The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier's Definition of the \textit{shaykh al-tarbiya} and the \textit{shaykh al-ta'\l\im} \\

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In response to the Prophet's command to seek knowledge, it was commonplace during the period prior to the institutionalization of religious sciences for students to travel from one teacher to another teacher even over great distances.\textsuperscript{1} Those who called themselves Sufis were no exception in their own search for knowledge, and the teaching relationships among them paralleled the model of traditional study common to the time. In fact, many Sufis traveled, just as the Hadith compilers did, in search of the sayings of different shaykhhs in addition to seeking direction on the spiritual path. Students were not bound to receive their spiritual direction under a single shaykh as would be common in succeeding centuries. Typically, Sufis of this era took their spiritual direction from several shaykhhs, each one contributing to their direction in a particular way. Ultimately, Sufism followed the general trend in all the religious sciences and became more formal and hierarchically institutionalized, a trend that culminated in the systematization of Sufi orders.\textsuperscript{2} 

However, one common opinion among Islamicists holds that during this early period, it was unusual for students to receive spiritual direction from the various shaykhhs with whom they studied. Rather, the early shaykhhs have been understood to be lecturers of Sufi wisdom, teachers rather than guides on the spiritual path. As teachers they would impart their wisdom to their students in lectures, but would not be personally involved or direct their students
concerning the students’ own spiritual development. As lecturers, shaykhs would not pay close attention to their students’ actions or states or usually require them to undertake practices of spiritual struggle. Typically, students would use their learning to guide themselves independently. It was only after the institutionalization of Sufism that students began to attach themselves to a single shaykh, and receive personal spiritual direction from their shaykh.

In his article “Ḫurāsān und das Ende der klassichen Ṣūfīk,” Fritz Meier defended the above opinion. I contend this position is at odds with the evidence found in the sources of the early period. This paper offers a brief critique of Meier’s teaching-direction thesis and some preliminary remarks on the nature of the relationships between shaykhs and their companions in early Sufism, as well as observations concerning the teaching environment, from the early Sufi sources available to us.³

**Meier’s Argument and the Critique**

Meier documents the transition from early Sufism in the 3rd/9th century to the beginnings of institutionalized Sufism in the 5th/11th century.⁴ His account of the institutionalization of Sufism is not under dispute here. Rather, I question his characterization of the early shaykhs as lecturers rather than directors on the spiritual path. The problem with Meier’s characterization is two-fold. First, he takes the relative lack of explicit writing about spiritual direction to indicate a lack of spiritual direction itself. Second, he defines *tarbiya* according to one dominant strain in its late and developed form and as it was understood by some later Sufis. In particular, Meier cites the opinion of the 8th/14th century Sufi Ibn ‘Abbād al-Rundi (d. 792/1390), who called the early shaykh the *shaykh al-ta‘lim* or the teaching shaykh, and the later shaykh the *shaykh al-tarbiya* or the shaykh of spiritual direction.⁵ Meier then looks back at early Sufism to find examples of these teaching and directing shaykhs. Thus, through an anachronism, he works from the assumption that only the more explicitly described and autocratic forms of spiritual direction constitute *tarbiya*. Meier’s approach in this article is not unusual in the study of early Islamic education. Richard W. Bulliet writes,

> In writing the history of Islamic education, scholars have almost invariably looked backward from this later period and searched for its roots in earlier times. They have not often recognized that things were fundamentally different before the proliferation of new educational institutions late in the eleventh century. Nor have they appreciated that, in some ways, the impact of education on society was stronger in that earlier period ...⁶

In the 5th/11th century, teaching relationships between shaykhs and their students began to be more rigid and formalized. Meier writes that the shaykh
took on an autocratic position in which he directed nearly every aspect of his students' lives. Students were rarely permitted to move on and study with another shaykh and were generally required to submit to the shaykh's instruction. Meier gives a succinct example of this transition. In the 3rd/9th century, Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tustari (d. 283/896) said that before God one must be like a corpse in the hands of the washer of the dead; by the 6th/12th century, the washer was understood to be the shaykh. Meier finds the main roots of this type of teaching relationship in Khurāsān beginning with Abū Ḥafs ‘Amr b. Salam al-Naysābūrī (d. 270/883–4 or 267/880–1), whose instruction with his students focused on the rules of proper conduct (adab). For Meier, this general method of instruction in which the shaykh requires his students to observe an exacting code of conduct and practice intense self-scrutiny, developed through successive shaykhs in Naysābūr into the later more autocratic teaching relationship between Sufis and their shaykhs.

Meier gives numerous citations to support the existence of tarbiya relationships in early Sufism. But the relative lack of reports detailing personal spiritual direction, as compared with later Sufism, leads him to argue that spiritual direction was not considered essential to the teaching relationship in Sufism at that time. Meier rightly points out that in the earliest period, no distinction was made between the shaykh al-ta'lim and the shaykh al-tarbiya. But he finds this to be evidence of a lack of emphasis on the spiritual direction of students; it may instead indicate the opposite. It is more likely that teaching and spiritual direction were so intertwined that the need for distinguishing the roles was not considered. It is only later, when the role of the shaykh began to be an institutionalized position, that distinctions came to be needed and relationships specified. In the same vein, the relative lack of early reports explicitly discussing teaching relationships, as compared with later Sufism, does not indicate the absence of these relationships. Instead, it may indicate what was and was not considered worth transmitting in writing at that time. It is the mark of the maturity of a field of knowledge that pedagogy itself comes to be an object of study.

In one of Meier's central examples, he writes that Abū ‘Uthmān al-Ḥirī (d. 298/911), Abū Ḥafs' companion, was reproached for being fixated on his students' actions. Meier seems to take this criticism to refer to Ḥirī's direction of his companions, and so sees it as evidence of a separation between teaching and spiritual direction. This is not the case. Meier uses as one example a story in which the 3rd/10th century Sufi Abū Bakr al-Wāṣīṭī (d. ca. 320/932) criticizes Abū ‘Uthmān for teaching a doctrine of intense self-scrutiny that amounted to nothing more than dualism. As his sayings show, Wāṣīṭī's main concern was that one's attention should be on God alone and not on oneself, one's works,
or anything else for that matter. Meier notes that Wāṣiṭi criticizes Hiri for instructing his companions to look at themselves and not at God. But because Meier associates Sufi instruction focused on adab with tarbiya, he understands Wāṣiṭi’s criticism as criticism of tarbiya itself. On the contrary, Wāṣiṭi’s criticism is not of Abū ’Uthmān’s involvement in his companions’ lives, but rather of the content of that involvement. The surviving reports of Wāṣiṭi’s relationships with his own companions demonstrate that he closely directed their spiritual lives, requiring them to look away from their own states and works toward God instead.

Teaching in Early Sufism and the Ahl al-Ḥadīth

I understand that the teaching relationship in Sufism paralleled the model of traditional study common to the time. Due to the broad influence of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, scholars in every area were deeply concerned about establishing an authoritative continuity between the Prophet’s community and their own transmission of knowledge that included using the Prophet as their pedagogical model. George Makdisi writes that early scholars consciously modeled themselves on the Prophet and his companions. He writes, “Just as the Prophet was the leader with followers, each school consisted of a leader, imam, with followers, šāḥib, pl. ašḥāb.” Muḥammad Qasim Zaman argues that the adherence to the Sunnah displayed by scholars served to convey the authority of continuity reaching back to the Prophet’s community. These scholars believed that they alone represented and guaranteed this continuity. They were transmitters of what they understood to be the Sunnah in both the subjects taught and the manner in which they were taught.

In Knowledge Triumphant, Franz Rosenthal has shown the centrality of knowledge and its transmission in medieval Islamic civilization. In one section, Rosenthal summarizes the contents of the four major Ḥadīth collections possessing chapters on knowledge. These chapters specifically describe how Muḥammad taught his community. The continued transmission and ultimate collection of these reports demonstrate the importance of the Prophet as the pedagogical model for the early Islamic community. These chapters in the Ḥadīth collections can be seen as handbooks of prophetic pedagogy, while the rest of the Ḥadīth collections constitute the prophetic knowledge to be transmitted.

The early period was also marked by a great diversity of schools of thought. Although only four schools of law survive to this day in Sunni Islam, there were in the early period a myriad of schools centered around particular scholars. Students sought out and were companions of individual Ḥadīth scholars, and traveled broadly for the sake of study. Traveling from teacher to teacher in search of knowledge was typical in all areas of early Islamic
education for those serious in their study. Even less committed students might travel to another city with which their town had a relationship.\textsuperscript{18}

It was a time of numerous, diverse, small communities of scholars in alliance with the larger Ahl al-Hadith movement. While we may speak of the Ahl al-Hadith and their goals and doctrines, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of thought and practice among those who allied themselves under this common name. Those who associated themselves with this name disagreed on some matters as often as they agreed on others, and their disagreements could be quite contentious. At heart, it may be said that they were allies under the agreement that the Qur’an and the Sunnah were the primary, if not the only, appropriate sources of religious knowledge.

Some argue that the Ahl al-Hadith merely tolerated the Sufis, giving the impression that the Sufis were usually at odds with them.\textsuperscript{19} This assertion seems imbalanced since so many Sufis were also scholars aligned with the Ahl al-Hadith themselves and taught Sufi and non-Sufi students alike in the sciences of Hadith and jurisprudence. Additionally, those Sufis who were not scholars of Hadith or jurisprudence were not isolated from the societal and intellectual influence of the widespread and broadly populist Ahl al-Hadith movement. Many Sufis who were not specialists in Hadith or jurisprudence were nevertheless learned in some degree in the religious sciences. In a recent article, Omid Safi argues that because of the tendency in the West to understand mysticism itself as entirely esoteric, Western scholars have mistakenly perceived Sufis as mystics disengaged from the world around them, rather than as integral members of the larger Islamic community.\textsuperscript{20} Marshall G. Hodgson was an exception. He remarks that Sufism in this period was closely associated with the Ahl al-Hadith and the source texts bear him out.\textsuperscript{21}

For example, Abū `Uthmān al-Ḥirī was known as a Ḥadīth scholar who did not stop searching out and recording Ḥadīth until the end of his life. It is reported that he heard extracts of Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ from Ja’far b. Ḥamdān.\textsuperscript{22} Sulamī reports that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥāḍir al-Balkhī (d. 319/931) was directly associated with the beliefs of the Ahl al-Ḥadith and came under attack because of it.\textsuperscript{23} Ruwaym b. Aḥmad al-Baghḍādī (d. 303/915) was a practicing jurist in the madhhab of Dāwūd al-Iṣbahānī, a Qurān reciter on the recitation of Idrīs b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ḥaddād, a scholar in interpreting the Qurān, and among the most revered Sufi shaykhs of Baghdād.\textsuperscript{24} Likewise, Junayd was a practicing jurist who studied under two well-known scholars aligned with the Ahl al-Ḥadith: Abū `Ubayd and Abū Thawr.\textsuperscript{25} Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Sayyārī (d. 342/953–4) was the Sufi shaykh, jurist, and Ḥadīth scholar of Marw. Sulamī reports that everyone among the Ahl al-Sunnah of his area was his companion.\textsuperscript{26} It is reported that Ahmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) consulted with Bishr al-Ḥāfi (d. 227/842) and his sisters on matters of Sufism as well as with

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other Sufis. He said about Bishr's sisters Mudgha and Zubda, "Anyone who would like to know how far one is from the scrupulous should visit the sisters of Bishr al-Ḥāfī. He should listen to their counsel and observe their path."26

There are also those Sufis who entered the path of Sufism after studying Ḥadيث science and jurisprudence and finding those sciences lacking in knowledge of God. In these cases, it is not a matter of rejection of the principles of the Ahl al-Ḥadith, but rather an indication of what these Sufis understood to be the proper and limited function of the outward sciences in guiding the lives of Muslims and producing knowledge of God. Ahmad b. Abīl Ḥawārī is a good example of this sort of Sufi. It is reported that he studied the outward sciences for 30 years before throwing his books into the river. But he did not disavow the outward sciences, rather, he found that he had gone beyond what they had to offer.29 Abū Nu'aym gives more than twenty Ḥadīth transmitted by him. A saying by Wāṣīṭī sums up the attitude toward the degrees of knowledge obtained from the scholars in his commentary on a Ḥadīth [in italics]:

*Question the scholars* with regard to what is lawful and unlawful. *Befriend the Wise* whowayfare by means [of wisdom] on the path of truthfulness and clarity. *Sit with the Great ones* who speak of God, allude to His lordship, and perceive by the light of His nearness.30

Ahmad b. Ḥanbal is also known to have criticized some of the early Sufi-scholars, such as al-Ḥadīth al-Muḥāṣibī (d. 243/857). But his criticisms do not indicate that he considered them outside the pale of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth. Indeed, Ibn Ḥanbal criticized Muḥāṣibī for writing a thorough exposition of Mu'tazilite doctrine in a book refuting their ideas, but was reported to be deeply moved by his discourse on Sufi matters.31 However Ibn Ḥanbal felt about his methods, Muḥāṣibī was to be seen later as an important source for what would eventually be the accepted use of reason as a supplemental source of knowledge in addition to the Qur'ān and Sunnah among the later Ahl al-Ḥadīth.32 Contentious debate and criticism were not unusual in that large and diverse alliance of Muslims, and the existence of debate does not indicate that a particular person or group was not seen as an ally in a larger sense. There were occasions where some members of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth brought up charges of heresy against some Sufis. But as Gerhard Böwering and Carl Ernst have shown, these charges were brought about by personal religious conviction and political motivations.33 There was no centralized authority representing the Ahl al-Ḥadīth that brought forth the accusations against them, even when connections within the caliphate were used to force the charges before the courts or when other connections were used to have accusations quelled. It
may seem obvious, but contentious debate, dislike, and personal and political vendettas are not unusual in any group which otherwise sees itself as unified toward a common goal.

If one is to define the Ahl al-Ḥadith in the broadest sense as those who agree that the Qurʾān and the Sunnah are the criteria for all knowledge, then the reported sayings demonstrate that most of the Sufis perceived their paths to be in agreement with this principle.

Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 234/849 or 261/875) said, ‘The Sunnah is abandoning this world, and religious obligation is companionship with the Patron, because all of the Sunnah points to abandoning this world, and all of the Book points to companionship with the Patron. Whoever learns the Sunnah and the Book will become complete.’

Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830) said, “Whenever one of the subtleties of the Tribe [i.e., the Sufis] falls into my heart for a few days, I do not yield to it unless it is with two just witnesses, the Book and the Sunnah.” Abū Ḥafṣ al-Naysābūrī said, “Whoever does not weigh his states in every moment by the Book and the Sunnah and does not suspect his incoming thoughts, then he will not be counted in the book of men (diwān al-rijāl).” Sahl al-Tustarī is reported to have said, “Our principles (uṣūl) are seven things: holding fast to the Book, emulating the Messenger of God through the Sunnah, eating what is permissible, desisting from doing harm, avoiding misdeeds, repentance, and discharging what is due [to God and others].” Abū Nuʿaym reports that two of Junayd’s students heard Junayd say repeatedly that his teachings do not go beyond the Qurʾān and the Sunnah of the Prophet. “We heard Junayd say repeatedly, ‘Our knowledge is delimited by the Book and the Sunnah.’ So whoever does not memorize the Qurʾān, nor write down the Ḥadith, nor study jurisprudence does not emulate him.”

The Sufis typically rely on the Qurʾān and Ḥadith for proof-texts in their sayings. Moreover, their teachings often involved commenting on the Qurʾān and transmitting and commenting on Ḥadith. Sulami’s compendium of Sufi glosses on the Qurʾān, the Haqāʾiq al-tafsir, attests to the practice of discussing the meanings of the Book among early Sufis. The selected transmissions in Sulami’s Tabaqāt and Abū Nuʿaym’s Hilya, as well as the sayings quoted throughout all the sources show it was not at all unusual for Sufis to transmit Ḥadith and comment on their meaning. Moreover, the surviving sayings often show agreement with the general theological positions of the Ahl al-Ḥadith against the Muʿtazilites and in some cases criticize them explicitly. For example, Abū ʿAlī b. al-Kātib (d. ca. 340/952) remarks on the excesses of the Muʿtazilites in asserting God’s incomparability, “The Muʿtazilites assert God’s incomparability with respect to rational understanding and they go too far; the
Sufis assert God's incomparability with respect to [transmitted] learning, and they hit the mark.  

The early Sufi manuals and treatises were written in part to answer the concerns of the Muslim community about the practices and doctrines of the Sufis. These texts present the goals of Sufism and the goals of the Qur'ān and Sunnah to be one and the same. Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj's (d. 378/988) treatise Kitāb al-lumā' uses ample quotations of the sayings, and even the letters, of the Sufis, along with proof-texts from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth to prove that Sufism is not in conflict with the Sunnah. Abū Bakr Muḥammad Kalâbâdhî's (d. 388/998) treatise and manual the Kitāb al-ta'rîf summarizes the Sufi position on various matters of doctrine and practice using quotes from their sayings as well as proof-texts from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. The book defends Sufism against misunderstandings in the larger community of Muslims and also acts as a guide to those who are seeking the path. The Qūt al-qulūb of Abū Ṭalîb al-Makkî (d. 386/996) is a Sufi manual of Islamic practice and good character heavily supported by proof-texts from the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and traditions of the Companions and Followers. The manual served as a model for the famous Iḥyāʾ 'ulūm al-dīn of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzâlî (d. 504/1111).

Although these books are clearly written to defend Sufism, it is difficult to argue from the evidence of available sources that they were falsely representing the sayings of Sufis to bring them into agreement with the tenets of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth. In particular, I have found Sarrāj to accurately summarize the majority positions found in the sayings available to us in early sources. The broad affiliations of the Sufis with the Ahl al-Ḥadīth and the content of their sayings attest to their alliance with this movement and its goals. Nevertheless, while the authors of Sufi treatises and manuals were elucidating what seems to be the majority position of Sufi practices and doctrines to the larger community, they were also drawing the boundaries of what they understood to be normative Sufism. The preserved sayings constituting the record of early Sufism were remembered and transmitted because they fit within these self-defined boundaries. The boundaries they drew are quite broad and inclusive, but still serve to expurgate practices and ideas they understood to be outside what is permitted by the Qur'ān and Sunnah. It should also be noted that despite the fact that most Sufis considered themselves to be in agreement with the larger community of Muslims among the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, as mentioned above, their ideas and practices remained inexplicable to some.

If there is a distinction to be drawn between the Sufis and the broader Ahl al-Ḥadīth movement, the Sufi shaykhs saw themselves as transmitters of what they understood to be the Prophet's inward Sunnah to his community, whereas jurists and Ḥadīth scholars, qua jurists and Ḥadīth scholars, were concerned with the outward Sunnah. Through the sayings of the Sufis and his own
summation, Sarrāj shows that Sufis felt that the jurists and Ḥadīth scholars have a deep understanding of the outward sense of the Prophet's conduct and character traits, but it is the Sufis who are scholars of the science of the inner realities of the prophetic example.⁴⁵

Sarrāj also shows that Sufis saw their path as a science among the sciences of Islam, yet as a science that encompasses all the others and uses them as resources for knowledge.⁴⁶ Similar positions are found throughout the texts and reported sayings. Makkī divides scholars into those of the next world and those of this world. Sahl al-Tustarī spoke of the scholars by means of God, scholars belonging to God, and scholars by means of God's ruling.⁴⁷

Sufism is also on occasion called a school (madhhab) in the sayings and texts.⁴⁸ This implies that these Sufis thought of Sufism as a school of interpretation concerning right action and belief that finds its sources in the Qur'ān and Sunnah, like the varied schools of jurisprudence common at that time. In an interesting saying, Abu al-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/907–8) denies that Sufism is a science, suggesting that it was not unusual for others to perceive Sufism as such. Like most other Sufis, he describes Sufism as having to do with character traits. Perhaps he felt that calling Sufism a science, even a science of character traits, equates it too easily with the more mundane and limited study of jurisprudence and Ḥadīth.⁴⁹

It is probable that, like other scholars of Islamic sciences, early Sufis saw their small, diverse teaching communities as variegated reflections of the Prophet's community. This was most likely simply the proper model for the teaching relationship during this period, whether or not a particular Sufi defined himself as part of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth movement. Like the other scholars and their students, the shaykh was a representative of the Prophet and his students represented his companions.

It is not unusual in later Sufism for shaykhs to claim to be the ‘ulamā' mentioned in the non-canonical Ḥadīth, "The ‘ulamā’ are the inheritors of the prophets." Sarrāj is already reading it this way by the mid-fourth century. But when he refers to this Ḥadīth in the Kitāb al-luma', he includes Sufis alongside Ḥadīth scholars and jurists as the inheritors of the prophets.⁵⁰ In imitation of the Prophet, the shaykh would teach through discussion, example, instruction, and daily interaction in the lives of his companions. The shaykh, like the Prophet, was indistinguishably both a teacher and a guide. It is understandable how in this context there would be no distinction made between ta'lim and tarbiya. Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990) specifically mentions that the shaykh should be like the Prophet who taught by being aware of the spiritual states of his companions according to their specific needs.⁵¹

Common usage in the texts shows that the follower of a shaykh was called a "companion" (ṣāhib) during this period, in contrast to the terms ‘disciple’ or
‘devotee’ (murīd). I argue that the understanding of murīd among scholars of Islamic studies as the general term for the committed follower of a shaykh does not accord with the usage during the early period.52

In pre-institutionalized Sufism, the term ‘companion’ was used in three senses to indicate a relationship of direction between two people: direction between a shaykh and his subordinate, between equals, and between all those on the path. This sense of direction is reflected in the related use of the word companion in phrases such as “companion of the heart” (ṣāhib al-qalb), or “companion of the appetite” (ṣāhib al-shahwā). Ṣāhib in this context could also be read as ‘possessor’ of the heart or appetite. Such a person would be dominated by the influence of his heart or appetites. Hence, the person could be said to be ‘directed’ by it. Ṣarrāj may be summarizing the common usage when he uses examples of all three senses of the word Ṣāhib in his chapter entitled “Mentioning their Proper Conduct in Companionship.”53

‘Companion’ was most often used to designate anyone who had committed himself to a relationship of direction with a shaykh or shaykhs no matter the stage on the path.54 Just as the companions of the Prophet are always known as such, one might become a shaykh oneself and still be regarded as the companion of one’s own shaykh. Sulami and Abū Nu‘aym consistently cite a Sufi’s attachments of direction by describing him as a companion of a shaykh or shaykhs.55 Their use of the term to describe a Sufi’s relationship of direction with a shaykh is borne out by the sayings preserved in the early texts. Sufis often say, “I became the companion of so and so” or describe a person as “a companion of so and so” to indicate a relationship of direction under a particular shaykh. Referring to Dāwūd al-Balkhi, who initiated him in the invocation (dhibkr) of the name Allāh, Ibrāhīm b. Adhām said, “I became the companion of a man …”56 Muhallab b. Aḥmad al-Miṣrī said of his shaykh Abū Bakr al-Abhari, “Of the companionship of all the shaykhs I have met, none benefited me like the companionship of Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṣāhir al-Abhari.”57 Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Maghribi said of his shaykh ‘Alī b. Ruzayn, “I have a shaykh, [when] I became his companion …”58 Abū ‘Alī al-Ribāṭī said when he became the companion of ‘Abd Allāh al-Marwāzī, he taught him that true companionship is through selfless service.59

Less often it referred to a companionship of direction among equals, each teaching the other what they have to offer. Abū Yazid al-Biṣāmī reports that he became the companion of Abū ‘Alī al-Sindī and they guided one another. “I became the companion of Abū ‘Alī al-Sindī and instructed him in the obligations he undertook, and he taught me tawbid and the realities of turning toward God.”60

Likewise, the term occasionally refers to companionship among Sufis in general. As I discuss below, keeping company with other Sufis was considered
an important element of direction on the path. Kharrāz said, “I was a companion to the Sufis for fifty years and there never occurred any acts of opposition between us.”61

The usual translations of murīd as “disciple” or “devotee” — implying in English a singular attachment to a shaykh — do not reflect the common usage in the early texts wherein the term refers to an aspirant of the path itself but not a shaykh. It most often denotes a person who aspires to undertake the spiritual path, who is in an early or intermediate stage of the path itself, or on the path in general.62 Hence, I will translate murīd as “aspirant.”

Murīd may sometimes refer to someone who has not yet found a shaykh, yet aspires to the path. The following sayings state that without a teacher, one cannot be a true murīd. In a chapter concerning what is fundamental for the aspirant, Makkī advises aspirants that they must have seven traits: (1) truthfulness in aspiration; (2) seeking the motivations of one’s obedience; (3) experiential knowledge of the state of one’s soul; (4) sitting with a knower of God; (5) repentance; (6) eating what is permissible; and (7) having righteous colleagues.63 Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Sijzi likewise advises, “The most beneficial thing for the aspirants is companionship of the righteous …”64

In other cases, ‘aspirant’ describes someone on an early or intermediate stage of the path. Dhu'l Nūn uses the term to address a group of people who have probably just begun the early stage of the path since they have taken the step of coming to listen to his direction. He says, “O assembled aspirants! Whoever among you aspires to the path, then let him meet the scholars with ignorance, the abstainers with longing, and the folk of direct knowledge with silence.”65 In his chapter on the technical terms of the Sufis, Sarrāj describes three stages of the path, the second of which is the aspirant.

The beginner (al-mubtadī”) is the one who begins with a strong resolve in wayfaring on the paths of those who dedicate themselves to God, and he takes on its burden of the required proper conduct (adāb). He is ready for proper conduct through serving and receiving from the one who knows the state in which he begins and watches over him from beginning to end.

The aspirant (al-murīd) is the one who has soundly accomplished the beginning stage, and has entered by name into the group of those who dedicate themselves to God. The hearts of those who are truthful bear witness to the soundness of his aspiration; he is no longer designated by means of a state, nor a station, because he is on the journey with his aspiration.

The one aspired for (al-murād) is the knower for whom no aspiration remains. He has arrived at the ends, and traversed the states, the stations, the goals, and the aspirations. So he is the one aspired for,
through Whom what is aspired is aspired, and he does not aspire for anything other than what He aspires for him.65

The Teaching Relationship and Direction in Early Sufism

The teaching relationship in early Sufism can be understood in the broadest sense to be the transmission of a shaykh’s outward and inward knowledge of God in order to bring about his companion’s own realization (tahqiq) of knowledge of God. The transmission involved guiding his companion’s spiritual life through commands, suggestions, and advice concerning spiritual discipline, explanations of what is experienced on the path, the assigning of litanies, disclosures of the inward meanings of the Qur’ân and Hadith, as well as the clarification and explanation of more mundane matters in all areas — all of which might to a lesser or greater degree apply to an infrequent visitor of a shaykh.

Texts show that aspirants were typically close companions of more than one shaykh. But it was not unheard of for a single meeting with a shaykh to inspire a profound transformation of the soul. The degree to which non-aspirants were included among a shaykh’s companions in his circle would vary from shaykh to shaykh according to his level of circumspection. There could be both public assemblies and more private gatherings held by the same shaykh. Women were among the companions of some shaykhs and, in some cases, became teachers themselves of both female and male students.67 Shaykhs also taught and advised through the composition of books and letters on spiritual matters. In some cases, a student went on to be a teacher himself.

The Mobility of the Early Sufis in Seeking Direction

In contrast to the relative stability and singular relationships with shaykhs in institutionalized Sufism, in early Sufism, greater mobility and numerous attachments to various shaykhs were common. Less often, a Sufi was a companion of one shaykh alone. I am treating the numbers and types of relationships between shaykhs and their companions documented in Sulami’s Ṭabaqāt as representative of the early period for the sake of this preliminary analysis. For each Sufi, Sulami gives the names of the companions’ shaykh or shaykhs and sometimes adds “and others” to that list. Out of 105 entries in Sulami’s Ṭabaqāt, the most common number of shaykhs per companion mentioned is two (16), two or more (5), three (10), and three or more (4) [a total of 35].68 The highest number of shaykhs belongs to one companion who had more than eight. Twenty-two of the one hundred and four companions are reported to have only one shaykh. But it is important to remember that
Sulami’s lists of shaykhs for each Sufi are not exhaustive; hence, the number of those companions with only one shaykh is actually less than what is reported here. Four companions who may have had only one shaykh and seven of those who had more than one are noted to have had special relationships with one of their shaykhs. Sulami indicates these special relationships with the phrases: “took the path from” (akbadha ḍanbu al-tariqa) in four instances “belonged to” (intama ilā), and in one case each “stuck to him” (yulāzimubu) and “was recognized as being his companion” (‘urifa bi-ṣubhatibī).

Many of the early Sufis acquired numerous attachments to the shaykhs during their travels. Sarrāj and Kalabâdî mention that the early Sufis were well known for leaving behind the safety of their homes and families in search of knowledge.69 Abû Bakr al-Shibli (d. 334/946) said that traveling was one of the marks of becoming an aspirant.70 A person might travel in search of the answer to a specific question and not stop until finding someone who could answer it satisfactorily. This question might act as the catalyst for the person to undertake the path of Sufism and eventually bring him under the direction of a particular shaykh. Sahl al-Tustari left his home under the burden of such a question. He traveled to Basrâ then to the ribāt at ‘Abbâdân where he met the shaykh Abû Ḥabîb Ḥamza al-‘Abbâdâni who resolved his question and continued to teach him.71 It is not unusual to hear that a particular Sufi traveled for decades of his life. Abû ‘Abd Allâh al-Nâṣîbi is said to have traveled for thirty years.72 Abû al-Hasan ‘Ali b. Bundâr al-Ṣayrâfi (d. 359/970) is reported to have met seventeen famous shaykhs in his extensive travels stretching from Khurâsân to Egypt.73

Traveling did not necessarily mean that the Sufi was forever wandering the roads. Traveling meant trips of varying lengths taken from one location either alone or with one’s comrades on the path to visit with different shaykhs.74 In some cases, travel might mean undertaking a trip of great distance. The following statements document both the distances covered by some Sufis and underscore the importance attached to seeking out direction wherever it might be found. Abû Sa‘id al-Kharrâz (d. 279/892) said that he traveled from Egypt to Basrâ to sit with a shaykh whose excellence had been mentioned to him.75 Abû Sulaymân al-Dârânî (d. 215/830) said that he would travel one hundred farsaks by foot if necessary if he knew of a man who could benefit him by one word in the science of direct knowledge (ma’rifâ).76

**Exchanges of Direction**

Despite the companions’ great mobility between different shaykhs, the shaykhs personally directed their companions on the path.77 There are numerous cases of unambiguously personal statements of direction between
shaykh and companions. In one case, one of Tustari's students discusses his experience of seeing God every night with his own eyes. Tustari corrects him tenderly, calling him ḥabibi. The letters between shaykh and their companions are often intimate and document personal relationships. One of Dhu'il Nūn's companions was ill and he wrote asking Dhu'il Nūn to make supplication for him.

Dhu'il Nūn replied, "Oh my brother, you have asked me to supplicate to God for your sake so that He might remove a blessing from you. Know, my brother that the folk of clarity, and the companions of spiritual resolve and heartache are intimate with illness and defect because these things are attained as healing in their life. The one who does not count the trial as a blessing is not among the wise. When someone is not secure from those who pity his soul, he will be secure from the folk who think ill of his affair. My brother let there be with you shame holding you back from complaint before God."  

Sources do not support Meier's assertion that relationships between shaykh and their companions tended to be impersonal. Although, as seen in Sulami's notation of those who had special relationships with particular shaykh, those personal relationships could be of varying intensity. Sarrāj even has a chapter entitled, "Chapter concerning the kindness (rifq) of the shaykh towards their companions and their sympathy (atf) with them."  

There were some who came simply to discourse with a shaykh without the intention of receiving direction from him. Abū Muhammad al-Jurayrī (d. 311/923) corrects this attitude when he says that the purpose of sitting with a shaykh is to have him advise one on the path. He said, "Sitting for the sake of discussion closes the door of benefit, sitting for the sake of sincere counsel opens its door."  

Brief relationships between shaykh and companions could also be relationships of direction. A single meeting with a shaykh could be transformative. Sulami may be indicating such encounters when he reports in fourteen cases that someone met with a shaykh, in five cases that someone saw a shaykh or shaykh, or, in one case, that someone discussed certain issues with a shaykh. It was common, and remains so in the Islamic world, to ask for advice while in the presence of a shaykh. The goal is to take advantage of the shaykh's insight and wisdom and perhaps be directed by him even though it might only be a brief exchange. There are also stories told in which someone unknown directs a person during a brief exchange, such as when an unknown man contentiously taught Shibli about patience.

A man stopped in front of Shibli and asked him, 'Which patience is most severe for those who are patient?'
Shibli replied, ‘Patience in God.’
The man said, ‘No.’
Shibli said, ‘Patience for God’s sake.’
The man said ‘No.’
He said, ‘Patience with God.’
The man said, ‘No.’
Shibli became angry and he said, ‘Woe to you! So which is it?’
He replied, ‘Patience apart from God.’ Shibli cried out such a
scream that his spirit was nearly destroyed.82

Any of the shaykhs with whom one associated might contribute to one’s
spiritual growth in a particular way. ‘Ā’isha al-Dinawari said that her shaykh
Ibrāhīm b. Shaybān said to her at his deathbed, “Take blessings from all that
the Sufi shaykhs give you.”83 Although Hujwīrī (d. 469/1077) was writing
during the time that institutionalized Sufism was beginning to take hold, his
opinion sometimes reflects the attitudes of earlier Sufism. He writes that when
the great shaykh of Naysābūr, Abū ‘Uthmān Sa’id al-Ḥirī (d. 298/911), was still
a student, he passed through three stations, each specific to the three shaykhs
with whom he associated. Hujwīrī remarks, “It is allowable for a disciple to
associate with five or six or more directors and to have a different station
revealed to him by each one of them ...”84

But what about the bulk of sayings that seem on the surface to be technical
definitions, clarifications of terms, or simply wisdom sayings? These seemingly
impersonal statements might suggest that most companions sat and memorized
the shaykh’s discourse and guided themselves on the path independently
of the shaykh. We should consider that what may seem like disinterested
questions and answers may in some cases be statements of direction from a
shaykh to his companion. Even a lesson given to the group as a whole has
the intent of guiding those who hear it. In many instances, only the pith of
the exchange is reported and not the scene of the exchange itself. These
sayings are thus disembodied of the human contexts that were the necessary
settings for their expression. Even if we consider only a portion of them
as expressions of direction, these sayings along with the more explicit
anecdotes leave little doubt that personal direction was essential to the
teaching relationship in early Sufism.

Take for example the famously different attitudes towards repentance held
by Tustari and Junayd. The seemingly straightforward definitions of repentance
had practical implications for the lives of their companions. Tustari said,
“[Repentance] is that you do not forget your wrongdoing;” Junayd said,
“[Repentance] is forgetting your wrongdoing."85

Does repentance require continuing reflection on one’s past wrongdoings?
Or should one forget one’s wrongdoings after repenting of them? What might
be taken as simple definitions of repentance also describe how the two shaykhs directed the inner lives of their companions.

Likewise, the following saying defining abstinence also suggests what Yahyā b. Mu'ādh al-Rāzī required from his companions. He said, "Abstinence is three things: scarcity, retreat, and hunger." He probably required that his companions keep little in the way of possessions, keep apart from the society and affairs of others, and eat as little as necessary.

What might be read as a wisdom saying by Shiblī can be understood instead as advice to his companions to give up all freedoms other than the heart's freedom from the attachment to anything other than God. Shiblī said, "Freedom is the freedom of the heart, there is no other." Discussions of theology among Sufis were also directed toward personal direction and not done for the sake of defining correct belief. The purpose was to understand reality so that one might conform to it in the most profound way possible. Tawḥīd, literally declaring God one, is not primarily a question of doctrine for Sufis but rather a question of transformation. For Kharrāz, declaring God one means that one perceives that all things belong to and are manifest through God, so much that one's sense of literal self-possession passes away and God makes the self belong to Him alone.

Abū Sa'id al-Kharrāz said, 'The first mark of declaring God one is that the servant leaves behind all things and sends all things back to the One who looks after them; so that the one who is looked after should be, through the One who looks after, gazing at the things, standing through them, and stable within them. Then He hides their souls in their souls from their souls, and He makes their souls die in their souls, and He prepares them for Himself. This is the first entry into tawḥīd with respect to the manifestation of perpetually declaring God one.'

Shiblī corrects a man's tawḥīd not by correcting his mistaken belief, but by directing him to stop searching for God through himself. One should seek God through God, not through oneself. "Shiblī said to a man, 'Do you know why tawḥīd will not be correct for you?' He said, 'No.' 'Because you seek Him through you.'" The manuals and treatises use theological doctrine to delineate the acceptable boundaries of Sufi experience. For instance, Sarrāj mentions the story of Tustari correcting his student who had claimed to see God with his own eyes in his chapter on "Error with regard to Seeing with the Hearts."

**The Necessary Direction of a Shaykh**

The sayings and anecdotes in the sources demonstrate that it was considered necessary for seekers to be under the direction of a shaykh just as it was necessary for the companions to follow the Prophet. The following
saying, quoted in part above, advises that those who aspire to the path become the companion of the shaykhs and emulate them in every way. Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Sijzī said, "The most beneficial thing for aspirants is companionship with the righteous; emulating them in their actions, character traits, and good qualities visiting the graves of the friends of God, and undertaking to serve the companions and comrades." Mumshādh al-Dinawarī (d. 299/911) said, "The proper conduct of the aspirant is in four things: duty towards that which is sacred to the shayks, service to the brothers, leaving behind the secondary causes, and preserving the conduct of the religious Law over himself." Abū Sāʿīd al-Khariṣārī said of the aspirant, "He should be like a dutiful son for his shaykh." A shaykh's directions were taken with such seriousness that Abū ʿAmr al-Zajjājī (d. 348/959) said if one is sitting with a shaykh and feels a strong urge to urinate, it would be better for him to urinate on himself than get up and miss any of the shaykh's words. As he said, "The urine washes away with water, but whatever benefit you might have gained from his words is lost when you stand [to excuse yourself], and you will never grasp it." Still, we should keep in mind that while the majority of relationships between shaykhs and their companions were relationships of personal direction, these relationships themselves do not seem to have been as formally binding as they would become later. It would be difficult to have the kind of singular relationships that became common after the institutionalization of Sufism at a time when it was considered good practice to take direction from as many shaykhs as possible.

**Required Practices**

The sayings show that the shaykhs required their companions to undertake various practices. The evidence survives in the form of lists of required practices, sayings mentioning that a particular shaykh required or forbade his companions to do something, descriptions of various methods of spiritual struggle, or sayings about the need for acting on what one learns.

Makki lists hunger, night vigils, silence, and retreat (khāltuwa) as central to bringing the soul under control. Various source texts demonstrate that the early Sufi shaykhs instructed their companions to undertake some form of one or more of these four practices as well as others. For example, Junayd is reported to have said, "Our affair in this is built on four things: We only speak from finding (wuḍūḍ), we only eat from need, we only sleep when it overcomes us, and we are only silent out of reverential fear." The general practice among Sufis was to follow the Prophetic example and eat as little as possible, and usually only when absolutely necessary. It was practiced at all levels of spiritual attainment. "Yahyā b. Muʿadh said, 'Hunger has four aspects: for the aspirants it is spiritual exercises, for the repentant a test, for the abstainers.
discipline, for the knowers an honorable trait." Likewise, it was common for Sufis to undertake all-night prayer vigils. Shibli remarks that in the beginning of his path, he would rub salt in his eyes to ward off sleep during the night. During the early period, silence meant speaking only when absolutely necessary and proper, and avoiding the pleasure the soul takes in hearing oneself speak. For example, it was usual not to express one's own opinion on matters of the path while one's shaykh was alive or without his permission. Retreat generally meant seclusion from people and engaging with others socially only when appropriate and as briefly as possible. Ultimately, one should be able to be among people outwardly while maintaining one's seclusion inwardly; in other words, one should be able to be among people but not get swept up in their affairs. Less often, retreat referred to formal withdrawal into a cell for a period of time.

Shaykhs considered nearly all aspects of a companion's life open to comment and direction. Earning money, for instance, might compromise their companions' path. Tustari held that it is not proper for those on the path to earn money unless it is to fulfill the Sunnah, such as supporting one's family, or to help out other Sufis. Whereas Junayd felt that it was permissible to work as long as one's trust in God was not compromised, and that if one had any dependents, one was required to work.

Part of companionship with a shaykh might have meant taking on the practice of reciting a litany or litanies. The litanies Makkî records were assigned after specific required and supererogatory prayers. They included recitations from the Qur'ân, prayers on the Prophet, and formulae such as the shabâda recited one to several hundred times. They were recited in the home, in retreat, or in the mosque, and with others or alone. Shaykhs seem to have had litanies that were particular to them and that they passed onto others both selectively and not. İbîrîhim al-Taymî passed this litany on to others, who likewise passed it along with its reported provenance.

Companionship might also include attending a spiritual concert (sama'). During a spiritual concert, a singer (qawwâl or munshid) would recite poetry with or without musical accompaniment. The purpose of these gatherings was to uplift one's state into ecstasy through poetry and music, recalling, for example, the nature of God and the character of the Prophet. There was some dispute over the permissibility of such events, but they seem to have been attended by even the most sober Sufis such as Junayd, if the conditions he set were met.

The Teaching Circles

The sayings illustrate that the shaykhs' circles ranged from informal gatherings in private dwellings to more structured teaching environments such
as the mosque. There were very few specially designated buildings used for Sufi gatherings and housing traveling companions such as would be common after the institutionalization of Sufism. Some anecdotes show the shaykh giving direction while the companions are gathered together for a meal. Others picture teaching circles held in the mosques with other teaching circles held nearby. Likewise, teaching circles might be held openly for anyone who wished to come and listen, and privately for the shaykhs’ more serious companions.

A good example of a possibly impromptu gathering is one occasion when Dhu’l Nūn visited Baghdād and all the Sufis gathered together to sit with him. A singer (gawwāl) who was present was asked to hold a spiritual concert (sama‘). Shabaka of Baṣra had a more formal arrangement for her companions. Sulami reports that she had vaults (sarādīb) built under the floor of her house for her companions to undertake spiritual struggle under her direction. Sometimes a shaykh’s companion was his servant, or a family member; thus, in these cases, the teaching environment could be in the context of life at home. Sulami’s grandfather, Abū ‘Amr b. al-Nujayd said of his wife Fakhrawyah bint ‘Ali, “What I gained from being the companion of Fakhrawyah was no less that what I gained from being the companion of Abū ‘Uthmān [al-Ḥiḍr].” Sometimes, shaykhs would travel with their companions, so their circle was wherever their behavior was under scrutiny on the road. In short, the Sufi teaching circle was wherever the shaykh met with his companions.

There were disagreements over which teachings were appropriate for public dissemination and which should be reserved for private discussions with one’s companions. For instance, Junayd was well-known for his circumspection in contrast to Nūrī, al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṭur al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/921), and Abū Bakr al-Shibli (d. 334/946). The texts show that the Sufis did not consider their knowledge to be doctrinally innovative, but some realized that it could seem to be so to those who did not understand it. Lack of understanding in the wrong people had in some cases serious repercussions, such as when Ghulām Khalīl (d. 275/888–9) denounced Nūrī, Samnūn b. ‘Umar al-Muḥiib (d. ca. 298/910), and some other Sufis of Baghdād of heresy and other charges in 264/877–8. Furthermore, lack of understanding in lay people or companions could result in dangerous confusion or being adversely overcome by the shaykhs words. One anecdote expresses the danger of telling companions what they are not prepared to hear by having Samnūn demonstrate on a bird that dies on hearing his words.

Abū Bakr al-Qahtābī said, ‘I was at the meeting of Samnūn when a man stood up and asked him concerning love.’
He said: 'I know of nobody today whom I am liberty to address on this subject, and who would understand it.'

At that moment, a bird alighted on his head, and fell on his knee, saying, 'If there were any it would be this.'

So he began to say, pointing to the bird: 'I have heard such and such of the states of people, and they experienced such and such, and were in such and such a spiritual condition.' So he continued to address the bird until it fell from his knee, dead.\(^{115}\)

Despite the opinions of some Sufis that much of their teaching should be kept private and revealed only to the companions and according to their capacities, other Sufis taught openly to whomever would listen despite the consequences.

**Service and Camaraderie**

There is a strong impression in the sayings that it was important for Sufis to have some place to gather together in companionship and be a support for one another on the path. These friends and allies of one another were called companions, comrades, and colleagues. As mentioned above, the term ‘companion’ in this context suggests common support and direction of one another on the path. But the terms ‘comrade’ (raftāq) and ‘colleague’ (qarin) are less clear. Comrade seems to be used to designate companionships marked by travel. The verb raftaqa, which is used to demote these relationships can mean “to escort, or accompany” in addition to “to be a companion” or comrade. Sulamī uses the term to denote a traveling companion. For example, he mentions that Abū Ḥamza al-Bazzāz (d. 289/902) was among Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī’s comrades in his travels and Yusūf b. al-Ḥusayn al-Razi (d. 304/917) was a comrade of Abū Sa’īd al-Kharrāz (d. 279/892) in his travels.\(^ {116}\) The meaning of qarin is less clear but seems to denote a relationship among equals, hence, I am using the term ‘colleague’ as its English translation. In Sulami’s case, because he uses the term ‘companion’ consistently to mean a relationship of direction between a shaykh and his subordinate companion, he may use the term ‘colleague’ to indicate a relationship between contemporaries that does not imply personal direction of that particular subordinate nature. For example, Sulamī reports that the brothers Muḥammad b. Abū al-Ward and Aḥmad b. Abū al-Ward were companions of Sāri al-Saqaṭī, Abū al-Fath al-Ḥammāl, Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī and Bishr al-Ḥaṭī. They shared some of the same Shaykhs as Junayd, and Sulamī calls them Junayd’s colleagues but not his companions.\(^ {118}\)

Companionship with one another was an important part of the path itself. It meant that one’s actions and words would be circumscribed and supported.
by those with similar goals. Hence, service to one’s companions and the
shaykh was considered one of the most important aspects of companionship
for all Sufis. Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz of Baghdād said of the aspirant “[He should]
bear away all that is detestable from his fellow worshippers and his own
character so that he might be an earth for his fellow worshippers to walk
upon.”119 Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī said, “Whoever sees his soul as having any
value has not tasted the sweetness of service.”120 Service was at the center
of the futuwwa movement. Fāṭima al-Khanāqaḥiyya said, “Sufi chivalry is
to maintain service to others without discrimination.”121 Service to one’s
companions was meant to wear away at one’s self-centeredness and
increase one’s humility. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Subayḥī said that a companion
should spend freely of himself on his companions by being of service to
them in order to weaken his sense of rank and possession and bring about
true poverty.122

Service no doubt also increased one’s sense of community with other Sufis,
but the companions would, of course, sometimes argue with one another. On
one occasion, the bickering among Kharrāz’s companions was such a problem
that Abū al-‘Abbās b. ‘Aṭā’ al-Adamī (d. 309/921) was forced to write to
Kharrāz, who was not with them at the time, for advice in handling the
situation. Kharrāz’s response is interesting in that it at once illustrates that the
companions relied on one another in their communities, but also points out
that this reliance could act also as an obstacle to relying on God. He wrote
back, “Know that it is out of jealousy from the Real over them, so that one of
them will not rely on the other.”123

The shaykhs were also companions of one another and often traveled
together, visited each other, and supported one another on the path. There is
an anecdote of three companions traveling together that gives us a fine
example of what their lives as shaykhs and companions of one another was
like. Muḥammad b. Ismā‘il al-Farghānī, Abū Bakr al-Zaqqāq, and Abū Bakr
al-Kattānī (d. 322/934) are reported to have traveled together for some
twenty years. Zaqqāq was a colleague of Junayd and Kattānī was one of
Junayd’s companions in Baghdād. Zaqqāq and Kattānī are reported to
have lived and taught in Mecca during this time, so most likely they took the
trips out from Mecca and returned again to teach.124 Mecca had a large
community of Sufis living there and staying on after undertaking the trip to
Mecca for the pilgrimage. Kattānī said that there were some 300 shaykhs and
fuqara’ all together in Mecca at that time.125 It is not difficult to imagine
that they sat with numerous shaykhs on their travels and associated with
many in Mecca, as well as encountering many aspirants of the path. The
anecdote gives a good sense of their camaraderie, their practices, and their
visiting with shaykhs.
We did not mix nor closely associate with anyone among the people. If we arrived in a town in which there was a shaykh, we would greet him and sit with him until night. When night came, we would return to a mosque. Kattânī would undertake to pray from the first of the night until morning came, thus completing [the recitation of] Qur'ân. Zaqqāq would sit facing the quibla, and I would meditate until morning came. Then we would all pray the morning prayer with the ablution we made during the first third of the night. If some person happened upon us and slept we would see him as our better.\textsuperscript{126}

Another anecdote is illustrative of the camaraderie between Sufis, and how they took care of each other. Abū 'Alī al-Rūḍhabārī (d. 322/934) tells how he visited Ibn Rufay' al-Dimashqī and spent the night in his home. They probably talked about poverty during his stay, since Rūḍhabārī related to him a saying by Sahl al-Tustarī on the subject. When he was leaving, Ibn Rufay' referred to the story in which Sahl says that the truthful poor one does not reject a gift and then dropped a few dirhams into his water cup. In this way, he put the compliment on Rūḍhabārī for accepting the money rather than on him for giving it.

Rūḍhabārī said, 'I related to him that Sahl said, 'The mark of the truthful poor one is that he does not beg, he does not reject, and he does not withhold.'

When I wanted to depart from Ibn Rufay' he picked up a few dirhams and stopped at my side where I carry my leather water cup.

He said to me, 'How was that story you related from Sahl?' When I had related to him the story and said to him, 'he does not beg, he does not reject, he threw the dirhams in the water cup and turned away.'\textsuperscript{127}

**Transmitting the Teachings of the Shaykhs**

Companions often memorized the teachings and instructions of the shaykh and repeated them to others in the chain of transmission; likewise, their writings might be collected and copied. Sulami's *Tabaqāt al-sufiyya* and Abū Nu'aym's *Ḥiyat al-awliya* are collections that trace their sources back to these early transmitters and lost collections of sayings.\textsuperscript{128} Sulami notes in his *Tabaqāt* when a companion was known for passing along his shaykh's sayings. For example, Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Sālim al- Баşrī was known for transmitting the sayings of his shaykh, Sahl al-Tustarī.\textsuperscript{129} Transmissions of a shaykh's sayings might also be made with the express permission to teach them (ījāza).\textsuperscript{130} Some Sufis traveled for the sake of collecting sayings as did the Ḥadīth transmitters. Muḥammad Ibn Shādhān Abū Bakr al-Rāzi (d. 376/986–7) was a collector of biographical material and sayings of the Sufis. His *Ṭaʾrīkh*, also known as *al-Ḥikâyāt al-sūfīyya*, was an important source for Sulami, Abū Nu'aym and others.\textsuperscript{131} Although he kept company with many Sufis from different circles,
reporting the sayings of numerous Sufis directly, as well as second and third hand, he seems to have been in closest contact with companions of Junayd, from whom he transmits the greatest number of sayings.\textsuperscript{132} Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Dāwūd al-Dīnawārī al-Duqqī (ca. d. 350/961) was well-known for his reliability in collecting sayings of the shaykhs. Like the collectors of Ḥadīth, he would travel great distances simply to confirm a story that had been reported to him.\textsuperscript{133}

**Becoming a Teacher**

In some cases, the spiritual development and character of a companion would call for the student to be a teacher himself. Given the available evidence, companions were reticent to teach while one’s own teacher was still alive.\textsuperscript{134} In a number of cases, there is evidence that the companion received the shaykh’s permission to become a guide himself. According to one report, the shaykh Abū Ḥafṣ al-Naysābūrī visited his companion Abū ‘Uthmān al-Ḥirā’s gathering after giving him permission to teach and critiqued his teaching afterward.\textsuperscript{135} A shaykh might appoint a particular companion to inherit his community after his death, such as Junayd did with Jurayrī, but the transfer of authority over the community does not seem to amount to what is understood as a Sufi order (tariqā) in later Sufism. The term tariqā is used in the texts but seems to either refer to the path of Sufism in general or the particular path of one shaykh within the larger community of Sufis, not a path stemming from that shaykh. Louis Massignon finds the earliest example of an initiatory isnād to be Ja’far al-Khuldī (d. 348/959) who claimed a connection through Junayd back to tāfṣīn such as Anas b. Mālik (d. 91/710). Claims of initiatory chains going back to the early prophetic community would not become commonplace until the beginning of the formation of the orders in the following century.\textsuperscript{136}

**Conclusion**

Sufism during this period was mainly centered around numerous diverse small communities who were allied with the broadly populist Ahl al-Ḥadīth movement. The shaykhs of these communities saw themselves as inheritors and transmitters of the inward Sunnah of the Prophet in both subjects taught and the manner in which they taught. It was usual for companions to sit with many shaykhs and take spiritual direction from each of them, even if this involved extensive travel. Spiritual direction (tarbiya) was common during early Sufism present in variegated forms, only one of which was the adab focused instruction Meier specifically identifies as tarbiya.

One gets the sense of the early Sufis being a widespread network of companions and shaykhs. While there was much boasting about the
benefits of sitting with a particular shaykh and criticism of others, there does not seem to be the type of claims to uniqueness that one finds in the later period attached to a shaykh and his way. Perhaps because companions were expected to seek direction wherever they could find it, the early Sufis seem to have understood themselves to be members of one far-flung community allied toward a common goal, despite their sometimes-contentious relationships.

Endnotes
1. Ibn Mājā, Muqaddima, 17.
3. Although several landmark articles have been written on aspects of the state of early Sufism, there is to date no comprehensive analytical study of the period. In this article, reference is made to the available sources texts, such as the treatises, manuals, and biographical sources. Here I have made special reference to Abū `Abd ar-Rahmān al-Sulamī’s Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya, ed. Nūr al-Dīn Sharība (Cairo, 1987); its possible appendix Early Sufi Women: Dhiḥkr an-niswā al-muṭa‘aśābdāt ḥaṣa-ṣūfīyyāt by Abū `Abd ar-Rahmān dās-Sulamī, ed. and trans. by Rκa E. Cornell (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999); Abū Nu‘aym Ahmad b. `Abd Allāh al-Isfahānī’s Ḥiyya al-awliyya wa tābaqāt al-ṣūfīyya, X (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988); Abū Nasr `Abd Allāh b. `Alī al-Sarrāj’s Kitāb al-lumā’ fi tāsawwuf, ed., `Abd al-Ḥālim Maḥmūd (Egypt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīth bi-Mīr, 1970); Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq al-Kalābādhī’s Doctrine of the Sufis, trans. by A. J. Arberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Abū Ṭalīb al-Makkī’s Qūt al-qulūb, n.e. (Maṭba‘a al-Anwār al-Maḥmudiyya, 1985).


4. Meier, op. cit. Page numbers will refer to the article in German with page numbers for the O’Kane translation cited in parenthesis following it.


8. Ibid., 141 [202].

9. Ibid., 142 ff (204 ff). Interestingly, the forms of institutionalized Sufism such as madrasas, khanqahs, and more autocratic relationships between companion and shaykh existed in Khurāsān long before they were established in the West. Richard Bulliet argues in *Islam: the View from the Edge* that the institutionalization of the Islamic sciences was not brought about by the so-called Seljuk “Sunni revival.” Rather, he demonstrates that centralized madrasas with organized curricula had already been in place in Khurāsān prior to the establishment of madrasas and organized curricula in the West under Seljuk rule. Bulliet documents that Khurāsāni scholars moved West bringing their educational institutions, which were then legitimized by the Seljuks and legitimized the Seljuks in turn. Following Meier’s observation here, it would be useful to see if Sufism became institutionalized in the same manner as the other Islamic religious sciences.

10. Ibid., 137 [197].

11. Ibid., 136 [195].

12. Ibid., 143 [205].


17. Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 2. Makdisi writes that some five hundred schools of law disappeared by the 3rd/9th century. Numerous schools persisted until only four remained in the 8th/14th century. Also see Bulliet’s *Islam* for a discussion of the diversity of early Islamic education.


30. Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma‘*, 164. This Ḥadīth is not indexed in Wensinck.
34. Sulāmī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 74.
35. Ibid., 78.
39. See Mojaddedi’s *The Biographical Tradition in Early Sufism* for a discussion of how *ṭabaqāt* works make a direct claim to authoritative continuity reaching back to the Prophet alongside the outward scholars of the religious sciences (see for example Mojaddedi, *Biographical Tradition*, 11–12, 20–21).
41. See Sarrāj’s introduction where he outlines the purpose of his defense and how he will go about it (Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma‘*, 18–21 [Nicholson, 1–4]).
42. See Kalābādhi, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 4.
43. See for example Sarrāj’s sections on the errors of various practices and doctrines, though his critiques are also present in many other sections of *Kitāb al-luma‘*.
44. See Böwering, “Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy,” op. cit.; Ernst, op. cit.
46. Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma‘*, 40 (Nicholson, 20–21); also see for example ibid., 239 (Nicholson, 180).
47. Makki, *Qūṭ al-qulūb*, 164.
48. See for example, Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 357.
50. Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma‘*, 22 (Nicholson, 5); Also Meier describes an anonymous manuscript dated to the 4th/10th century in which he found a citation of this non-canonical Ḥadīth in the article, “Ein wichtiger handschriftenfund zur sufik” *Oriens* 20 (1967): 60–106.

51. Kalābādhi, Doctrine of the Sufis, 77. Meier notes this tendency among later Sufis and cites it as an example of tarbiya relationships (Meier, “das Ende,” 141–142) [202–203].

52. It may not always accord with the actual usage in the later period either, but that remains to be examined at another time. For example, Ibn al-‘Arabi and his followers regularly use “companion” as the general term for all those under the direction of a shaykh, whereas murid has a specific technical connotation.


54. Meier notes that early descriptions of companionship show elements of tarbiya similar to those he identifies in Naysabūr (Meier, “das Ende,” 147 [210]. Mojaddedi writes that Sulamī uses the term consistently to mark relationships through which one acquires authority (Mojaddedi, Biographical Tradition, 14, 19, 186 n. 32).

55. The terms teacher (ustād) and student (tilmt) seem to be used less often than, but interchangeably with, shaykh and companion. See for example Abū Nu‘aym, Hilya, X 228–229.

56. Abū Nu‘aym, Hilya, X 44.

57. Sulamī, Tabaqāt, 391.

58. Abū Nu‘aym, Hilya, X 228; see also Sulamī, Tabaqāt, 242.


60. Ibid., 235 (Nicholson, 177). Qassim al-Samarri discusses the history of scholarly dispute over the identity of Abū 'Alī al-Sindī and exactly what it was the two taught each other. He shows that the two were equals who shared their knowledge with each other. A. J. Arberry argues, through another version of the anecdote, that the two taught each other the inward realities of certain chapters of the Qur’ān (Qassim al-Samarri, The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writing [Baghdad: National Printing and Publishing Co., 1968], 215–224).


62. For example, Sulamī quotes Sufis using the term in several contexts: as not yet on the path, an early stage of the path, and being on the path in general (Sulamī, Tabaqāt, 26, 135, 179, 211, 216, 255, 309, 313, 318, 340, 356, 408, 495). Hujwīrī quotes others and uses the term murid himself to designate someone on an early stage on the path, an aspirant on the path in general, a friend of God (wali) in respect of his active aspiration toward God, one on the path of love, and as referring to God himself (Hujwīrī, Kashf al-mahjūb, 84, 107, 157, 211, 263, 370, 414).

63. Makki, Qūt al-qulūb, I 112.

64. Sulamī, Tabaqāt, 255.

65. Ibid., 26.


67. See Sulamī, Early Sufi Women, op. cit. Women were also companions and teachers in outward sciences. For an account of women Ḥadith scholars see Muḥammad Zubayr Siddiqī, Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development, and Special Features (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), appendix I.

68. There are 103 listings in the Tabaqāt, but there are two entries that contain the records for two men each.

69. Sarrāj, Kitāb al-Luma’, 19 (Nicholson, 3); see also Kalābādhi, Doctrine of the Sufis, 5. It was not possible to track the travels of the Sufis from Sulamī’s Tabaqāt as he does not always mention them. They can be found documented in other sources.

70. Sulamī, Tabaqāt, 340.


74. See for example the Kattani story below.


76. Ibid., 240 (Nicholson, 181).

77. See “das Ende,” as mentioned above, for examples of spiritual direction in the early period that are similar to Khurāsānīan tarbiya.


79. Ibid., 307 (Nicholson, 235).

80. Ibid., 273 (Nicholson, 204).

81. Ibid., 238 (Nicholson, 179).

82. Ibid., 76 (Nicholson, 49–50). Or see for example when Bishr b. Bashār received direction from three unknown worshippers at the Ka‘ba when he asked them to advise him (Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilya*, X 133).

83. Sulami, *Dbikr al-niswa*, 152.


87. Ibid., 343.


89. Ibid.

90. Ibid., 544 (Nicholson, 428).


92. Ibid., 318.


94. Ibid., 241 (Nicholson, 182).

95. It should be noted that although it is common in the post-institutional period for people to attach themselves to one shaykh alone, people continue to seek out direction from more than one shaykh to this day.


98. Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma‘*, 270; (Nicholson, 180).


100. See for example ibid., 240 (Nicholson, 180).


102. See for example Sulami, *Tabaqāt*, 329.


104. Makki, *Qūt al-qulūb*, 10–30; for the Taymī litany and its story, see ibid., 11–12. Also, Abū Bakr al-Wasiti is reported to have regularly recited his litany in a large public gathering (Zakariyya al-Ansāri (d. 916/1511), *Sbarb al-risālat al-qushayriyya* [n.p., n.d., 1178]). Also, Sari al-Saqafī mentions “my litany” in a saying (Sulami, *Tabaqāt*, 50). The litanies recorded in Makki’s *Qūt al-qulūb* do not seem to differ in nature from contemporary Sufi and popular litanies.


107. See for example ibid., 239 (Nicholson 180) and Quṣhayrî, *Risâlah*, 753/9.


111. Ibid., 176–77.


117. Ibid., 249.

118. Ibid., 233, 284.


123. Ibid., 373; Quṣhayrî, *Risâlah*, 131.

124. Ibid., 245 (Nicholson, 185).

125. Ibid., 250 (Nicholson, 185).

126. Ibid., 262 (Nicholson, 197–8).


130. This text is no longer extant, see GAS I 666. Also see Alikberov, “Genre Ṭabaḳât,” 25. Fuat Sezgin remarks that Ibn Shâdhân’s *Hikâyât al-Ṣâfiyya* appears to have been a major source for Sulâmî (GAS I 666).

132. See the index in Sulâmî, *Ṭabaqât*, 544–45. By far the largest grouping of his transmissions concern the companions of Junayd. Alikberov also remarks on his spiritual affiliation with Junayd (Alikberov, “Genre Ṭabaḳât,” 25).


134. For example, see ibid., 240 (Nicholson, 180).

135. See Kalâbâdhî, *Doctrines of the Sufis*, 148; and for example, ibid., 239 (Nicholson, 179).