Between Zuhd and Sufism:
An Analytical Reading of Concept and Practice

Entre le Zuhd et le Soufisme :
une lecture analytique du concept et de la pratique

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Abstract

This article presents a comparative study of the concepts of *zuhd* (asceticism) and *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) in the Islamic tradition, focusing on their linguistic and terminological roots, historical emergence, and practical application. Zuhd appeared in the early Islamic period as an ethical attitude aimed at freeing oneself from attachment to worldly adornments and achieving psychological and social balance through contentment and satisfaction. By contrast, Sufism developed in the third century AH as a comprehensive spiritual and philosophical project, centered on the purification of the soul, refinement of the inner self, and attainment of divine knowledge through experiential and spiritual stations.

The study concludes that *zuhd* represents an initial stage of moral discipline and spiritual elevation, while Sufism constitutes a deeper extension that seeks to experience divine reality through spiritual taste (*dhawq*) and direct

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witnessing (*shuhūd*). Despite their different aims and methodologies, the two are complementary: *zuhd* lays the ethical foundation, and Sufism opens the epistemological and spiritual horizon, both contributing to shaping a distinctive Islamic experience in the quest for salvation and inner peace.
Keywords : Zuhd - Sufism - Spirituality - Ethics - Divine Knowledge

Resumé

Cet article présente une étude comparative des concepts de zuhd (ascétisme) et de taṣawwuf (soufisme) dans la tradition islamique, en mettant l'accent sur leurs racines linguistiques et terminologiques, leur émergence historique et leurs applications pratiques. Le zuhd apparaît dès la première période islamique comme une attitude éthique visant à se libérer de l'attachement aux parures du monde et à atteindre un équilibre psychologique et social fondé sur la satisfaction et le contentement. À l'inverse, le soufisme se développe au III^{e} siècle de l'Hégire en tant que projet spirituel et philosophique global, centré sur la purification de l'âme, le raffinement de l'intériorité et l'accès à la connaissance divine à travers des stations spirituelles et expérientielles.

L'étude conclut que le zuhd représente une étape initiale de discipline morale et d'élévation spirituelle, tandis que le soufisme constitue un prolongement plus profond, cherchant à vivre la réalité divine par le goût spirituel (dhawq) et le témoignage direct (shuhūd). Malgré leurs objectifs et méthodologies distincts, les deux dimensions apparaissent complémentaires : le zuhd pose le fondement éthique, tandis que le soufisme ouvre l'horizon épistémologique et spirituel, contribuant ensemble à façonner une expérience islamique singulière dans la quête du salut et de la paix intérieure.

Mots-clés : Zuhd - Soufisme - Spiritualité - Éthique - Connaissance divine

Introduction

Zuhd (asceticism) and Sufism are among the most significant concepts that have profoundly shaped spiritual life in Islamic history. Each of them represented a particular response to the human condition, oscillating between the temptations of the material world and the spiritual yearning for salvation and tranquility. While they may appear similar at first glance—especially in terms of the outward behavior of the ascetic (*zāhid*) and the Sufi—their deeper examination reveals essential differences in their origins, purposes, and outcomes.

Zuhd emerged during the early centuries of Islam as a moral attitude and social reaction to the increasing attraction of worldly pleasures following the expansion of the Muslim state. It centered on simplicity, renunciation of excess, and preparation of the soul for the afterlife. Sufism, however, developed later as a broader and more complex spiritual project, particularly in the third century AH, encompassing not only ascetic practice but also an intellectual and philosophical dimension aimed at attaining divine knowledge through mystical experience.

This article seeks to clarify the distinction between these two notions by analyzing their linguistic and terminological foundations, tracing their historical development, and offering a comparative reading that highlights the broader context of each concept within Islamic thought and practice.

Among the Qurʾānic verses that urge believers toward *zuhd* is the saying of the Almighty: *"Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire - of women and children, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, cattle, and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return."* [Āl ʿImrān 3:14]. This verse shows that the inclination toward worldly possessions is a natural disposition in the human soul. However, Allah described it as fleeting enjoyment in contrast to the "best return" that is with Him, which encourages the believer not to be deceived by the adornments of this world but to direct his heart toward the Hereafter (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, vol. 7, p. 520).

And His saying, Exalted is He: *"Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your full compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has indeed attained success. And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion?"* [Āl ʿImrān 3:185]. This verse affirms that worldly life is but a short passage, and that true success lies in being saved from the Fire and admitted into Paradise, not in clinging to the ornaments of this world. This is the very essence of *zuhd*: to divert one's striving from the fleeting world to that which is everlasting (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, vol. 2, p. 198).

And His saying, Glorified is He: *"So that you may not grieve over what has eluded you and not exult [in pride] over what He has given you. And Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful."* [al-Ḥadīd 57:23]. This verse educates the Muslim in balance: not to grieve excessively over what of this world has passed him by, nor to rejoice arrogantly in what has been granted to him, for this world is not an end in itself but a means to the Hereafter. Such balance constitutes the essence of *zuhd* (al-Qurṭubī, 1964, vol. 17, p. 272).

And His saying, Exalted in Might: *"Know that the worldly life is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children. It is like the example of rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment, and forgiveness from Allah and approval. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion."* [al-Ḥadīd 57:20]. Allah likened this world to rainfall that produces rapid growth, only to wither and become debris. This imagery reinforces the reality of its perishability, urging the believer not to cling to it but to work for the Hereafter, where forgiveness and divine approval await (al-Rāzī, 1990, vol. 29, p. 171).

And likewise His saying, Majestic and High: *"But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters."* [al-Qaṣaṣ 28:77]. This verse sets forth a balanced method of *zuhd*: it does not mean abandoning the world completely, but rather using it as a means to seek the Hereafter, without neglecting one's lawful share of it, while avoiding corruption (al-Ghazālī, 1982, vol. 3, p. 213).

Among the Prophetic traditions that urge the believer toward *zuhd* is his ﷺ saying: *"Be in this world as though you were a stranger or a traveler."* (al-Bukhārī, 2018, p. 2840). This ḥadīth directs the believer to treat worldly life as a temporary station, not as a permanent abode, which is the very essence of *zuhd*.

And he ﷺ said: *"If the world were worth even the wing of a mosquito in the sight of Allah, He would not give a disbeliever a drink of water from it."* (al-Tirmidhī, 1996, vol. 4, p. 150). The Prophet here emphasizes the insignificance of this world before Allah, thereby warning the believer against attaching value to it.

He ﷺ also said: *"The world is the prison of the believer and the paradise of the disbeliever."* (Muslim, 2008, p. 927). This ḥadīth illustrates that the believer restrains himself in this life in anticipation of eternal bliss, while the disbeliever enjoys it as if it were his paradise.

And the Prophet ﷺ said: *"Whoever wakes up with this world as his greatest concern, Allah will scatter his affairs, place poverty before his eyes, and he will not receive from the world except what has been decreed for him. But whoever wakes up with the Hereafter as his greatest concern, Allah will gather his affairs, place richness in his heart, and the world will come to him despite its reluctance."* (Ibn Mājah, n.d., vol. 2, p. 1375). This narration underlines the

difference between worldly preoccupation that brings anxiety, and concern for the Hereafter that grants contentment and sufficiency.

And he ﷺ said: *"Renounce the world and Allah will love you; renounce what is in the hands of people and the people will love you."* (Ibn Mājah, n.d., vol. 2, p. 1395) This ḥadīth makes clear that detachment from worldly attachments brings divine love, while detachment from what others possess earns human love

First Theme: The Concept of Zuhd

Zuhd in Language and Terminology

In the Arabic language, *zuhd* is derived from the root *zahida*, which means turning away from something and abandoning desire for it, as mentioned in the linguistic dictionaries. For example, the expression "so-and-so renounced the world (*zahida fī al-dunyā*)" means that he turned away from it and left its pleasures. Its definitions in the classical dictionaries are as follows:

1. Lisān al-ʿArab (Ibn Manẓūr): "Al-zuhd: abandoning desire for something, and it is the opposite of desire. It is said that zuhd is when a person is indifferent to what is in his hands. It is also said: zuhd is little longing for the world and little desire for it" (Ibn Manẓūr, 1994, s.v. "zahada").

2. Maqāyīs al-Lugha (Ibn Fāris): "(Z-H-D) is an origin that indicates little desire for a thing. It is said: a man renounced the world (*zahida fī al-dunyā*), meaning he turned away from it and abandoned it, and zuhd is the opposite of desire" (Ibn Fāris, 1979, vol. 3, p. 30).

From the modern dictionaries:

1. al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ (Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo): "Zuhd: little desire for something. Zuhd in the world: to turn away from it and not become attached to it or its pleasures and adornments" (Shawqī Ḍayf et al., 2004, s.v. "zahada").

2. al-Muʿjam al-ʿArabī al-Asāsī (Academy of the Arabic Language in Paris): "Zuhd: lack of desire for the world and material adornments. It is a religious and moral concept that signifies detachment from worldly pleasures and preference for what is with God" (Aḥmad Mukhtār ʿUmar, 2003, s.v. "zahada").

As for its technical meaning in the Islamic tradition, the concept developed to denote freeing oneself from the luxuries of worldly life, severing the heart's attachment to them, renouncing what is not necessary, and sincerely turning toward Allah the Exalted, in pursuit of His pleasure and eternal reward.

Among the technical definitions of *zuhd* are the following:

1. Imām al-Qushayrī (in *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*): *"Zuhd is abandoning the comfort of this world in pursuit of the comfort of the Hereafter"* (al-Qushayrī, 2002, vol. 1, p. 240). It means that the soul turns away from the world and its adornments, content with what Allah has allotted without greed or covetousness.
2. Ibn al-Qayyim (in *Madārij al-Sālikīn*): *zuhd* has three levels:

Zuhd in what is forbidden: this is an individual obligation upon every Muslim, requiring him to abandon all that Allah has prohibited, whether unlawful wealth, lust, or sin. Attaining this rank is essential, for one's religion cannot be upright while persisting in the unlawful.

Zuhd in doubtful matters: this is the mark of *waraʿ* (scrupulousness). Doubtful matters are those whose ruling is unclear—neither clearly permissible nor clearly forbidden. *Waraʿ* means safeguarding one's religion, as expressed in the authentic ḥadīth: *"Indeed the lawful is clear, and the unlawful is clear, and between them are doubtful matters unknown to many people. Whoever avoids the doubtful has safeguarded his religion and his honor"* (narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim). Thus, the *zuhd* of the scrupulous is to avoid doubtful matters out of fear of falling into the prohibited.

Zuhd in excess: this is the zuhd of the truthful. Excess refers to all that goes beyond need in speech, looking, food, social interaction, and sleep. This form is not a legal obligation, but it is the path of the sincere in their pursuit of piety and purification of the soul. Its purpose is to discipline the self and cut off the heart's attachment to worldly pleasures so that it may devote itself to the Hereafter and its bliss (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 2003, p. 118).

3. Ibn Taymiyya: *"Zuhd is abandoning what has no benefit in the Hereafter, while waraʿ is abandoning what one fears may harm in the Hereafter."* This is a legitimate zuhd that indicates the soundness of the heart. It does not mean abandoning the world entirely, but detaching the heart from it. His student Ibn al-Qayyim transmitted this in *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, saying: *"I heard Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya, may Allah sanctify his soul, say: zuhd is leaving what does not benefit in the Hereafter, and waraʿ is leaving what one fears may harm in the Hereafter. This statement is among the finest and most comprehensive said about zuhd and waraʿ."* (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 2003, vol. 2, p. 12).

4. Al-Junayd al-Baghdādī: *"Zuhd is that the world be in your hand, not in your heart."* That is, nothing of this world should distract you from Allah, nor cut you off from striving for the Hereafter (Abū Nuʿaym, 1997, p. 256). This means that true zuhd is not to abandon wealth or possessions, but to ensure that the heart is not attached to them, so that they do not obstruct one's path of obedience to the Lord and striving for Paradise.

Summary of the technical definitions: In the Sufi and ethical understanding, *zuhd* does not mean rejecting the world itself, but rather freeing oneself from servitude to it - so that love of wealth, rank, and ornamentation does not own a person. Instead, he relies upon Allah, is content with His apportionment, and knows that the Hereafter is the ultimate goal.

Zuhd in Islam

Zuhd arose as a moral and existential stance in the early period of Islam, particularly after the expansion of Islamic conquests and the appearance of wealth and luxury. Among the Companions and the Followers, *zuhd* was marked by simplicity and moderation, combining practical worship with avoidance of worldly adornments, without reaching the level of total withdrawal from society.

Some of its most prominent figures in Islamic history were al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, and Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya, who offered a model of *zuhd* grounded in exhortation and actual renunciation of the world, far removed from philosophical theorizing.

Among the sayings of the early Muslims and scholars regarding *zuhd* are the following:

1. Abū Muslim al-Khawlānī: *"Zuhd is not the prohibition of what is lawful nor the wasting of wealth, but zuhd is that you place greater trust in what is in Allah's hand than in what is in your own hand."* (Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, 2008, p. 613).
2. Al-Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ: *"Zuhd is contentment and despair concerning what is in people's hands."* (Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, 2008, p. 612).
3. Sufyān al-Thawrī: *"Zuhd in this world is shortness of hope; it is not [merely] eating coarse food or wearing woolen cloaks."* (Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, 1999, p. 155).
4. Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: *"Zuhd is on three levels: abandoning what is unlawful, and this is the zuhd of the common folk; abandoning excess in what is lawful, and this is the zuhd of the elect; and abandoning whatever distracts the servant from Allah, Mighty and Majestic, and this is the zuhd of the gnostics."* (Ibn Mufliḥ, 2009, vol. 21, p. 149).
5. Al-Shāfiʿī: Among his most famous verses on zuhd are his lines of poetry (al-Shāfiʿī, 2003, p. 85):

Truly, Allah has servants who are wise,
They abandoned the world and feared its trials.
They looked into it, and when they realized,
That it was no homeland for the living,
They made it like an ocean and took
Righteous deeds within it as their ships.

The Impact of Zuhd on Individual and Social Conduct

Zuhd is not a purely abstract spiritual notion, but rather a behavioral value that is clearly reflected in the life of both the individual and society. On the individual level, *zuhd* purifies the heart from the diseases of greed and avarice, and implants in it contentment and satisfaction, which result in inner peace and tranquility that protect one from the anxiety caused by attachment to perishable things. Ibn al-Qayyim pointed to this meaning when he said: *"Zuhd is the journey of the heart from the homeland of this world toward the stations of the Hereafter"* (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1996, vol. 2, p. 10). Zuhd also grants man spiritual freedom, liberating him from subjugation to material possessions, elevating his thought and conduct, and enabling him to stand at a distance from his desires so that he may choose what draws him closer to God and benefits him in both this world and the Hereafter.

On the societal level, the spread of the spirit of *zuhd* among its members contributes to the refinement of character, the cleansing of relationships from miserliness, envy, and selfishness, and the promotion of cooperation and solidarity. For those who renounce the world do not compete over its appearances nor envy one another over its adornments, thereby reducing social conflicts rooted in the love of possession and status. Ibn Taymiyya summarized this social dimension by

saying: *"Zuhd is leaving what does not benefit in the Hereafter, and waraʿ (scrupulousness) is leaving what one fears may harm in the Hereafter"* (Ibn Taymiyya, 2004, vol. 14, p. 458). This indicates that *zuhd* is not a negative withdrawal from the world, but rather the reform of the self and of human relations in light of the standard of the Hereafter.

Thus, in linguistic usage, *zuhd* means to turn away from something and abandon desire for it, and it is the opposite of greed and covetousness. It is said: "He renounced the world (*zahida fī al-dunyā*)" when he turned away from it, belittled it, and lessened his desire for its pleasures and ornaments (al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, 1992, p. 387). In the terminology of the scholars of spiritual discipline and the masters of the heart, *zuhd* is one of the stations on the path to God. It manifests in the heart's detachment from the world and its adornments, while the hand continues to work and the body strives to earn a livelihood. True *zuhd* is therefore not merely the withdrawal of the limbs from the world, but the withdrawal of the heart from it, placing trust in what is with God, and preferring the abode of the Hereafter over fleeting worldly pleasures. Imām al-Ghazālī summed up the essence of *zuhd* when he said: *"Zuhd is not that you own nothing, but that nothing owns you"* (al-Ghazālī, 1982, p. 218). The point is not the emptiness of the hand, but the emptiness of the heart from attachment to anything other than God. True *zuhd* produces peace of mind, serenity of the soul, and freedom of the heart from envy and greed. It is the provision of the traveler to God on the path of discipline and spiritual elevation.

Second Theme: The Concept of Sufism

Sufism in Language and Terminology

The origin of the word *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) has been a matter of debate among scholars, but the most widely accepted view is that it is derived from *ṣūf*

(wool), referring to the rough garment worn by the early ascetics as an expression of renunciation, humility, and abandonment of luxury. The term is defined in Arabic dictionaries as follows:

First: In the classical Arabic dictionaries

1. Lisān al-ʿArab (Ibn Manẓūr): Under the entry "ṣūf": *"Al-ṣūfī: attributed to wearing wool. It is said: he is a ṣūfī man if he wore wool, displayed austerity and devotion, and renounced the pleasures of the world."* Ibn Manẓūr did not provide a philosophical or technical definition of Sufism, but connected it directly to wearing wool and to asceticism.

2. al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ (al-Fayrūzābādī): *"Ṣūfī: attributed to wool. It is also said to derive from purity of the heart (ṣafāʾ al-sarīra), or from being in the first row (al-ṣaff al-awwal) in worship, or from purification and freedom from blemishes."* Scholars differed about its etymology.

Second: In the modern dictionaries

1. al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ (Academy of the Arabic Language, Cairo): *"Taṣawwuf: an Islamic school of thought based on asceticism, piety, disciplining the self, purifying the heart, traveling to Allah Almighty through unveiling and direct witnessing, and seeking truth through spiritual experience rather than rational inference."*

2. al-Muʿjam al-Falsafī (Academy of the Arabic Language, Cairo): *"Taṣawwuf: a religious and ethical orientation known in Islam, aiming at purification of the soul and elevation of the spirit in order to attain the rank of iḥsān, wherein the servant worships his Lord as though he sees Him. It is based on striving, contemplation, and experiential unveiling of the reality of existence."*

3. al-Muʿjam al-ʿArabī al-Asāsī (Academy of the Arabic Language, Paris): *"Taṣawwuf: a spiritual doctrine based on asceticism and austerity, seeking to attain purity of*

heart and knowledge of God through contemplation and disciplining of the self. It is one of the manifestations of deep religious experience in Islam."

Notes on the Origin of the Word

Scholars differed concerning the origin of the word *ṣūfi*. It was said to be:

- Derived from wearing wool (*ṣūf*), which was the hallmark of the ascetics in the early centuries.
- Or from the word *ṣafā'* (purity), signifying purity of heart.
- Or from the *Ahl al-Ṣuffa*, the poor Emigrants who dwelled in the Prophet's mosque ﷺ.
- Or from *iṣṭifā'* (divine election), indicating their special closeness to Allah.

Definitions of Sufism by Its Leading Figures

1. Al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (known as the master of the Sufi order): *"Sufism is to be with Allah without any attachment, and to be as He wills you to be, not as you wish Him to be."* (al-Junayd, 2005, p. 16). The meaning here is that Sufism is annihilation of personal will and complete union with the will of Allah, Mighty and Majestic.

2. Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī: *"Sufism is entering into every noble character and leaving behind every vile character."* (al-Sulamī, 1953, p. 115). By this he meant that Sufism is practical ethics, not mere appearances, achieved through disciplining and purifying the soul.

3. Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī: *"Sufism is adopting every lofty character and abandoning every base one."* (al-Ṭūsī, 1960, p. 41). This definition ties Sufism to ethics, showing that it is not simply ascetic renunciation but conduct realized in one's dealings.

4. Al-Qushayrī (in his famous *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*): He cited from some of the Sufi masters that Sufism is *"preferring the truth over falsehood"* and *"sincere dealing with Allah."* (al-Qushayrī, 1966, pp. 82–83). This means that the essence

of Sufism is sincerity of orientation and pure intention toward Allah, without turning to anything else.

4. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (in *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*): *"Sufism is a science through which one knows the states of purification of the souls, refinement of morals, disciplining of the inner self, and enlivening of the heart with the remembrance of Allah, until the servant attains the station of iḥsān."* (al-Ghazālī, 1982, p. 951). Al-Ghazālī clarifies that Sufism is the cultivation of the heart that leads man to worship his Lord as though he sees Him - it is the essence and spirit of religion.

Summary of the Spirit of Sufism

In essence, Sufism is a spiritual and ethical path. It does not suffice with outward renunciation of the world, but rather focuses on cleansing the heart from worldly attachments, refining the self until it becomes a mirror reflecting the lights of the Truth, and seeking Allah's pleasure through asceticism, humility, and sincere love for Allah and for people.

Thus, Sufism is a spiritual method that aims to purify and discipline the soul, cleanse the heart from whims, and journey toward Allah Almighty through spiritual stations and ranks, beginning with striving (*mujāhada*) and culminating in gnosis (*maʿrifa*) or "unveiling" (*kashf*) attained by the Sufi through direct taste and spiritual experience, not through rational speculation or literal transmission.

Sufism in Islamic History

Sufism did not emerge as a clear philosophical and spiritual orientation until the third century AH, when it developed from ethical *zuhd* into a spiritual school with epistemological and mystical dimensions. What most distinguishes Sufism from *zuhd* is its emphasis on the concept of "divine love" and "annihilation in the Divine Essence," as well as its blending of spiritual practice with intellectual

reflection, in addition to the development of precise philosophical concepts related to existence and knowledge.

Among its major figures are al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, and al-Ḥallāj, who contributed to grounding the Sufi discourse and clarifying its theoretical and practical features.

Major Schools of Sufism

Islamic Sufism is not merely a general concept, but a wide-ranging current with diverse schools and approaches that differ in their focus on either the practical or theoretical aspect, as well as in their methods of spiritual discipline and self-purification. Below is a clear and concise presentation of the most prominent schools of Sufism:

1. The Ethical - Purificatory School

- Focuses on purification of the soul, refinement of character, and training in sincerity and asceticism.
- Avoids philosophical and mystical terminology, emphasizing scrupulousness, worship, and humility.
- Its pioneers: al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, al-Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ, Sufyān al-Thawrī.

2. The Mystical–Philosophical School

- Concerned with inner knowledge, unveiling (*kashf*), and spiritual taste (*dhawq*).
- Employs philosophical and intellectual terms such as "annihilation" (*fanā*), "subsistence" (*baqā*), "special monotheism," and emphasizes unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and manifestation (*tajallī*).
- Its pioneers: Ibn ʿArabī, al-Suhrawardī, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, al-Bisṭāmī.

3. The Practical–Ṭarīqa (Order) School

- Focuses on practical spiritual exercises and discipline through the master (*shaykh*) and disciple (*murīd*).
- Established organized Sufi orders with specific litanies (*awrād*), remembrances (*adhkār*), and strict regulations.
- Examples:
    - al-Qādiriyya (Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī)
    - al-Shādhiliyya (Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī)
    - al-Naqshbandiyya (Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-Naqshbandī)
    - al-Tijāniyya (Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī)
    - al-Rifāʿiyya (Aḥmad al-Rifāʿī)

4. The Reformist–Sunni School

- Focused on integrating authentic Sufism with adherence to Sharīʿa, stressing the necessity of avoiding innovations.
- Sought to revive the original spirit of Sufism: humility, sincerity, remembrance of God, detachment from worldly life, without exaggeration in miracles or extraordinary claims.
- Its figures: Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, al-Shāṭibī, Muḥammad Zarrūq, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī.

Summary: Each school of Sufism strove, in its own way, to explain the path to God:

- The ethical schools emphasized practical conduct.
- The mystical–philosophical schools focused on experiential knowledge.
- The ṭarīqa-based schools established collective systems of spiritual training.
- The reformist schools called for rectifying Sufism and reconnecting it with the jurisprudence of the Qurʾān and Sunnah.

Third Theme: The Essential Differences between Zuhd and Sufism

- The points of difference between *zuhd* and *taṣawwuf* can be summarized in the following table, followed by a detailed exposition:

Aspect	Zuhd	Sufism
Fundamental goal	Liberation from worldly desires and attachment to the Hereafter	Attaining knowledge of God and spiritual union with Him through mystical taste
Method	Renunciation of the world, abundance of worship, contentment	Traversing the stations of the soul, striving, annihilation (*fanā*) and subsistence (*baqā*)
Historical origin	Emerged in early Islam as a moral reaction	Later developed in the third century AH into a philosophical Sufi school
View of the world	Abandonment of worldly pleasures and simplification of living	Symbolic view of the world, considering it a veil from the Divine Reality
Relationship with God	Based on fear and hope, and seeking reward in the Hereafter	Based on divine love and yearning, transcending mere reward and punishment

It thus becomes clear from this table that there are evident differences between *zuhd* and *taṣawwuf* in many respects, which may be elaborated as follows:

The fundamental goal

Zuhd proceeds from the desire to be freed from the captivity of material appetites and to look forward to the reward of the Hereafter. It is an ethical stance based on self-restraint and guarding the heart. Sufism, however, goes beyond this ethical dimension to make knowledge of God and spiritual taste its supreme goal, not content with reward in the Hereafter, but seeking witnessing of the Truth and existential closeness to Him. This is what al-Junayd expressed when he said: *"Sufism is that the Truth annihilates you from yourself, and revives you through Him."* (al-Qushayrī, 2002, p. 78).

2. The method

Zuhd is practically translated into renouncing luxury, increasing in worship, and being content with little - steps that prepare the heart for purity. Sufism, however, follows a broader and more precise method, involving the traversal of the soul's stations such as repentance, renunciation, patience, and gratitude, culminating in annihilation in God and subsistence through Him. These are ranks that go beyond outward deeds to deep inner experience.

3. The historical origin

Zuhd arose in early Islam as a reaction to the immersion of some Muslims in worldly adornments after the conquests and expansion of the state. It was thus an individual reformist movement aimed at disciplining the self. Sufism, however, crystallized later, especially in the third century AH, when ascetic practice evolved into an intellectual and spiritual school with philosophical and theological dimensions, delving into theories such as annihilation, union, and experiential knowledge.

4. The view of the world

Zuhd sees the world as a domain of temptation and attachment, calling for simplification of living and avoidance of indulgence in pleasures. Sufism, on the

other hand, views the world symbolically, as a veil preventing perception of the Divine Reality. Hence the many Sufi references to the "cosmos" as a covering that must be pierced to unveil the Light of the Truth.

5. The relationship with God

Zuhd focuses on fear of punishment and hope for reward, which accords with the early exhortative discourse in Islam. Sufism, however, elevated this relationship to the station of divine love and yearning, where worship is motivated by love rather than greed or fear. Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī summarized this difference, saying: *"Zuhd bequeaths contentment, whereas love bequeaths longing for God."* (al-Muḥāsibī, 1995, p. 142).

Conclusion

Although *zuhd* and *taṣawwuf* share certain outward features, they remain different in depth and ultimate aim. *Zuhd* represents an ethical and social stance that focuses on liberation from the trappings of the world, reducing the burdens of the self that distract from the Hereafter. In this sense, it is a call to simplicity, moderation, and minimizing material preoccupation, enabling man to direct his effort toward what is more enduring and beneficial. Thus, in Islamic heritage, *zuhd* is a first step, a psychological and spiritual preparation that paves the way for a broader and deeper journey.

Sufism, on the other hand, is a comprehensive spiritual and philosophical project that transcends the ethical dimension to construct a cosmological and epistemological vision of existence, through an inner mystical experience that aims at closeness to God and direct experiential knowledge of Him - not content with theoretical concepts or outward rituals. Whereas *zuhd* seeks to purify the heart from attachments to the world, Sufism seeks to fill that heart with the lights of

divine love, tasting the realities of the unseen, and living in presence and witnessing with God.

Despite these differences, *zuhd* and *taṣawwuf* share a common thread: the search for serenity and deliverance from the burden of matter. Yet the path proposed by Sufism is more complex and layered, founded on stages of spiritual progression, disciplines of the self, and an openness to philosophical and metaphysical meanings absent in the simpler conception of *zuhd*. Thus, one may say that *zuhd* constitutes the beginning by which the soul opens to a higher horizon, whereas Sufism is the completion and full articulation of that horizon in a comprehensive spiritual project.

From this perspective, *zuhd* and *taṣawwuf* should not be viewed in terms of opposition, but rather complementarity: *zuhd* provides Sufism with an ethical foundation that frees the self from desires, while Sufism provides *zuhd* with a philosophical and spiritual horizon that elevates man from mere negative renunciation of the world to the experiential living of the great truths of existence. In this way, they meet in serving a single purpose: liberating man from the narrowness of materiality and opening his heart to the horizon of divine mercy and spiritual knowledge.

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