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BOOK REVIEW

**Introduction To The Science of Sufism (Tasavvuf İlmine Giriş), Dawūd Al-Qayşarī,  
Trans. by Muhammed Bedirhan (Nefes Publications, Istanbul, 2013).**

**Saezd Rashed Hasan Chowdury**

Assistant Professor Dr., Department of Basic Islamic Sciences (Sufism), Faculty of Islamic  
Sciences, Bartın University, Bartın, Türkiye

Email: [saezdrashed.du1991@gmail.com](mailto:saezdrashed.du1991@gmail.com)

ORCID: [0000-0002-3864-1378](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3864-1378)

**Abstract**

This paper analyses “Introduction to the Science of Sufism (Tasavvuf İlmine Giriş),” which comprises translations of two treatises by the renowned Sufi scholar Dawūd Al-Qayşarī. A prominent follower of Ibn Arabi, Al-Qayşarī was the chief instructor of the first madrasa in Iznik, established during the Ottoman Empire. His mystical interpretation of existence, deeply rooted in the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud (the Unity of Being), has significantly influenced Iranian, Arab, Turkish, and Indian cultures. The first treatise delves into topics such as the definition of Sufi science, the names and attributes of God, the degrees of existence, prophethood, sainthood, union, unity, and the role of the perfect human in the world. The second treatise offers a commentary on the initial sentence of a Quranic exegesis by Abdurrazzaq Kashani, Al-Qayşarī’s sheikh, also framed within the Wahdat al-Wujud understanding. This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Al-Qayşarī’s contributions to Sufi metaphysics and his profound influence on Islamic mysticism.

**Keywords:** Dawūd Al-Qayşarī, Wahdat al-Wujud, Sufism, Ibn Arabi, Ottoman Empire, Unity of Being, Divine attributes, Prophethood, Perfect human, Quranic exegesis.

### **Book Review**

Dawūd Al-Qaysarī, who lived during the latter half of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century, articulated the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud (the Unity of Being), a central theme in post-Ibn Arabi Sufism, using philosophical language. He is among the foremost Islamic scholars combining theoretical knowledge with intuitive science.

This book is a translation of two treatises by Dawūd Al-Qaysarī, titled “Risale fi İlmi’t-Tasavvuf” and “Şerhu Te’vilatı Besmele.” These treatises are based on the Wahdat al-Wujud (unity of existence), which expresses Ibn Arabi’s understanding of being, God, the universe, and man. The first treatise includes an introduction, the first, second, and third maksads (goals), and a conclusion.

The introductory section consists of two chapters, in which the author initially defines the science of Sufism while discussing its benefits. The essence of Allah and His eternal attributes are among the subjects of this science. The author briefly mentions the problems of Sufi science and addresses these topics in other sections. These issues include how unity emerges from multiplicity, how the return to the essence of Allah occurs, and how the manifestations of divine names are realised. At the end of this section, the author states that the purpose of writing the treatise is to refute what philosophers advocate using their methods and to establish the knowledge reached through the criticism of Sufis on a solid foundation.

In the second chapter of the introduction, certain terms specific to Sufism are addressed, with explanations provided for these terms in the footnotes section. Designations such as “hüvviyet,” “hakikatü'l hakaik,” “ahadiyyet,” and “amâ” about the divine essence are elucidated. Additionally, discussions are held regarding the states of unity and differentiation.

The “First Aim” section consists of two chapters. In the first chapter, the discussion revolves around “the existence, names, and attributes of the Truth.” Here, it is argued that the necessity of absolute existence exists; otherwise, succession would arise. Criticism is directed towards the views of theologians and philosophers regarding necessary existence. It is asserted that apart from the Truth, there is no actual existence, and their seeming existence is argued to be mere illusion. This notion is elucidated through the example of waves not existing without the ocean.

The second chapter includes “the degrees of the manifestations of existence and the five divine degrees.” The discussion touches upon the concept of the universal imagination, referred to as “nefes-i rahmani.” It is elucidated that after creating intellect, Allah first created the soul, then the universal imagination, the Throne (Arsh) and the Footstool (Kursi), celestial bodies, minerals, plants, and animals, and finally, the last degree of descent being human. It is

mentioned that from this final degree of descent, human beings ascend again to return to their Lord.

This section discusses the five universal realms (degrees). The first of these is the realm of “Ayan-ı sabite,” or the realm of immutable essences. The second is the first level of determination, known as the “ceberût alemi” (the world of power), where the reality of things exists potentially. Another realm is the realm of similitude, also called the “berzah alemi” (intermediate realm), where counterparts of forms will materialise in the realm of bodies. The subsequent realm is referred to as the realm of dominion, also known as the realm of bodies, where the forms from the realm of similitude manifest in physical form. The final realm discussed in this section is the “insan-ı kamil” (the perfect human). Despite being the last in determination, this degree is above all others. It is the first intellect and the “nur-i muhammedi” (Muhammadan light). According to Dawūd al-Qayṣarī, the first intellect is represented by Prophet Adam (as), and the universal soul by Eve.

In the third chapter, the realm of similitude is discussed. To this degree, existence manifests its attributes and names collectively, and there are forms resembling imaginary shapes. From this realm, descent occurs into the realm of bodies. The realm of souls lies between the realm of spirits and bodies. When humans depart from the realm of bodies, they will transition to the intermediate realm. According to the author, within this realm lie the concepts of punishment, reward, the torment of the grave or its blessings, the gathering (mahşer), paradise, and hell. The author explains the issue of Prophet Muhammad seeing other prophets during the Miraj event in connection with this realm.

The Second Aim’s title is “The Path to Reaching the Origins of Origins.” In the first chapter, the topic of prophethood is discussed. It is asserted that to reach the essence of Allah, there is a need for prophets and their representatives, the saints. Reason alone can comprehend the existence and unity of Allah; however, understanding His essence requires the guidance of prophets. In this section, examples are provided from the Qur’an to emphasise that Allah knows His essence best and informs us through the prophets from whom we can learn. This communication occurs through prophethood. Prophethood is categorised into general and specific, and it is emphasised that prophethood cannot be attained through effort; instead, it is a selection by Allah.

In this section, emphasis is placed on the concepts of “zahir” (apparent) and “batın” (hidden), highlighting that the inner aspect of prophethood is “velayet” (sainthood). Drawing from the sayings of the prophet, it is concluded that the inner aspect of the Qur’an is its esoteric dimension, while its exoteric aspect is its apparent meaning. The initially understood meaning

of the Qur'an, i.e., the exoteric, encompasses both the ordinary people and the elite. The esoteric dimension concerns only the elite. The "matla" (morning) belongs to the elders of the saints.

The second chapter discusses the concept of sainthood and its degrees. Sainthood has two aspects: one, like prophethood, emerges solely through divine bestowal, while the other can be attained through effort and spiritual struggle. Those referred to as "meczup" focus on ecstasy, also known as "muhib." Sainthood attained through spiritual struggle is called "mahbub," and those who earn it are more competent than the muhib. The level of "kutb" is the first degree and is also called "gavs." Following the kutb are two imam degrees, representing the right and left. After the demise, the kutb's degree of kutb continues with the left imam. The fourth degree is likened to the four great companions. In this section, other degrees are also extensively discussed, emphasising that all are under the command of the kutb.

In the third chapter, the focus shifts to attaining sainthood. The servant has three principal faculties: the ego (nefs), the heart (kalp), and the spirit (ruh). If one desires to reach the Divine, one must ascend through these faculties. The first faculty is that of the ego, which is the initial state of human existence upon birth. Initially, the ego is only acquainted with basic needs like eating and drinking, but darker inclinations eventually emerge. As individuals become conscious, they distance themselves from these evils and turn towards the spiritual journey (seyr-i suluk) from the egoic state. Here, they require guidance from a spiritual guide (sheikh). The disciple engages in spiritual struggle (mujahedah) under the guidance of the sheikh, after which they begin to experience spiritual delights. They devote themselves to seclusion, meditation, remembrance of God (zikr), and worship, replacing their love for the world with love for God. This love leads the disciple to annihilation (mahv) of the self, through which they receive mystical insights (Ilm Ladunni), thus attaining the station of sainthood.

The Third Aim consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, the concept of "unity" and its degrees are discussed; in the second chapter, the concept of "divine oneness" and its degrees are discussed; and in the last chapter, the topic of "caliphate" is addressed. Here, "unity" refers to the assertion that the absolute necessary existence, advocated by pantheists, does not perish in nature or contingent existence. On the contrary, it is argued that contingent existence, which can be characterised by non-existence and being created, disappears within the Essence of the Truth. Thus, nothing remains except the Truth in the one who attains this station. After reaching the station of unity, one attains the station of differentiation. They now perceive how plurality arises from unity. This is the station of all perfection, like prophets and saints.

The second chapter discusses three levels of divine oneness (Tawhid). The lowest level is the affirmation of divine oneness by the ordinary people, which is expressed in the statement “La ilaha illallah” (There is no god but Allah). The divine oneness of the elite is divided into three parts. The first part is the oneness of actions (Tawhid-i efal), where it is argued that all actions of the world emanate solely from Allah, meaning there is only one actor. The second part is the oneness of attributes (Tawhid -i sifat), where it is stated that human attributes are merely a drop from the attributes of Allah. The final part is the oneness of essence (tevhid-i zat), which entails the notion of all contingent beings returning to Allah and ceasing to exist. Understanding these levels of divine oneness occurs through three methods: Rational inquiry (istidlal), imitation (taklid), and observation (mushahede).

The topic of the third chapter is the caliphate. There exists a locus for all the names and attributes of Allah. The manifestation of the name of Allah, in which all names and attributes converge, is the caliph, and this is the spirit of Prophet Muhammad. Through the nurturing of Allah, this caliph has attained the competence to nurture all the truths in the world. The esoteric aspect of prophethood is sainthood, meaning every prophet is also a saint. In Islamic tradition, prophets have successors, and these saints, who inherit the knowledge and state of the prophet, are called the “qademi” of the prophet. According to the author, the partial aspect of Prophet Muhammad’s sainthood is manifested in Ibn Arabi. The universal element of sainthood is manifested in the prophet Jesus, and this saintliness ended with him.

The “Exegesis of The Basmalah” treatise comprises an introduction, five preambles, and a conclusion section. The introduction begins with praise to Allah. It discusses how Allah, through the manifestation of His names and attributes, makes humanity knowledgeable and appoints them as His deputies. It mentions reading Kaşani’s work “Ta’wīlat al-Qur’an al Karim” and discusses its opening statement. It states that the purpose of writing this treatise is to elucidate this opening statement.

The writer mentions the First Preamble: In the knowledge of Allah, immutable truths and forms exist for everything. These forms are the manifestations of the divine attributes and manifestations. These manifested forms of expertise are both eternal. For example, the physical body of a human being manifests a similar form in the intermediate realm. In this analogy, the body is the manifestation of the bodily form, the human form is the manifestation of the spiritual form, and the spiritual form is the manifestation of the hidden form fixed in the knowledge of the Divine Essence. All of these are types of manifestations of existence. When Kaşani refers to the “type of form,” he means these types.

In the Second Preamble, in the Divine Essence station, he referred to the immutable essences (vücutat-ı hassa) as particular entities. The immutable essences manifesting in the external world are the same and different. To elucidate this concept, he provided the example of a mirror, stating that one's reflection in the mirror is both oneself and not oneself. The realities of things converge into a single reality, and in this reality, there is the Creator from non-existence to existence. Thus, the multiple realities become one in this reality.

In the Third Preamble, the writer mentions that Allah is in absolute existence. He encompasses everything. He is the giver of existence to worlds and beings. He is the one who makes truths and manifest forms.

In the Fourth Preamble, the discussion revolves around the four levels of existence. The phrases comprising 'expressions' are reflections of the level of immutable essences. The second level, 'immutable essences,' are manifestations of the unseen forms. 'Embroideries in writing' are reflections of the phrases in speech. Allah's existence, names, and attributes are known through the immutable essences.

The Fifth Preamble states that all individual entities reflect immutable truths, yet the forms belonging to a type are abstract and cannot be found in the external world. These individuals are reflections of truths. There are manifestations of Allah's names. For instance, the name "ez-Zahir" is realised through the Great Throne (Arsh-ı azim).

In this section, the author discusses the difference between Ahad (the Unique) and Vahid (the One). Subsequently, the author addresses the distinction between er-Rahman (the Most Gracious) and er-Rahim (the Most Merciful). It is mentioned that the mercy of the name Rahman does not encompass the disbelievers, whereas the name Rahim is all-encompassing. The manifestation of the name Rahman is the First Intellect, while the manifestation of the name Rahim is the Universal Soul. The treatise concludes with praise to Allah and salutations upon Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).