

# **A Short Glossary of Sufi Terms**

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**Ādab:** All of the requirements of Sufi etiquette and discipline. *Ādab* is an Arabic term used to refer to proper demeanor or courtesy as well as to the broader categories; a set of principles that regulates the best manners and attitudes; propriety. Each of the Sufi orders has had its own distinctive brand of *ādab*. *Tasawwuf* is based upon *ādab*, which extends from right behavior with regard to the Sacred Law (*sharī'ah*) and reaches to unceasing spiritual courtesy to Allāh himself.

**Akhlāq:** Ethics, moral qualities, character traits. Underlying principles governing the specific requirements of Sufi behavior as elaborated by the various orders. *Tasawwuf* is based upon assuming the beautiful and noble character traits, which were perfected by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may the blessing and peace be upon him).

**Arwāh:** Plural of *rūh*. See. **Ruh**.

**Awliyā:** Plural of *walī*. See. **Walī**.

**‘Āshiq:** The origin of the word is *‘ishq*, which means love or divine love in Arabic. *‘Āshiq* means in this context, lover (of Allāh), and the person who love Allāh. *‘Āshiq* is the one who searches for Allāh with intense yearning and longing, never allowing himself rest in his pursuit of the Beloved.

**Barakah (blessing):** A beneficial spiritual force accessible through the power and proximity of friends of Allāh (*awliyā*) to the source of grace. It is a subtle spiritual energy, which flows through everything, but is strongest within the human. The more purified the human becomes, the greater the flow of *barakah*. Of course, all blessing derives ultimately from Allāh, and sincere seekers of blessing know that one ought not take it for granted.

**Dunyā:** The corporal world. *Dunyā* is the life. It is all that distracts man from the remembrance of Allāh. It is the veil with which He conceals Himself from His creation. *Dunyā* is whatever is closest to one’s lower self (*nafs*). Man must be in this world like a stranger. His sights, his vision, his aspiration and his love should be directed totally towards the Real, Allāh.

**Fayd:** Divine effusion or overflow or emanation. One of the ways of gaining knowledge is through this divine effusion. It is a bestowal from Allāh to the heart of His perfect slave, the perfect man. The world itself remains in existence due to this overflowing of the lights of His self-manifestation.

**Firāsah:** Power of spiritual perspicacity, a type of clairvoyance. This is divine light, which Allāh gives to the person of faith in his inner eye (*basīrah*). *Firāsah* is gained through assuming the noble character traits in perfect harmony, balance and equilibrium. The Holy Prophet said: “*Be wary of the firasah of the man of faith for he sees with the light of Allāh.*” (Tirmidhī, *Tafseer al-Qur’ān*, 16, n. 3127)

**Fitnah:** Causing discord between muslims or sedition; testing and trial in the life until death.

**Ghaflah:** To be negligent or heedless or unconscious of Allāh. From the viewpoint of *Tasawwuf*, *ghaflah* indicates a state, which, at times, may overcome some of the lesser knowers. In this state they succumb to such a state of heedlessness as to utter phrases, which should be kept concealed. Perfect courtesy (*ādab*) towards Allāh is preserved when the knower keeps His secret within himself.

**Ghawth/Ghauth:** This refers to the Pole-star, at a time when he is being sought as a refuge. He is not called this except at such a time. He is the hidden centre of the hierarchy of saints (*awliyā*).

**Hayā (syhness):** Modesty. It extends from the concealment of the human body under the modest covering of dignified apparel, through to the ultimate concealment of the inner reality under the ultimate of modest coverings, which is slavehood (*'ubūdah*). *Hayā* is the slave's shame before Allāh, knowing that Allāh sees him, inwardly and outwardly, always.

**Hidāyah:** The word *hidāyah* literally means to guide, to direct, to show the way; direction, a path. Conceptually, it refers the only way that ensures a person to achieve the pleasure and closure to Allāh.

**Hikmah:** Wisdom. This is the knowledge of the reality of things, their precise characteristics, specialities and properties, and of the connection between causes and effects, and of the secret mechanism regulating creation, as well as the appropriate action required. To act as is proper to each situation. To be able to act in such a manner it is necessary to have discernment of relationship.

**Himmah:** Intense spiritual resolve. This the most powerful force contained within man. It is the sincere and dedicated application of all one's efforts and strivings towards attaining the desired Object-Allāh. Through the *himmah*, the great friends of Allāh possess the power to perform miracles.

**Ijtihād:** Outwardly this takes the form of individual endeavor to earn knowledge of the *sharī'ah*. Inwardly the efforts of the individual are directed towards self-purification on order to gain knowledge of Allāh (*ma'rifah*). Such a striving (*ijtihād*) for knowledge is contrasted with the bestowal (*wahb*) of knowledge. In other words, it is striving to derive the rules to solve problems that have not been explained clearly and openly in the Holy Qur'ān or in the hadiths by likening them to matters that have been explained clearly and in detail. This can be done by those who have been promoted to the grade of *ijtihād*; these people are called *mujtahid* (See. **Mujtahid**).

**Ikhlas:** Sincerity and purity of intention. Without this noble quality man is unable to advance towards his Lord. With it he is able to traverse great distances and attain to the heights of knowledge.

**Intisab (bay'ah):** Being a part of Sufi lineage by accepting a sheikh as a murshid, spiritual guide. The pact or rite of initiation into a Sufi tariqah. This pact, which in truth is a pact between Allāh and His slave, eternally bonds together the murshid and his murīd. Within the *bay'ah* there is a sacred moment in which the *barakah* (spiritual energy) of the *silsilah* (spiritual chain) is transmitted from the murshid to the murīd. This enables the murīd to travel in safety under divine protection and with divine aid.

**Irshad:** Guidance. In this context it means, guiding people to Truth (haqiqah).

**Istighfar:** Seeking forgiveness from Allāh. It is a necessary part of preparation for true prayer. It is an act of devotion, which should never be abandoned, regardless of one's knowledge, spiritual visions, acts of abstinence etc.

**Istiqamah:** Steadfastness. It is spiritual steadfastness in the face of all events, be they manifestation of divine beauty (*jamāl*) or divine majesty (*jalāl*). Stand out for following the right path, the path of The Holy Prophet and his noble successors.

**I'tikaf:** *I'tikaf* is one of the spiritual traditions of Islam. The literal definition of the word *i'tikaf* is to stay in a particular place or focus on something good or bad. Religiously it means to stay in a mosque for a particular time period with the intention of worship of Allāh. Remaining in their designated prayer area (*musallā*) at home, with intention is better than staying at the mosque (though it is normally somewhat disliked for them to do so) for women. The Holy Prophet (may the peace and blessing be upon him) normally did *i'tikaf* during the last ten days of Ramadan. He also did *i'tikaf* in other months and occasions. Hence, one can make *i'tikaf* whenever fasting is permitted. So the legitimacy of *i'tikaf* is not limited to the last ten days of the holy months or Ramadan.

**Jadhba:** The divine attraction. When, through His infinite grace, Allāh draws or pulls His lover towards Himself, without any effort on the part of the lover, rapture and ecstasy are experienced. During the divine rapture (*jadhba*), which overpowers the lover's heart, he becomes present (*hudūr*) with Allāh.

**Jamāl:** The divine beauty. Beauty is comprised of the characteristics of mercy and graciousness from the divine presence. *Jamāl* is opposite *jalāl* (*majesty*). When the heart is overwhelmed by *jamāl* then intimacy (*uns*) is experienced.

**Janāzah:** Funeral.

**Jannah:** Paradise.

**Jihād:** There are two types of jihad:

**Jihād al-akbar:** The greater holy war. This is the constant and vigilant inner warfare against ignorance, the passions and the vices of the lower self, which drag man downwards away from Allāh. It is the real struggle against the inner enemies, the inner unbelievers and inner tyrants. The celestial weapon used in that jihad is the remembrance of Allāh (*dhikrullāh*).

**Jihād al-asghar:** The lesser holy war. This is the outer combat against the infidels and unbelievers and tyrants to defend muslims and downtroddens.

**Kashf:** Unveiling or revelation. *Kashf* is one of the types of direct experience through which knowledge of reality is unveiled to the heart of slave and lover. In His infinite grace, Allāh gives His slave and lover a divine self-disclosure which not only increases his knowledge of Allāh but also increases his yearning and intense love of Allāh.

**Khidmah:** Service. From the aspect of *Tasawwuf*, it is the service just for the sake of Allāh.

**Kibr:** Arrogance.

**Latā'if (singular form: latīfah):** Belonging to the “universe of command” (*‘ālam al-amr*) are collectively known as the subtle centres of the heart and are the focus of this work. They are the *qalb*, *rūh*, *sirr*, *khafī*, and *akhfā*. Initially “the *latā'if* were luminous” but when Allāh connected them with the body “their light started to be filtered through the influences of the physical” and as a result work must be done to activate them. Travelling along the Sufī path consists of successive openings of each of the *latā'if*.

**Majlis:** The gathering of the people of the spiritual path for the performance of the collective remembrance (*dhikr*). There is no “place of sitting” more honorable or more perfect than sitting in the remembrance of Allāh (*dhikrullāh*).

**Makrūh:** The word *makrūh* literally means something “disliked” or “undesirable.” According to *sharī'ah* it is any action that one is told not to do without making it absolutely prohibited. It is important to avoid doing that which is *makrūh*. There is no sin and no punishment if a person commits the *makrūh*, but it is blameworthy. Those who want to be pious and conscious of Allāh should avoid doing any action that is *makrūh*.

**Mahabbah (of Allāh):** *Mahabbah* is the lofty, pure and unconditional love of Allāh. The attainment of such love transforms the murīd from “the one who desires Allāh” into the murād, “the one whom Allāh desires.” Nothing is greater than this.

**Ma’nawī / Ma’nawīyyah:** Inner meaning or dimension.

**Maqām:** A spiritual station. A *maqām* is acquired and earned through the effort and sincerity or the traveller (sāliq), but such an acquisition is ultimately through the grace of Allāh. A situation is a “fixed” quality of the self, in contrast to the fleeting nature of a spiritual state (*hāl*).

**Ma’rifah:** Divine knowledge. Ma’rifah is a light, which Allāh casts into the heart of whomsoever He will. This is the true knowledge, which comes through “unveiling” (*kashf*), “witnessing” (*mushāhadah*) and “tasting” (*dhawq*). This is knowledge from Allāh; it is not Allāh Himself, because He is unknowable in His essence.

**Mufassir:** The one who has enough knowledge to interpret The Qur’ān.

**Mujahid:** The one who is the spiritual warrior, engaged in the spiritual struggle (*mujāhadah*) of the *jihād al-akbar*.

**Mujtahid:** *Mujtahid* refers to a scholar permitted to exercise *ijtihād* and thereby issue an original legal ruling (*fatwā*). There are a number of qualifications that *mujtahid* must have: He should be an expert in the Arabic language, literature and philology, so that he may be able to decide properly between the different connotations of the same word. He should be a high calibre scholar of the Qur’ān, and his study of it should be so intensive and extensive that whenever he has to consider a given problem, he should be capable of keeping before his mind's eye the whole sweep of Qur’anic thought and all relevant verses. He should have the traditions of the Holy Prophet (*hadīth*) memorized, so that whenever he has to concentrate on any problem, he may have all the connected traditions, even those indirect ones, before him, clearly and vividly, to guide his thinking both appropriately and comprehensively. Further he should be an expert in both the science of historical criticism (*riwayah*) and logical criticism (*dirayah*), so that he may be able to view the worth and connotation of various traditions, under study in their proper perspective. Above all, he should possess piety and a true Islamic character, and his heart should be imbued with what the Qur’ān calls “fear of God” (*taqwā*).

**Munāfiq:** The hypocrite. The *munāfiq* manifests the form of a man of faith (*mu’min*) in his outward practice, but his inner dimension is devoid of belief and faith.

**Munkir:** From the aspect of *Tasawwuf*, *munkir* means; the one who deny *Tasawwuf* and its concept.

**Murāqabah:** Contemplation. Various referring to method and/or content of various forms of interior prayer. A Sufi might “contemplate” using the method of focusing on a particular mental image, a kind of visualization technique. The goal of the process is to achieve communion (*murāqabah*) with the object of contemplation, whether that is an image of the mystical Beloved or one’s sheikh or the spirit of a deceased holy person, including the Prophet.

**Mushāhadah:** A variety of experiential witnessing. This witnessing occurs in various ways. Some of the travellers (*sāliq*) and man of the path witness Allāh in the things. Some witness Allāh before or after or with the things. And some witness Allāh Himself. And, because Allāh never discloses Himself in the same form in two successive moments to any thing, the witnessing (*mushāhadah*) is infinite and endless.

**Muttaqī:** The one with fear of Allāh. The one who obey the orders of Allāh and avoid the prohibitions thoroughly which have been ordained by Allāh.

**Nafs al-Mutmainnah:** The self whose enlightenment has been completed by the light of the heart, so that it has divested itself of unacceptable morals and has been moulded by laudable moral conduct and orientated toward the way of the heart, generally following it closely and progressively rising step by step.

**Nafy:** Negation. *Nafy* is the negation of the fancy of the existence of the “other” (*ghayr*). The supreme example of *nafy* is the first declaration of faith (*shahādah*) -There is no god, only Allāh (*Lā ilahā illa’llāh*). “There is no god” (*lā ilāha*) forms the negation and “only Allāh” (*illa’llāh*) forms the affirmation. This is unity (*tawhīd*).

**Nazar:** Consideration or to look, to gaze, to inspect or to investigate.

**Niyah:** Intention. The Perfect Man (*insan al-kāmil*) is the first intention and desire through Allāh making him the intended aim and final cause of the creation of the world. From the side of creation all acts of obedience to Allāh require purity of intention. Without pure intention there can be no sincerity of word or deed.

**Nūr:** Light. Primary the metaphor for the divine self-manifestation to the human heart. *Nūr* is the created light, which radiates from the uncreated light of Allāh. When this light enters the heart, it drives away the existence order (*al-kawn*) thereby annihilating the inner eye (*basīrah*) from witnessing “other than Allāh” (*ma siwā Allāh*). For “unveiling” (*kashf*) to take place the light,

which comes from Allāh, must coincide with the light within the heart. If there is darkness within the heart, then it will not be able to match the light from Allāh. In such a case, there is no “unveiling”, and knowledge of Allāh (*ma‘rifah*) does not arrive in that heart. It is the remembrance of Allāh (*dhikrullāh*), which polishes the heart and allows it to be filled with light.

**Qadā (salāh):** The muslim scholars agree that it is obligatory for one who has forgotten the *salāh* or slept through its time to make up the missed *qadā prayer*. This opinion is based on the *hadīth* of the Prophet.

**Qalb-e Saleem:** Holy Prophet Abraham described the day of Qiyāmah as: “*The day when wealth and children will not benefit anyone except he who will come to Allāh with a Qalb-e-Saleem.*” (Qur’ān 26/88-89). A heart that is absolutely free from disbelief (*kufir*), hypocrisy (*nifāq*), arrogance (*kibr*), jealousy (*hasad*) and hatred (*hiqd*). Sincere heart. The heart which, due to extreme love for Allāh and His Prophet, leads to total obedience to Allāh and his Prophet.

**Qutb:** Pole. Pinnacle of the Sufi cosmological hierarchy. Individual Sufi leaders have sometimes been identified as the cosmic axis, pivot or pole (*qutb*) “of the age”, suggesting that the cosmic hierarchy is subject to metaphorical renewal in that it is composed of living individuals. In that sense the term refers to the highest level of sanctity among friends of God (*awliyā*).

**Qutb al-Irshād:** See. **Qutb.**

**Plain of Mahshar:** The gathering place, which all people come to there on the Day of Judgement.

**Rabb al-Ālameen:** The Lord of all universes. Allāh is the “Lord” of all existent things and all things are His “vassals” (*marbūb*).

**Rūh:** Spirit. It is a human faculty that typically represents positive inner impulses and drives. In addition, many Sufi authors describe the spirit as highly mobile, able to depart from the body during sleep and returning during the waking state; though it leaves the body at death.

**Rūhaniyyah:** See. **Rūh.**

**Sādat Kiraam:** The definition used to indicate the whole *awliyā* of the spiritual chain (*silsilah*).

**Sādiq:** The truthful and sincere one.

**Sāleh:** The righteous one. *Sāleh* is the person who has become pure and righteous through acquiring the noble character traits.

**Sayr u Sulūk:** The journey of seeker of truth (*haqīhah*). It is the methodical travelling and spiritual journey through the various stations, from the self to the self under the direction of spiritual master (*sheikh, murshid*).

**Sirr:** The *sirr* is the subtle secret or mystery hidden in the innermost centre of consciousness or being of the human. It is the “hidden place where Allāh manifests His mystery to Himself” and that it is “the point of secret communication between Lord (*Rabb*) and His slave (*‘abd*).” It is also known as *the qalb ul-qalb*, the heart of the heart. The *sirr* is the site of witnessing and its cleansing makes unveiling (*kashf*) possible. With the opening of the *sirr* it becomes possible to “begin to discern the real from the illusory.” Through the opening of the *sirr* “we begin to see the divine reality more clearly in the multiplicity of forms.”

**Sheikh/Shaykh:** The spiritual master. He is the authentic guide and the only one to whom a seeker of truth should turn in his quest. In turning to the spiritual master the seeker is turning to Allāh Almighty.

**Silsilah:** The spiritual chain. The spiritual chain of each *tariqah* descends from the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessing be upon him) himself down to the present-day sheikh. It is through his attachment to the *silsilah* that the newly initiated murīd has the means to travel to Allāh under divine protection.

**Suhoor:** A meal taken before sunrise (*fajr*) by the people who intend to fast that day.

**Tafakkur:** To reflect or meditate upon things. The root of all engendered things is the Most Beautiful Names of Allāh. Therefore *tafakkur* is connected to them, not to the essence.

**Talimat:** It is a Turkish word with Arabic origin; means instructions.

**Tafsir:** Amplification; exegesis, generic term for commentaries of Qur’ān.

**Tarbiyah:** Formation; shaping seekers in the inner, experiential aspects of the path; the development and training of seekers in various aspects.

**Tasarruf:** Free disposal or dispensing. The Perfect Man (*insan al-kāmil, sheikh*) governs the affairs of the world and controls them by means of the divine names. He exercises free disposal throughout the world. This free disposal (*tasarruf*) is the knower’s power of bringing events to pass through directing his spiritual energy towards the sphere of possibilities.

**Taslīmiyah:** Surrender. *Taslīmiyah* is pure, total and unconditional surrender to Allāh in each moment and under every condition. Also, it has another meaning is that surrender to murshid’s order without questioning.

**Tawajjuh:** Concentration or attentiveness or “to turn the face towards something.” *Tawajjuh* can refer to the spiritual concentration exercised between the murshid and his murīd. On a higher level of meaning it is Allāh’s attentiveness towards the possible thing, which brings that thing into existence. Also, through the attentiveness of a divine name, the *sālik* is drawn towards Allāh.

**al-Wahhāb:** He Who gives you with no means and bestows His favors upon you with no reason or cause.

**Wakīl:** Substitute. The one who has limited authority given by his murshid. In *Naqshbandī-Khalidī* order, the authority and the mission of *wakīl* is to take *bay’ah (intisāb)* from people in behalf of his murshid and to inform them about basic Islamic knowledge and *tarīqah*. *Wakīl* is not a deputy (*khalīfa of the murshid*) of the murshid and he does not have authority to guide people like his murshid (murshid has a spiritual and inner power to guide and treat his murīds while *wakīl* does not have). If we need to reemphasize that, *wakīl*’s authority is so restricted and his duty just help to the seekers of truth by instructing and informing them.

**Walī:** A chosen individual, loved by Allāh. This is someone who is entrusted with the Truth (*Haqq*) and who protects it from subversion and would never let it or himself down, until he reaches such perfection as is possible to mankind. *Walī*, is from a root meaning, “close to, near”, thus suggesting in this usage divine protection or patronage. As a category they are known in the plural as *awliyā Allāh*.

**Waseela:** The means. *Waseela* indicates the means through which man can come close to Allāh. “*Seek the means of approach to Him*” (Qur’ān 5/35). There is no other means to ascend from the physical realm to the divine presence. The murīd traverses the first stages of the journey of return to Allāh with the direct aid and under the protection of his murshid. Through the grace of Allāh the murīd may attain to annihilation in the murshid (*fanā ft-murshid*). But, no one will meet Allāh before meeting the Prophet. The murīd can advance no further towards Allāh Almighty unless he travels with the *waseela*.

**Waswasah:** The satanic suggestions and whisperings, which enter into the heart of man in order to distract him from the remembrance of Allāh. The *waswasah* is sneaky and cunning. He is not easily located or quietened. The struggle against satanic suggestions is a decisive part of the strategy in the Greater Holy War (*jihād al-akbar*). Initially the murīd needs his murshid, the divine physician, to protect him and guard him and assist him in locating the *waswasah*. In time and after many journeys and through much ascetic discipline (*riyādah*), abstinence (*warā’*) and spiritual endeavor (*mujāhadah*), the heart of the murīd becomes increasingly purified.

**Zakāt:** The giving up of a portion of the wealth one may possess, in excess of what is needed for sustenance, to “purify” or legitimize what one retains. *Zakāt* is one of the five pillars. It may be paid directly to the poor as alms. *Zakāt* may be used for the upkeep of the poor, for those who own less than that prescribed for the paying of *zakāt* and who have no earning capacity; for the destitute; muslims in dept through pressing circumstances; travelers in need; those serving the cause of Islam; and fighting or striving in the way of Allah.