

# The Concept of Worship towards Sheikh

Akila Mamat<sup>1</sup>, Aminudin Basir @ Ahmad<sup>2</sup>, Shumsudin Yabi<sup>3</sup>

Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Kampus Gong Badak  
21300 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia  
E-mail: akila@unisza.edu.my

DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i5/2985 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i5/2985>

## ABSTRACT

The followers of deviant movements have an extraordinary level of obedience towards their sheikhs or spiritual leaders. The leaders are regarded as religious sources that determine certain practices and are considered ma'sum or infallible by his followers. They would therefore blindly follow what their leaders want and desire without much resistance. This has resulted in an extraordinary level of worship exceeding the level accorded for the Prophet s.a.w. Individuals involved in such extreme worshipping risk putting themselves in a major shirk. This article seeks to address the issue of extreme attitude or al-Ghuluw, and the concept of worshipping the spiritual leaders from the Islamic points of view by using the document analysis method. The results of the study have found that these religious leaders are regarded as a point of reference to certain practices, and are considered infallible or free from sin. In more extreme cases, these leaders are deemed to have divine attributes.

**Keywords:** Worship; Sheikh; Imam; Extreme; Ma'Sum

## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of deviant teachings has become a threat to national security and capable of shaking the country's political stability. Spiritual or religious leaders, which commonly known as sheikhs or imams play an important role in determining the behavior and practice of their followers. They truly believe everything taught by their leaders, although some of it may go against the Quran, hadith or ijma'. These followers not only have total obedience to their leaders, but also believe that these leaders are ma'sum or infallible and are divine in nature. Such belief can shake the faith of a Muslim. Therefore, the article will discuss the concept of sheikhs or spiritual leaders as sources of religious reference. This is then followed by a discussion on the two important principles in the concept before coming to a conclusion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Islamic Contemporary Studies (FICS), Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Terengganu

<sup>2</sup> Prof.Madya.Dr.,Center For General Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor

<sup>3</sup> Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Quran and Sunnah, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Nilai Negeri Sembilan

## **PROHIBITION OF EXTREME WORSHIPPING IN ISLAM**

*Al-Ghuluw* or extreme attitude towards a subject is strictly prohibited in Islam. This includes extreme worshipping of an individual. Among the evidence from the Quran regarding this is as mentioned in Surah al-Taubah verse 30 which means: *The Jews say, "Ezra is the son of Allah "; and the Christians say, "The Messiah is the son of Allah"*.

The verse above explains the attitude of extreme worship among the Jews and Christians as stated in Surah al-Nisa' verse 171 which means: *"O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion"*.

According to al-Baghawiy (1989), this verse is meant for the Christians that consist of four groups namely al-Ya'qubiyyah, al-Mulkaniyah, al-Nasturiyyah and al-Marqisiyyah. For the al-Ya'qubiyyah and al-Mulkaniyah, they believe that Isa is the son of Allah. The al-Nasturiyyah on the other hand believe in the concept of Trinity. This then led to the revelation of this verse to prohibit them from excessively worshipping Isa.

The extreme attitude of the Christians who worship and consider Isa to have divine qualities has been reprimanded by Allah s.w.t. as Isa, just like Adam a.s. was created from the soil. He was not a god as claimed, as stressed by Allah in Surah al-Imran verse 59 which means *"Indeed, the example of Jesus with Allah is like that of Adam. He created him from dust; then He said to him, "Be," and he was"*.

The prohibition applies not only for the prophets and messengers, but also to ordinary people. With regard to this, the Prophet PBUH said which means *"Do not praise me excessively like what the Christians worship (Isa) Ibn Maryam, as I was only His slave. Therefore, you should say: (I) am only His slave and His messenger"* (al-Bukhariy, 1997).

The above hadith is the Prophet's prohibition against excessively praising him (Ibn Hajar, 1986). In reality, Muslim community especially those who are involved in deviant teachings extremely glorify their spiritual leaders to the extent of believing that their leaders possess divine attributes. They become too fanatic and assume that the leaders are perfect and free from any sins.

According to Abdul Rauf (1993), this extreme attitude can be divided into two parts. First, extreme from the faith point of view, and secondly from the practice point of view. In terms of faith, examples include the Christians' worship of Isa as the son of god as well as the *Syi'at's* belief that their imams or spiritual leaders possess divine attributes. Similarly, some deviant followers glorify extremely their religious leaders, sheikhs and imams believing that they are free from any sin and capable of knowing the unseen.

From the practice point of view, it is as if allowing things which are haram or forbidden (Abdul Rauf, 1993). For instance, there are some teachings which allow the followers to

perform the solat by mentioning the niat or intention only without doing the solat physically, skip the fasting during Ramadhan and marry more than four wives.

Most of the deviant followers have extreme attitude towards their sheikhs due to the following four reasons. Firstly, ignorance of the religion; secondly, influence of lust; thirdly, belief in false hadith; and finally influence from other ideologies and religions (Abdul Rauf, 1993).

Islam strictly prohibits Muslims from being extreme in terms of faith and practice. Having such attitude could threaten a person's faith and eventually lead to self destruction. In fact, this was repeatedly mentioned three times by the Prophet in a hadith meaning: "*Doom upon those of you who behave excessively*" (Muslim, 2000).

### **PERCEPTION OF SHEIKHS AS SOURCES FOR RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING**

This concept means that groups that deviate make their imams or sheikhs as their sources to understand religion. Religious matters of the faith and practice are understood based on their own views and interpretation. In this regard, the *al-Syi'at* believe that their sheikhs are sources of reference when it comes to religion. In fact, they have made the concept of an imam or *Al-Imaamat* as one of the four pillars of their religion. The four pillars are Tauhid or belief in one God, justice, prophetic qualities and *al-Imaamat* (Ibn Taymiyyat, 1986). According to a *Syi'at* advocate Muttahari (1991), the appointment of *al-Imaamat* had already been determined by the Prophet PBUH through divine revelation. They are also of the opinion that their imams provide guidance for them not only politically, but also religiously.

They believe that based on logic, the Prophet PBUH. did not have sufficient time to convey the teachings of Islam to mankind. Therefore, he had appointed Imam 'Aliy as his successor. The Prophet taught 'Aliy everything he knew, so when 'Aliy succeeded the Prophet PBUH, it means 'Aliy was also considered *ma'sum* as well (Muttahari, 1991).

Within the context of the Twelve Imams, they believe that the imams are appointed by Allah just like how Allah raised the prophets from justice, His knowledge and blessings. They believe that Allah has arranged a succession plan after the death of the Prophet PBUH in order to guide and lead mankind until the end of the world (al-Khatib, 1994). For the same reason, Allah has appointed the twelve imams whereby when the twelfth Imam appears, it signals the end of the world (al-Khatib, 1994). According to them, 'Aliy was the first Imam and the last one is Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan which better known as the invisible al-Mahdiy (al-Khatib, 1994).

According to Muttahari (1991), within the context of imam as a source of reference, the imams are believed to have received knowledge through an invisible and unknown way. He further explains that Imam 'Aliy received knowledge directly from the Prophet PBUH, while other imams got it from him. They believe that the knowledge received is sacred and inherited

from one imam to another. They are also of the opinion that the knowledge received is *ma'sum*, since the imams are gifted with the soul of confidence to deal directly with the unknown world where their souls roam in several high places.

Meanwhile, al-Kulayni (1998) clearly explains that Allah's argument will not stand in the face of the earth except with the Imam. In this regard, he narrated that and when he reached al-'Abd al-Salih, he said which means, "Verily, Allah's argument does not stand on mankind except with the Imam who explains it". He also narrated that Abi 'Abdillah said: "They (the imams) explain matters on halal and haram". With regard to the obligation of being obedient to their imams, Abi 'Abdillah said which means: "Allah has obliged us to be obedient to our imams, to know us, no ill for those ignorant towards us, those who know us have faith in Allah and those who do not are the unbelievers".

In short, there are numerous statements from al-Kulayni (1998) which explain the rationale of imams being the religious sources for the *al-Syi'at*. Their praises and worship for the imams are so high and extreme that it even exceeds the level accorded for the prophets and messengers. Thus, it is evident that the *al-Syi'at* is among those who make their imams as their sources of religion in matters regarding aqidat and syariat.

Apart from the *Syi'at*, deviant tariqat sects also display similar attitude and stance. It is crucial that the followers show absolute respect for their sheikhs. Those who disobey their orders or teachings are considered blasphemous and apostate. In terms of loyalty, a student has to sacrifice everything, body and soul, in this worldly life and life hereafter, vowing to submit himself to the Syeikh in order to obtain his blessing (Khalili, 1996). If the student disagrees or disobeys any of the Syeikh's orders or teachings, he can be considered an apostate and that can spell disaster to the student.

As religious sources, the sheikhs have the authority to decide on matters which are permissible and those which are forbidden. In fact, they also have the power to abolish certain syariat which are deemed unnecessary. Investigations conducted by the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM, 2001) revealed that there are more than twenty characteristics of deviant teachings. Among them are:

- a. Claiming to be the Prophet's representative.
- b. Having the authority to abolish Islamic law.
- c. Changing the meaning of verses from the Quran.
- d. Claiming that everything has its physical and spiritual aspects (JAKIM, 2001). The Islam Jamaah tariqat for example was once led by Hj Nurhasan al-Ubaidah Lubis.

As a self-proclaimed Amirul Mukminin, he claimed to be the source of religious law (JAKIM 2001). Similarly, in a case study mentioned by (Ibrahim, 1994) on the teachings of batiniyyah tariqat which claims to have the authority to omit the practice of solat, fasting, zakat,

pilgrimage and junub bath while at the same time, allowing alcoholic drinks and free sex among tariqat members.

From the explanation, it clearly shows that these sects make their leaders and sheikhs as their absolute sources of religious understanding. Those who disobey the sheikhs are considered apostate. For better understanding, the following explanation describes the main principles of this concept.

## THE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF THE CONCEPT

### a. The imams and sheikhs are *ma'sum* or infallible

*Al-'ismat*, one of the principles applied in this concept, simply means free from mistakes, forgetfulness, carelessness and sins. For the *Syi'at*, this is the basic principle which must be followed by all their imams. Muttahari (1991) stressed that the *Syi'at* believe that the imams are *ma'sum*, meaning they have never made any mistakes or sins. In this regard, they have positioned 'Aliy as well as other imams as being equal to the Prophet PBUH in terms of religious revelation. They are of the opinion that if the teachings revealed by a prophet is *ma'sum* in nature, the imams who are successors of the Prophet PBUH are supposed to be *ma'sum* as well. Therefore, they believe that the imams are individuals appointed by Allah with the quality of *ma'sum*, just like the prophets and the messengers.

One of the local *Syi'at* advocates, Syed (1993) stated that the *'ismat* attribute which belongs to the imams is the highest level of piety. What this means is that not only are they incapable of committing vice, but also incapable of even thinking about it. Among the evidence to show how infallible the imams are is based on what the Prophet said which means: "*I left for you two important things, the Books of Allah and my Sunnah*".

According to Muttahari (1991, the above hadith shows that the imams are *ma'sum* where the prophets had asked the ummah to refer to two sources-the Books of Allah and their descendants. One of the Books is of course the Qur'an which is free from any confusion, therefore other sources should also be free from errors as well. He further explained that it would be impossible for the prophets to ask their followers to obtain religious knowledge from someone who is likely to make mistakes.

The same principle applies to deviant sheikhs as well as leader of tariqat or path advocated by a particular school or order of Sufis. Although this is not clearly stated, further studies reveal that this principle has always been their stand. In tariqat teachings for example, a student is obliged to have good faith and full respect of their religious leaders. The students are strictly prohibited from condemning their religious leaders as such act could bring disaster to the students and the leaders. Regardless of the situation, a student must admit that the sheikh has his own advantage over his students. Therefore, the students must show total respect of their leaders to the extent that if the student is put in the fire, his body will not be burned. If it is

burned, it means the student's heart is not pure enough. Or worse, the student may even be considered as an apostate (Khalili, 1996).

When the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM, 2001) exposed the deviant teachings of Mufarridah tariqat, it was revealed that its leader Syekh Makmun bin Yahya believed that he was the Imam Mahdi to the Muslims, 'Isa for the Christians and the father for the atheist. In fact, he even claimed to have the mu'jizat (Ibram, 1994).

It is evident from this that the deviant groups hold on to the principle of *ma'sum*. Their imams and sheikhs are considered free from sins and mistakes, thus obeying them is a must.

**b. Extreme glorification of the imams and sheikhs (al-Ghuluw)**

Apart from the above principle, the imams and sheikhs are so highly praised and glorified that they go beyond what is prescribed by the *syara'*. The *Syi'at* holds on dearly to this principle. As an illustration, the al-Kulayniy explained that their imams know the contents of all the revealed holy books of Allah regardless of the language used. The imams also claim to know all the knowledge revealed in the al-Qur'an. Besides that, they claim to possess what the prophets and messengers once had. For example, Musa's walking stick, Adam's attire and Sulayman's ring (al-Kulayni, 1998).

Muttahari (1991) elaborated that the imams are leaders who continually exist and have perfect human attributes which complete with the universal soul. In fact, he mentioned that there is no difference between imams who have passed away and those who are still alive as they are accorded the same respect.

In more extreme situations, there are some among the *Syi'at* followers who perceive their imams as having the same status and position as god, as what happened to 'Abdullah Ibn Mu'awiyat Ibn Ja'far Zi al-Janahayn who was worshipped and regarded by his followers as god and prophet. As a result, they practiced his deviant teachings including defying the existence of the Last Day and allowing the consumption of carcass and alcoholic drinks (al-'Asy'ariy, n.d). The same applies to those who believe 'Aliy as god (al-Baghdadiy, n.d). By giving such treatment to their imams, it shows their total obedience to their imams on religious matters.

The very same principle is obviously applied by the deviant tariqat sects. Their saints are believed to have the same status as the prophets and messengers, and some even consider them to have divine attributes. In regard to this, Al-Wakil (1979) stated that *al-Qutb* or head of the saints is regarded as *insan kamil* or a person who has reached perfection. He further explained that *al-Qutb* has the power to determine the whereabouts and destinations of all creatures on earth, where all the *al-Qutb* saints are free to roam. According to him, there are also *al-Qutb al-Qadim* where the *al-Qutb* exist in both real and invisible worlds. In fact, the universe and all its creatures are created due to the *al-Qutb*.

In explaining the stand of al-Tijaniyyat tariqat regarding this, he stated that *al-Qutb* to them is considered as *al-Khilafat al-'Uzma* or great caliph (Al-Wakil, 1979). The caliph, who replaces god, is the ruler of the universe and his law as well as his teachings are the complete truth, with his soul absorbed in all orders of life.

He further added that the *al-Qutb* saints have specific assistants of a certain level of status. The first assistant is known as two imams-one to assist in the *al-Malak* world, while the other imam is to help with the *al-Malakut* world. The second level of assistants is known as *al-Awtad al-Arba'at*. If there are none of these assistants, the world will come to an end (Al-Wakil, 1979).

The third level assistants are called *al-Abdal*, *al-Badal* who are the souls of the gathered saints totalling forty altogether. The fourth level assistants are known as *al-Nujaba'*, who live in Egypt with a total of seventy of them. *Al-Nuqaba'* are the fifth assistants consisting of five hundred of them (Al-Wakil, 1979).

If the teachings of Arqam are studied in detail, this will also be their stand. 'Asyaari Muhammad once mentioned, as explained by Said (Abdul Halim, 1994) is a former of Arqam leader in the Malaysian state of Pahang that the saints are appointed by Allah which based on the terms that only Allah knows.

## CONCLUSION

The above discussion has clearly shown that the sheikhs or imams have very high position and are highly regarded by their followers. The sheikhs are not only fully respected, but also are considered to have divine attributes. Such stand obviously indicates that there are elements of major shirk in their beliefs, including excessive praising and worshipping of an individual to the extent of equating him to god. The fact is that this is a form of a major shirk. Groups that practice deviant teachings make their imams or sheikhs as their religious sources, and whatever they say must be fully obeyed. Therefore, anyone who objects to any part of the teaching is considered to be an unbeliever.

## CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Akila Bin Mamat (MA), Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Islamic Contemporary Studies (FICS),  
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Kampus Gong Badak, 21300 Kuala Nerus, Terengganu.  
Tel: 019-9192475 / 09-6688134, Faks: +609-6669531, E-mail: akila@unisza.edu.my

## REFERENCES

- Al-'Asy'ariy, A. A. -H. 'A. I. I. (n.d). *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin wa Ikhtilaf al-Musallin*. Reedited by Halmut Ditar. Beirut: Dar Ihy'a' al-Turath al-Islamiy.
- Ibrahim, A. F. H. (1994). *Ajaran sesat*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Said, A. G. (1994). *Tujuh wali Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Hikmah.

- Abdul Halim El-Muhammadiyah. (1994). *Penyelewengan al-Arqaam dari aqidah Quran dan sunnah*. Kuala Lumpur: ABIM.
- Abdul Rauf, M. O. (1993). *Mahabbah al-Rasul*. Riyad: Alwan lil al-Tiba'ah.
- Al-Baghawiy, A. M. A. -H. I. M. (1989). *Tafsir al-Baghawiy*. Riyad: Dar al-Tayyibah.
- Al-Baghdadiy, 'A. A. -Q. I. T. I. M. A. -B. (n.d). *Al-Farq bain al-Firaq*. Reedited by Muhammad Muhyiddin 'Abd al-Ham'id. Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifat.
- Al-Bukhriy, Muhammad Ibn Isma'il. (1997). *Sahih al-Bukhariy*. Mesir: Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabiyy.
- Al-Khatib, M. (1994). *Al-Khutut al-'Aridat* (Terjemahan). Kuala Lumpur: Added Enterprise.
- Al-Kulayniy, M. Y. (1998). *Usul al-K'afiy*. Reedited by Muhammad Ja'far Syam al-Din. Beirut: Dar al-Ta'aruf.
- Al-Wakil, 'A. A. -R. (1979). *Hazihi Hiya al-Sufiyyat*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyat.
- Ibn Hajar al-'Asq'alaniy, Ahmad Ibn 'Aliy. (1986). *Fath al-Bariy bi Syarh Sahih al-Bukhariy*. Kaheerah: Dar al-Diy'an Li al-Turath.
- Ibn Taymiyyat, Ab'u al-'Abbas Taqiy al-Din Ahmad Ibn 'Abd al-Halim. (1986). *Minhaj al-Sunnat al-Nabawiyyat*. Reedited by Muhammad Rasyad Salim. T.tp: Dar al-Kitab al-Islamiyy.
- JAKIM. (2001). *Mengenal ajaran sesat di Malaysia*.
- Khalili, A. B. (1996). *Ajaran tarikat*. Selangor: Pustaka Ilmi.
- Muslim, I. A. -H. (2000). *Sahih Muslim*. Riyad: Dar al-Salam.
- Muttahari, M. (1991). *Imamah dan khilafah*. Jakarta: Penerbit Firdaus.
- Syed, J. A. -S. (1993). *Sunnah Syiah dalam perpaduan Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Dar Ahlul Bait.