *santri* at Dayah Krueng Kalee led by Teungku Haji Hasan Krueng Kalee before moving on to Dayah Kasbiyah Indrapuri led by Teungku Haji Ahmad Hasballah in Aceh Besar. Not soon after Muhammad Waly moved further to West Sumatera to study at the newly established Normal Islam School (NIS) or Kulliyatul Muallimin al-Islamiyyah in Padang founded by one of the al-Azhar alumni Muhammad Yunus in 1931. However, in 1939 he decided to return to Aceh.<sup>24</sup>

According to Wirianto, Sheikh Muhammad Waly al-Khalidy authored the following works:<sup>25</sup>

1. Risalah Permata Intan dan Intan Permata ada Menyatakan Keputusan I'tiqad tentang Ketuhanan Menurut Hadis, Ijma', Qiyas dan Qur'an (Permata Intan and Intan Permata treatises on

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<sup>22</sup> Wirianto, "Abuya Muda Waly al-Khalidy," 128–148.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Wirianto, "Pendidikan Tasawuf Syaikh Muhammad Waly."

stating the decision of *P'tiqad* regarding divinity according to Hadith, *Ijma'*, *Qiyas* and *Qur'an*).

2. *Tamwir al-Anwar fi Idhār Kbalal mā fi Kashf al-Asrār* (Shining Light in Showing Shortcomings in Dealing with Secrets).
3. *Adab Dhikir Ismu Zat dalam Tariqat Naqshabandiyah* (Etiquette of Dhikir Ismu Zat in Tariqat Naqshbandiyah).
4. *Obat Hati Nadham Munajat yang Diberkati bagi Ahli Thariqat al-Aliyab al-Naqshabandiyah* (Nadham Munajat of Heart Medicine Blessed for Experts in Thariqat al-Aliyab al-Naqshabandiyah)
5. *Al-Fatāwā* (Islamic Scholar Advices).

### **Duties of the *Murshid* in Educating the *Salik***

In the context of spiritual education, the *murshid* of a Sufi sect has to meet strict moral criteria. According to Sheikh Muhammad Waly, the first obligation of a *murshid* is to ascertain that the *salik* is in a state of purity. Before performing *dhiker ism dhāt* (remembrance of the name of the substance), he firstly has to perform ablution and put on clean clothes. In his view, a clean place to pray and study and a set of clean clothes will make him comfortable and help him to focus.

After purifying himself, a *murshid* has to perform prayers to open the gate of *ma'rifah* (esoteric knowledge).<sup>26</sup> The prayers can be in the form of *sunnah* (recommended) prayers in advance of the learning process. These prayers are frequently led by Sheikh Muhammad Waly and performed before and after the instruction or *dhiker* session.<sup>27</sup>

A teacher is obliged to educate and accept his *salik* for the sake of Allah and not to confirm his own self-importance. In educating a *salik*, a *murshid* has to give wise consultation, pay full attention to the *salik*, feel deep affection for him, and coach him gently because he may not be able to bear the exercises. Aside from this, a teacher has to guard his student like a tender and kind mother and like a loving, wise father. The teacher has to be serious and constantly pray for the goodness of his *salik* in case he finds weaknesses and lack of confidence. Besides, he has to protect his student's privacy and guard his inner secrets, so as not to become guilty of breach of trust. When

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<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Waly, *Adab Zikir Ismu Zat dalam Thariqat Naqsyabandiyah* (Banda Aceh: Taufiqiyah Sa'adah, n.d.).

<sup>27</sup> Abu Keumala, *Wadhibah Ibadah Keagamaan dan Pengembangan Ilmu Keagamaan Hari-Harian Abuya Syaikhul Islam Aceh Maulana Syech H Muda Waly al-Khalidy* (Labuhanhaji: Media Dakwah Santri Dayah, 1997).



advising his student up committing a mistake, he should speak to him in confidence and advise him not to repeat it. A sheikh has to shun rude and offensive behavior since this will adversely affect the teacher's character and render him unfit for this role.<sup>28</sup>

The obligations of a *murshid* to his *sālik* are similar in most recognized *tarekat* including the Naqshabandiyah. The *murshid* guides his *sālik* to take an oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*), gives him an *ijāzah*, and selects his *khalifah* (successor). A prospective *sālik* first needs to repent by recalling all the sins he committed in the past and commits to not repeating them. The substance of the *bay'at* of a *sālik* to a *Murshid* is that he pledges an oath of allegiance and receives *talqin* (initiation) before his is allowed to join the activities in the *tarekat*.<sup>29</sup>

The process of *talqin* or infusing the Prophetic light (*nūr al-nubūmah*) into the heart of the student is applied in the Naqshabandiyah al-Waliyah order as a precept formulated by Sheikh Muhammad Waly in his description of the *kayfiat dhiker ism al-dhāt* (remembrance manual of the name of the substance) where the receiver has to be in a state of purity and perform the prayer of repentance. After the *bay'at* and *talqin* the initiation process is completed, and the *sālik* is accepted as a member of the *tarekat*.<sup>30</sup> In the Sammāniyyah order developed by Abdus Shamad, the *murshid* instructs his student to practice obedience. During the *bay'ah* ritual the *murshid* takes the hands of the *sālik* as a sign of acceptance, and the *sālik* repeats after him. It includes the recitation of certain Qur'anic verses, the oath of allegiance to Islam as a religion, to the Prophet as the Messenger of Allah, to the Qur'an as the leader, to the Ka'bah as the *qiblah* (the direction of prayer), to Sayyidi Sheikh as the teacher and to the poor people as comrades. Next, they recite the *istighfār* formula three times, followed by recitation of the *tawhīd* (*tablīl*). When the *Murshid* recites, the *sālik* is listening, and vice versa. Then, the

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<sup>28</sup> Syekh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani, *al-Ghunyah li-Ṭālibi Ṭariq al-Haqq* (Jakarta: Zaman, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Indonesia*.

<sup>30</sup> Chabib Musthofa, "Relasi *Murshid* dan Murid dalam Bimbingan Tarekat Shādhiliyah di Pesulukan Thoriqot Agung Tulungagung". *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 7, no. 2 (2017): 295–329. <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2017.7.2.339-373>.

*murshid* asks his *sālik* to make mention of Allah at all times and in every condition, while sitting, standing, and laying down.<sup>31</sup>

When a Naqshabandi *sālik* has learned the basics and exhibited his ability to practice the *riyāḍah* (exercise), the *murshid* should grant him an *ijāzah* (license) to practice alone. After a *sālik* receives his first *ijāzah*, he is authorized to act as an assistant of the *murshid* and can start instructing and guiding others. The highest *ijāzah* provides him the authority to take up a position as a sheikh, act as the *tarekat's* delegate in a different location, and accept the *bay'at* of his own followers. However, he must continue to exhibit complete obedience to his *murshid*.<sup>32</sup>

There are two kinds of *bay'ah*. First, there is *bay'ah ṣuwariyyah* where the candidates recognize the *murshid* as an authority to be consulted and the *murshid* accepts his guardianship over them. Second, there is *bay'at ma'naviyyah* for those candidates who are willing to be trained as to become 'Knowers of God' (*'arīfīn bi-llāh*), at the discretion of the *murshid*. However, such a *sālik* will have to leave his family and all worldly responsibilities behind and must observe seclusion in the *ẓāwiyah* (spiritual retreat) for many years.<sup>33</sup>

This vow of allegiance means that the student commits himself to observing all his spiritual activities, both outwardly and inwardly, so that they are always in accordance with Islamic principles and morals, following the example of the Prophet. This includes the obligatory *dhikr* practices to be observed with constancy (*istiḳāmah*). As such, the *bay'ah* is as much a commitment to the sheikh as a commitment to one's self.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the *murshid* is committed to educating his *sālik* by providing him with the needed guidance. Also, the candidate must be instructed in the basics of *tawhīd*, *fiqh*, and *taṣawwuf* so that he can understand the meaning and purpose of their practices.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Wan Mohd Shaghir Abdullah, *Urwatul Wutsqa: Syaikh Abdus Shamad al-Falimbani, Pegangan yang Kukuh Golongan Sufi* (Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Indonesia*.

<sup>33</sup> Noor Ainah, "Ajaran Tasawuf Tarekat Tijaniyah," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Usbuluddin* 10, no. 1 (2011): 87–105.

<sup>34</sup> Fatmawati. "Fungsi Tasawuf terhadap Pembentukan Akhlak (Etika) Kerja: Studi pada Murid Tarekat Qadiriyyah Naqsyabandiyah di Kota Pontianak Kalimantan Barat" *Jurnal Theologia* 24, no. 2 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2013.24.2.330>.

<sup>35</sup> Misbah, *Gerakan Dakwah Sufistik*.

In the traditions of the Shaṭṭāriyyah, the *bay'at*, as explained by al-Qushashī, is taken by the *sālik* placing his hands under the hands of the sheikh, followed by his declaration of loyalty. Then the sheikh takes the *sālik*'s hands to signal his acceptance, both inwardly and outwardly, in this world and in the next. The *murshid* also advises the *sālik* to repent by repeating the *istighfār* and reciting the *talqīn* three times before touching the *sālik*'s cap or his clothing to show that he has been accepted into the *tarekat*. Then, the *sālik* is instructed to shake hands with all of the members of the congregation who are in attendance to welcome their new member. The *murshid* concludes the session by advising the *sālik* to avoid what is forbidden and what is not recommended (*makrūb*) and finally warns him not to break his promises, which would be like falling back into unbelief.<sup>36</sup>

### Visualizing the *Murshid* and Mentioning His Name (*Rābiṭah Murshid*)

In the Naqshbandiyah order paying respect to the teacher is called *rābiṭah* which denotes the act of placing one's affection upon something.<sup>37</sup> This concept can be found in the work of Sheikh Muhammad Waly who explained that the teacher is always present in the mind of his students, guiding and instructing them in every movement. This is described in the first poem of his *Tanwīr al-Anwār* (shining light), informing the reader that the book should be read as if he is in the presence of the teacher.<sup>38</sup> *Rābiṭah*, which is commonly employed in *sulūk*, means remembering one's *murshid* and the chain of all *tarekat* sheikhs back to the Prophet. The practicing *sālik* is asked to visualize his sheikh to ignite positive thoughts when starting to read the book. This will strengthen his mind and increase his memory.

The *rābiṭah* is divided into four categories: obligatory, recommended, permissible, and forbidden. Obligatory *rābiṭah* include someone's affection toward the House of God (*baytullāh*) when performing the obligatory prayer. Like the prayer which is not valid without facing the *qiblah*, the *rābiṭah* is only valid when taking the

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<sup>36</sup> Oman Fathurahman, *Tarekat Syattariyah di Minangkabau* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Djalaluddin, *Sinar Keemasan Dan Pembelaan Thariqat Syufiah Naqsyabandiyah* (Ujung Pandang: Persatuan Pengamal Tarikat Indonesia, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Waly, *Tanwīr Anwār fī Idbār Ḥalāl mā fī Kashf Asrār* (Banda Aceh: Taufiqiyah Sa'adah, n.d.).

sheikh as one's model of behavior and strive to imitate him. The *sālik* still lacks the insight to follow his heart, so he must link the *rābiṭah* to his *murshid*. When the *sālik* has arrived at the level of mediation (*murāqabah*) and witnessing (*mushābadah*), this link is no longer necessary. After all, the role of the *murshid* is only symbolical (*majāzī*), while the source of all that is real (*ḥaqīqī*) is Allah, the Almighty. Forbidden *rābiṭah* are thoughts that lead to sinful deeds. Thinking about a desired object or action will cause attraction and eventually lead towards it.<sup>39</sup>

The Naqshbandiyah believe that the *rābiṭah* is established either through the bond of love and affection between the *sālik* and his sheikh (*rābiṭah murshid*) or through the bond between the heart of the *sālik* and someone who is dead and buried in the grave (*rābiṭah kubur*), referring to the medium in loving the Prophet. Some sheikhs do not recommend their *sālik* to do *rābiṭah* directly to the Prophet.<sup>40</sup>

Van Bruinessen contends that almost all *tarekat* believe in mediation (*wasilah*). The *murshid* is necessary for *wasilah* (mediation) to help the *sālik* to reach a higher spiritual level and eventually connect to the Almighty. This spiritual growth requires active support from a spiritual superior, in the tradition of the Prophet. Therefore, the spiritual genealogy (*silsilah*) is of vital importance in the *tarekat*, as it establishes a strong, unbroken link all the way back to the Prophet.<sup>41</sup> Equally, an aspiring *sālik* must choose his *murshid* wisely and be certain that he will be able to guide him and have the necessary qualification (*ijazah*). According to Fathurraman, the Shaṭṭāriyyah *murshid* is understood as a substitute (*nā'ib*) of the Prophet in terms of spiritual achievement to arrive in the presence of Allah, the Almighty.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the role of the *murshid* is considered a core element in *tarekat* practice.

The important connection of *silsilah* or the link between the *murshid* and the *tarekat* is also highlighted by Sheikh Muhammad Waly who explained that the *rābiṭah* between the *sālik* and the *murshid* is necessary to attain spiritual goals, besides the reward of reciting Sūrah

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<sup>39</sup> Djalaluddin, *Sinar Keemasan Dan Pembelaan Thariqah Syufiah Naqsyabandiyah*.

<sup>40</sup> Arrazi Hasyim, "al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandiyah fi Minangkabau: Tarjamah Kitāb al-Sa'ādah al-Abadiyah Li Syaikh 'Abd Al-Qadīm," *Studia Islamika* 18, no. 1 (2011): 101–138.

<sup>41</sup> van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Indonesia*.

<sup>42</sup> Fathurahman, *Tarekat Syattariyah di Minangkabau*.

al-Fātiḥah to the leader (*imām*) of the *tarekat*, Muhammad Bahauddin Shah Naqshbandi.<sup>43</sup> It is also recommended to recite Surah al-Fatihah for the souls of the deceased sheikhs in the *silsilah*.<sup>44</sup> The *silsilah* connects the long line of spiritual guides and teachers back to the Prophet, from generation to generation.<sup>45</sup>

In the Naqshbandiyah (Sufi) order, there are several steps to complete the *rabiṭah murshid*. First, the *sālik* must visualize the sheikh with open eyes, looking to the right and to the left while focusing on the soul until something “unseen happens” (see the “sheikh face”). Then, he should recall the *murshid*'s face in the middle of his forehead. It is believed that this mental exercise can repel stray thoughts that make the heart forgetful of Allah. Further, the *sālik* visualizes the *murshid*'s face in the middle of his *murshid*'s forehead and then bring it down to the center of the heart. In the last, the *sālik* must forget and negate himself and affirm the *murshid*'s existence.<sup>46</sup>

According to the teachings of the Naqshbandiyah *tarekat* of Sheikh Abdul Wahab Rokan, the *sālik* must seek closeness to his *murshid* over a long period of time, whose heart is always with Allah. Looking at such a person with affection is not similar to worshipping him and associating him with Allah. *Rabiṭah murshid* is intended to boost remembrance of the *murshid* and increase the feeling of being constantly monitored by him and never out of his sight. The *murshid*'s supervision is not a restriction of personal freedom and but true companionship on the journey to Allah.<sup>47</sup>

Sheikh Muhammad Waly described the *rabiṭah murshid* in great detail, focusing on repeatedly visualizing the teacher's face being in front of the *sālik*'s face. More specifically, the *sālik* visualizes the *murshid*'s forehead touching his forehead, his knees touching the

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<sup>43</sup> Dru C. Gladney, “Salafiyya Movement in Northwest China: Islamic Fundamentalism among the Muslim Chinese?,” in *Muslim Diversity, Local Islam in Global Context*, ed. Leif O. Manger (United Kingdom: Psychology Press, 2006), 119–120.

<sup>44</sup> Waly, *Adab Zikir Ismu Zat dalam Thariqat Naqsyabandiyah*.

<sup>45</sup> Julian Baldick, *Islam Mistik Mengantar Anda ke Dunia Tasawuf* (Jakarta: Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Sri Mulyati, *Mengenal dan Memahami Tarekat Tarekat Muktabarab* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> L. Hidayat Siregar, “Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Syaikh Abdul Wahab Rokan: Sejarah, Amalan, dan Dinamika Perubahan,” *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman* 35, no. 1 (2011): 59–77.

*murshid's* knees, his heart meeting the *murshid's* heart. Consequently, the *murshid's* existence touches the *sālik's* existence until both of them are in the presence of Allah. The process of this *raḥīṭah murshid* continues by saying in his heart, as a vigil, "O Allah, by the *murshid*, please grant me *ma'rifat* (knowledge) from You".<sup>48</sup>

According to J. Spencer Trimmingham, the *murshid* and the *sālik* receive spiritual guidance that goes beyond the levels (*maqāmāt*) of Sufism.<sup>49</sup> This understanding is likely based on Mulyadhi Kartanegara who observed that the *murshid's* role tends to be grossly exaggerated. In fact, at one point the *murshid* will no longer be needed when the *sālik* has arrived safely on the right spiritual path. The *murshid* is the guide whose role ends when the *sālik* is on his way.<sup>50</sup> However, Hamka warned that the veneration of the *murshid* has gradually turned into *shirk* (association with Allah). Since the thirteenth century, some spiritual teachers claimed to have attained the level of sainthood and *kāramah*. Julia Day Howell contends that Hamka strongly rejected the practice of *raḥīṭah murshid* because the process of visualizing the teacher during *dhikr* is highly questionable and interferes with the remembrance of Allah.<sup>51</sup>

Another view contends that the *murshid* merely acts as a temporary medium and that the *murshid's* role ceases once the *sālik* has arrived on his path. However, this contradicts the *silsilah* concept of every *tarekat*. The *murshid* is part of the *silsilah*, the chain connecting him to other sheikhs and eventually to The Prophet Muhammad; therefore, he cannot be dismissed. Sheikh Muhammad Waly contends that the role of the *murshid* is like a family member of the *silsilah* or as a medium to get the gate of *ma'rifat* to be opened by Allah. Therefore, in the practice of the *dhikr* by the Naqshbandiyah al-Waliyah, a reward from reciting Sūrah al-Fāṭīḥah and Sūrah al-Iklāṣ is offered to the *murshid* and all generations before him. Here it can be argued that the role of the *murshid* is that of a spiritual teacher and not an ordinary teacher; thus, their relationship cannot be rationalized. Nasr agreed that people today tend to ignore the intuitive aspect of understanding an object or reality. He argued that spirituality denotes the core (crux)

<sup>48</sup> Waly, *Adab Zikir Ismu Zat dalam Thariqat Naqsyabandiyah*.

<sup>49</sup> J. Spencer Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> Mulyadhi Kartanegara, *Menyelami Lubuk Tasawuf* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> Julia Day Howell, "Indonesia's Salafist Sufis," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 5 (September 23, 2010): 1029–1051.

of every culture as a spiritual vision from multiple realities, which in turn opens up the likelihood and the opportunity of attaining a genuine identity.<sup>52</sup> On this point, negating the *murshid's* role as a spiritual teacher is a limiting attitude that solely relies on rationality at the expense of intuition.

The *rabi'ah* is a strong link between the *murshid* and the *salik*, and this relationship is an essential element in the organization of the *tarekat* and its network. It is for this reason that Sheikh Muhammad Waly intended to preserve the *rabi'ah murshid* as a salient feature of the *tarekat*. Picturing the face of the sheikh (*taṣawwur al-shaykh*) is believed to be a faster and easier way than other spiritual methods, for someone to succeed in the practice of *sulūk* (spiritual praying). Additionally, the *rabi'ah murshid* is a more effective method for developing spirituality.<sup>53</sup>

When Sheikh Muhammad Waly's viewpoint is examined from a neuro-linguistic programming viewpoint, it is not cognition which paves the way for information processing but in the limbic system connected to the heart. By remembering his teacher and visualizing the teacher's face, he activates his long-term memory of his teacher's lessons and exercises.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, *rabi'ah murshid* and visualizing the *murshid's* face are considered as a faster and easier method of learning. The researcher believes that Sheikh Muhammad Waly decided to preserve the practice of *rabi'ah murshid* as a core concept and practice that is highly effective and beneficial.

The *rabi'ah murshid* furnishes the *salik* with spiritual as well as cognitive intelligence, as it touches the limbic system as a tool in affective processing. More specifically, it leads to the unity of information impulses between the two cortices (i.e., the right and the left hemispheres of the brain) so that information instilled by the *murshid* can be easily absorbed and retained.<sup>55</sup>

Remembering the teacher, according to Sheikh Muhammad Waly, has numerous benefits besides increasing the students' respect

<sup>52</sup> Misri A. Muchsin, "Salik Buta: Aliran Tasawuf Aceh Abad XX," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 42, no. 1 (July 9, 2008): 177–198, <http://aljamiyah.or.id/index.php/AJIS/article/view/1030>.

<sup>53</sup> Demetrio Giordani, "Stages of Naqshbandi Suluk in Ṣah Abu Sa' id Mugaddidi's Hidayat Al-Tālibin," *Priente Moderno* 92, no. 2 (2012): 393–417.

<sup>54</sup> Edhy Rustan, "Pembelajaran Menulis Kreatif Berbasis Neurolinguistik Programming" (Jakarta--Universitas Negeri Jakarta, 2016).

<sup>55</sup> Rustan, "Pembelajaran Menulis Kreatif Berbasis Neurolinguistik Programming."

for him. This strong link in the mind connects to the heart and cannot be easily eradicated. In a similar fashion, the adherents of TQN from the Suryalaya Islamic Boarding School agreed that meeting Abah Anom had many advantages, for example, the face-to-face meeting with their teacher was a rare opportunity for which they were willing to wait for hours and even days. Secondly, meeting with their teacher, even though for only a very short time, helped them to correct their sins and errors. Thirdly, they might receive *barakah* and witness his *karāmah*.<sup>56</sup>

Mentioning the names of teachers is done by reciting the names of those having a *silsilah* or a link to the Prophet, beginning from the *murshid* and *sāliks* who have received their *ijāzah* all the way back to the Prophet. In the practice of *dhiker* in the Naqshabandiyah al-Waliyah of Sheikh Muhammad Waly those names are often mentioned during the *dhiker* ritual. This tradition of reciting *naẓam* (poem) has been preserved from the days of Sheikh Muhammad Waly until today. This practice is maintained in Islamic schools (*dayah*) and some villages. The link between the *murshid* and the *sālik* is also used to determine their successors who will continue the tradition and establish the *tarekat* in other regions.

### ***Murshid's Method of Teaching***

According to Keumala, Sheikh Muhammad Waly used two methods in educating and teaching his students: reading and explaining instructional material and prompting questions; and asking the student to read the instructional material and explain its meaning or recapitulate previous topics.

Sheikh Muhammad Waly often asked his *sālik* to read from a particular textbook (*kitab*), commenting on certain points, and offering additional explanations while he was teaching. In this way, the *sālik* will become more confident in mastering the learning material. Through probing questions and discussion the teacher can assess and evaluate the scope and depth of the *sālik's* understanding.

Another method he frequently used was storytelling by narrating meaningful events in the lives of great Muslim scholars like Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, which contain elements of wisdom and insight. According to Zamzami, Sheikh Muhammad Waly used stories

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<sup>56</sup> Dadang Rahmad, *Tarekat dalam Islam Spiritualitas Masyarakat Modern* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2002).



to engage and motivate his students, and to remind them that searching for knowledge requires focus and persistence.<sup>57</sup>

The history telling method is a traditional method of instruction and has been used throughout human history. However, there is also a distinctly scientific aspect to it, which links it to the concept of *rabīṭah murshid*. In the context of neurological linguistic programming (NLP), storytelling is a highly effective teaching method using metaphors or parables which are like well-defined mental images. In NLP, one image represents 1,000 words, and visualizing the story being told helps the listener to understand the intended lesson more effectively than 1,000 words. Good metaphors can represent 1,000 pictures, which gives a good idea about the efficacy of this method of instruction.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, the course of lessons given by Sheikh Muhammad Waly followed an invisible roadmap, and each unit followed a particular path. This systematic approach made it easy for his students to understand the learning material and make swift progress, being aware of the purpose and benefits.<sup>59</sup> Another method used by Sheikh Muhammad Waly was by drawing comparisons and linking the new learning content to the previous sessions, thus integrating the new topic into the whole fabric. Sheikh Muhammad Waly liked to compare different chapters in the textbook to highlight their relevance (*munāsabah*) to the whole topic under discussion, which marked him as a skillful and competent interpreter. He could draw from a vast repertoire of Prophetic traditions, given that he had earned his degree (*ijāzah*) in this science from Sheikh ‘Alī al-Mālikī. He was able to apply the knowledge and experience he had gained as a student at the Haramain at his *dayah* in Darussalam in South Aceh.

Furthermore, Sheikh Muhammad Waly liked to give direct examples related to the current affairs of the *ummah* (community of Muslims) in South Aceh. While deeply engaged in instructing his students, a stranger sought permission to enter, and he stopped and went to meet the guest who had come from far away to seek his advice. The sheikh immediately made himself available and attended to the needs of his visitor, which is, admittedly, a behavior rarely exhibited by other eminent leaders and scholars. Similarly, Zamzami

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with A.D. Zamzami in West Labuhanhaji on February 14th, 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Rustan, “Pembelajaran Menulis Kreatif Berbasis Neurolinguistik Programming.”

<sup>59</sup> Interview with A.D. Zamzami on February 14th, 2021.

shared his own observation that Sheikh Muhammad Waly was leading a *dhikr* session in the mosque when a visitor came wishing to speak with him. He immediately interrupted the *dhikr* and went to meet his guest, much to the astonishment of all the attendees who did not fail to be impressed by his humility and kindness.<sup>60</sup>

When Sheikh Muhammad Waly was about to commence his lesson, he would start with reciting a supplication prayer (*du'ā*).<sup>61</sup> He did this to motivate his students and ensure they would listen attentively to his instruction, while reminding them that knowledge does indeed belong to Allah the Almighty. Besides making his best effort to guide and instruct his students he was aware and made his students equally aware that they needed God's blessing so that the knowledge could be internalized and put into practice to bear fruit.

In some of his works, he identified different categories of instructional materials, depending on the capabilities of his students, the level of difficulty, and the targeted educational objectives: beginner (*'awām*), intermediate (*mutawassīf*), and advanced (*muntahī*). For example, in theology, the testimony of the first part of the *shahādah* "There is no god (worthy of worship) but Allah" (*Lā ilāha illa-Allāh*), the beginner level is for those who have an outward and purely textual (*bayānī*) understanding of it, comprehending the meaning of the words, yet without having internalized its true import. The intermediate level is for those who have grasped the nature of Allah the Almighty who has no equal, yet are still limited by their sense of self. Only the third category are free from any unconscious *shirk* and have accepted that nothing exists in this universe but Allah.<sup>62</sup>

This approach to categorizing his students into three groups allowed Sheikh Muhammad Waly to select the appropriate learning materials for them. Similar categories were devised by al-Ghazālī in the three levels of *dhikr* practice: beginners (*'awām*), intermediate (*mutawassīf*), and advanced (*muntahī*). Undoubtedly, their awareness of the diverse levels of peoples' intelligence and education is based on a ḥadīth from the Prophet who spoke to people at their own level, so that they would be able to understand him and benefit from his teachings.

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with A.D. Zamzami in West Labuhanhaji on February 15th, 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Waly, *Tanwīr al-Anwār fī Idhār Ḥalāl mā fī Kashf al-Asrār*.

Sheikh Muhammad Waly mentioned repeatedly that a *sālik* must be consistent in his efforts to widen and deepen his understanding. Consistency is very important so as not to stagnate and make steady progress, including moving on from one teacher to another.

### Concluding Remarks

The *murshid* has a big role in determining the path on which his *sālik* can move towards Allah. According to the system described by Sheikh Muhammad Waly, the *murshid* directs and monitors the spiritual progress of the *sālik* to deepen his knowledge and understanding of Islamic teachings which strike a harmonious balance between the intellect and the heart, between the Shari'ah and Sufi practices, culminating in the science of *ḥaqīqah* (truth) and experience (*dhawq*). In this process of spiritual initiation and training, the *murshid's* role as an intermediary is mandatory and necessary; without the guiding hand and encouragement of the sheikh, the student cannot find his path. Further, those who argue that the *murshid's* authority over his followers is too extreme, and that the follower's dependence on the sheikh is too high, may not be ready to admit that it is a relationship that goes beyond their understanding and should, therefore, refrain from condemning that which they do not fully comprehend.

*Rābiṭah murshid* is a Sufi concept that does not exaggerate the veneration and obedience due to the *murshid*; rather, it reveals the reason for it being necessary. After all, the *murshid-sālik* relationship is an intimate relationship between two spiritual beings who communicate through love, and there can be no love without trust. Such a reality applies not only in the realm of the *sulūk*, but also in the *silsilah* of education, which will be interconnected amongst the teachers who have ever learned from a group of *Murshids*.

This study on the spiritual education devised by Sheikh Muhammad Waly addresses the important role of the *murshid* in the spiritual development of his *sālik*, which requires deep affection and trust on both sides. However, it also asks complete obedience from the *sālik*, which is difficult to accept in a regular educational setting, especially in an intellectual culture where questioning and resisting authority, self-reliance and skepticism is expected from intelligent and educated minds. However, spiritual education is not like intellectual

education and requires a different set of attributed from the teacher as well as the student. Formal education is limited to a transfer of knowledge which can be grasped by the mind; however, spiritual education is a transfer of truth which can only be grasped by the heart. When the aspiring *salik* offers his *bay'ah* he does so willingly and motivated by his sincere affection for the sheikh and his complete trust in him. Therefore, obedience comes naturally to him and does not need to be enforced.

The findings of this study on the concept of visualizing the face of the sheikh differ from the previous research by Trimmingham, Howell, and Kartanegara who regarded the role and authority of *murshid* as too excessive. However, according to Muhammad Waly, a true sheikh has natural authority, and this authority is justified and does not go against the Shari'ah. Visualizing the face of the sheikh is found, as agreed by Sheikh As'ad Mungka Payakumbuh, a justified practice of the Naqshbandiyah al-Waliyah order, as done during the reading of *naẓam* of *Obat Hati* (medicine of the heart) which contains the names of the *murshids* and *kbulafā'* of the Naqshabandiyah order, in their sincere effort to keep the light of the *silsilah* burning and cast their luminous lights into the darkness that surrounds them.

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