

Spiritual Purification in Islam

The life and works of al-Muḥāsibī

Gavin Picken



Routledge Sufi Series

Spiritual Purification in Islam

Purification of the soul is a principle that is central to understanding Islamic spirituality but despite this, relatively little has been written explicitly in the Islamic tradition regarding this discrete method of spiritual purification. This book examines the work of a scholar of this discipline, al-Hārith al-Muḥāsibī, who lived and worked during the classical Islamic period under the Abbāsids.

Although al-Muḥāsibī was well known for his skills in many disciplines, including the Qur'ān, Prophetic narration and scholastic theology, it is his mastery in the field of Islamic spirituality and moral psychology for which he is best remembered. Assessing the extent to which the political, social and economic factors played a part in his life and work, Gavin Picken provides a comprehensive overview of his work and its great significance in the development of Islamic spirituality. Reconstructing his life in chronological order and providing the most comprehensive appraisal of his works to date, it explores a facet of al-Muḥāsibī's teaching which as yet has not been studied, namely his understanding, concept and methodology regarding the purification of the soul within the Islamic paradigm. As such, it will be of great interest not only to researchers and students of Sufism but also to scholars of comparative spirituality and mysticism.

Gavin Picken is Lecturer in Islamic Studies and Arabic at the University of Edinburgh. His research focuses on the evolution of Islamic intellectual history in the formative period and he has published a number of articles in the areas of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and Islamic spirituality and mysticism.

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For my parents Norman and Ann

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A note on transliteration

Arabic	English	Arabic	English
أ	<i>a</i>	ض	<i>ḍ</i>
ب	<i>b</i>	ط	<i>ṭ</i>
ت	<i>t</i>	ظ	<i>ẓ</i>
ث	<i>th</i>	ع	<i>‘</i>
ج	<i>j</i>	غ	<i>gh</i>
ح	<i>ḥ</i>	ف	<i>f</i>
خ	<i>kh</i>	ق	<i>q</i>
د	<i>d</i>	ك	<i>k</i>
ذ	<i>dh</i>	ل	<i>l</i>
ر	<i>r</i>	م	<i>m</i>
ز	<i>z</i>	ن	<i>n</i>
س	<i>s</i>	هـ	<i>h</i>
ش	<i>sh</i>	و	<i>w</i>
ص	<i>ṣ</i>	ي	<i>y</i>

ء is denoted by *’* when not at the beginning of a word.

ة is denoted by *a*, except in *iḍāfa* constructions where it will be denoted by *t*.

Short Vowels:

ا is denoted by *a* اِ is denoted by *i* اُ is denoted by *u*

Long Vowels:

آ/إ are denoted by *ā* اِي is denoted by *ī* اُو is denoted by *ū*

Diphthongs:

اَ is denoted by *ay* اَوْ is denoted by *aw*

اَ is denoted by the doubling of the letter.

The definite article لْ is denoted *al-* in all cases except when it follows an inseparable preposition or construction, in which case it will be denoted 'l-.

The divine name (*al-luḥẓ al-jallāla*) will be transliterated as 'Allāh' in all cases.

Note on the text

Centuries are first expressed according to the (*Hijrī*) Islamic calendar and the Common Era equivalents follow, e.g.: second/eighth century.

Introduction

The nature of the soul, being the intrinsic, essential and yet hidden human facet, has occupied the minds of humanity for millennia. More specifically, world religions have contributed greatly to this debate, furnishing a great deal of discussion from their own unique theological and philosophical perspectives. In this sense, Islam is no different and it too has a fully developed concept of the soul based on scriptural tradition. In addition, however, not only the idea of the soul is alluded to in Islam, but also the notion of its purification through a process of spiritual development. Despite the principle of purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) being central to Islam, relatively little attention was given to it in the formative period in terms of written compilation, if compared to the vast volumes devoted to, say, Qur'ānic exegesis (*al-tafsīr*), Prophetic narration (*al-ḥadīth*) or Islamic jurisprudence (*al-fiqh*). Moreover, much of what has been written has been within the general precepts of what is now termed *al-taṣawwuf*, or Sufism, and much of this work has been concerned with the post-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) period.

Nevertheless, several authors devoted their time and energy to writing on this topic and, indeed, the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* had been developed prior to the advent of al-Ghazzālī. One of the most influential scholars in the pre-Ghazzālī period who wrote on a primordial form of Islamic spirituality was the second-/eighth-century Islamic scholar Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, who was born in Basra around 165/782 but later resided in Baghdad, albeit with a period of exile in Kūfa, until his death in 243/857. Al-Muḥāsibī was known for his skills in many disciplines, including the sciences associated with the Qur'ān, Prophetic narration (*ḥadīth*) and scholastic theology (*'ilm al-kalām*), but it is for his mastery in the field of Islamic spirituality and moral psychology that he is remembered.

Regardless of his favourable notoriety, especially in later Sufi apologetic works, he was not without criticism, being repudiated by Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 242/856) for his 'unorthodox' views and reviled by Aḥmad's subsequent followers Abū Zur'a al-Rāzī (d. 264/878), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) and 'Abd al-Raḥīm 'Irāqī (d. 806/1403). In spite of this, he was a prolific writer, reportedly authoring more than 200 works, the most famous of which is perhaps *Kitāb al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*. It was this latter, monumental work which drew the attention of the West in the form of the British scholar Margaret Smith (d. 1970), who was the first European

2 Introduction

researcher to address the life and works of this great exponent of *tazkiya* in depth. This is not to say that al-Muḥāsibī has been exhausted as an area of research, however, as many of his works have been preserved and, indeed, have been published, edited and annotated since the pioneering work of Smith.

Thus, in an attempt to shed further light on this under-discussed facet of the Islamic tradition, this book comprises an examination of the linguistic and terminological usage of the terms *tazkiya* and *al-naḥs* to determine an accurate understanding of these concepts. In addition, it provides an extensive survey of the available biographical and historical sources to produce an accurate and comprehensive account of this unique and extraordinary scholar's life, including a study of the historical period in which al-Muḥāsibī lived, to assess the extent to which the political, social and economic factors played a part in his life and work. Moreover, due to the large number of works produced by this prolific author and their importance, the latter part of this book will be concerned with an assessment of al-Muḥāsibī's works to determine the writer's understanding and methodology regarding the spiritual process of development termed *tazkiyat al-naḥs*.

Before we start, however, it is deemed useful to provide the reader with an outline of the research previously carried out in this field,¹ so as to acquaint them with the depth of scholarship regarding al-Muḥāsibī, as well as to define the scope of the present work.

Al-Muḥāsibī studies²

The first and most obvious works to mention regarding al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī are those of the author himself. However, since these works will be dealt with specifically in Chapter 3, they will not be mentioned here and, thus, this leaves us with the works related to al-Muḥāsibī, which will be summarised in the following paragraphs.

1

'Notice of the Writings of Abū 'Abdullah al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, the first Ṣūfī Author' by D. S. Margoliouth in *Transaction of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions* (Oxford: 1908). In this paper the author begins by introducing al-Muḥāsibī, indicating the sources where his biographical details can be found and then giving a summarised version of this material. Margoliouth then numbers al-Muḥāsibī's works and where they can be found. The content of these works is then described, to which the author attributes Ash'arite³ tendencies to al-Muḥāsibī and proposes that his works are from improvised sermons.⁴ An interesting observation is made regarding al-Muḥāsibī's use of Christian sources, suggesting that the author had direct contact with them. Margoliouth then compares al-Muḥāsibī to later scholars, alludes to his influence upon them and shows that al-Muḥāsibī's works are free from many of the Sufi doctrines which developed later. However, the most interesting statement is that al-Muḥāsibī is the first 'Sufi' author who had written works attributed to him.⁵

2

An Early Mystic of Baghdad by Margaret Smith (London: The Sheldon Press, 1935). This is perhaps the most well-known, if not the most important work to be carried out and, as such, requires an in-depth discussion. This work is extremely thorough, being over 300 pages long and consisting of 14 chapters. The first three chapters of *Early Mystic* are concerned with the biographical details of al-Muḥāsibī's life and provide information regarding where he was born, his environment, his 'conversion' to *taṣawwuf* and those who surrounded him, whether they were teachers, students, or associates. Chapters 4 and 5 concentrate on al-Muḥāsibī's works and the sources he uses in them. Chapter 6 deals exclusively with what Smith terms the 'Psychological Theory', the various 'unseen' aspects of *tazkiya*, such as the soul (*al-nafs*) and the heart (*al-qalb*). The next three chapters discuss various aspects of what Smith terms 'Ascetic Theology' where such topics as sin (*dhanb*), the Devil (*Iblīs*) and asceticism (*zuhd*) are discussed. The following three chapters deal with the various moral, devotional and mystical teachings of al-Muḥāsibī, covering such topics as the 'stations' (*al-maqāmāt*) and 'states' (*al-ahwāl*), prayer (*ṣalāt*) and love (*ḥubb*). The final two chapters summarise al-Muḥāsibī's teaching and discuss its influence on later generations. Thus, it is easy to see why Smith's work is regarded as one of the most important when discussing al-Muḥāsibī and, due to its comprehensive nature, one could argue that this is the reason why so little work has been done in this area. Despite this, however, Smith does not define the methodology of al-Muḥāsibī in employing *tazkiya*, nor does she discuss the method he employs during his writings.

3

'The forerunner of al-Ghazālī' by Margaret Smith in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (January, 1936). Building on her excellent work in the above-mentioned book and in particular chapter XIV of *Early Mystic*, Smith consequently wrote this article showing the significance of al-Muḥāsibī's teachings through their influence on one of Islam's most famous intellectual luminaries – Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī. Starting from the perspective that al-Ghazzālī himself admits to reading the works of al-Muḥāsibī in his *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* and the fact that there is considerable similarity between al-Muḥāsibī's *Kitāb al-Tawahhum* and al-Ghazzālī's *al-Durra al-Fākhira*, Smith proceeds to make a further comparison between the content of *Iḥyā'* and a variety of al-Muḥāsibī's works, with particular attention being paid to *al-Waṣāyā'* and *al-Ri'āya*. Smith constructs her comparative analysis around a variety of positive moral qualities such as sincerity (*ikhlas*) and truthfulness (*sidq*), which formed the basis of the *maqām* system in later Sufism, as well as a number of moral deficiencies such as conceit (*ujb*) and self-delusion (*ghurūr*). To this extent Smith's appraisal is erudite and relatively comprehensive and she concludes that, although al-Ghazzālī was an outstanding scholar in his own right, his reliance on al-Muḥāsibī is considerable. As such, this article is extremely important as it establishes the

4 Introduction

importance of al-Muḥāsibī as an original thinker and, in addition, shows to some extent the influence of his thought on later generations.

4

*Al-Moḥāsibī – Un Mystique Musulman Religieux Et Moraliste*⁶ by Abd-El-Halim Mahmoud (d. 1398/1978)⁷ (Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner: Paris) in 1940. This work is a published Ph.D thesis, written by the above-mentioned author under the supervision of the renowned French scholar Louis Massignon and is divided into four main parts: the first part deals with al-Muḥāsibī's biography and works, being separated into three subsequent chapters; chapter one examines the social milieu of al-Muḥāsibī and assesses its effect upon him, as well as surveying other external influences, which may have played their part in affecting his thought; chapter two deals with the works of al-Muḥāsibī and is useful in the sense that it provides a chronological classification of the books he wrote; chapter three concludes this part of the research and is concerned with the interpretive method used by al-Muḥāsibī when examining the Qur'ān. Part two contains one chapter only – chapter four – and deals with al-Muḥāsibī's religious theory, including his concept of God, his attitude towards sects and rituals, religious obligations (*al-farā'id*) and meritorious acts (*al-nawāfil*), and concludes with his interpretation of repentance and eschatology. Part three discusses al-Muḥāsibī's moral system, including his ethico-psychological system of human nature and the factors which affect this, such as *al-naḥs*, Satan, vanity (*al-'ujb*), arrogance (*al-kibr*), envy (*al-ḥasad*) and delusion (*al-ghirra*), as well as discussing the topic for which he is best known – 'introspective examination' (*al-muḥāsaba*). The thesis concludes with part four in which the author discusses al-Muḥāsibī's ascetical and mystical theory within Chapter six. This chapter deals with the various qualities required by the mystic, including reliance on God (*al-tawakkul*), scrupulousness (*al-wara'*), asceticism (*al-zuhd*), contentment (*al-riqā*) and divine love (*al-maḥabba*). Thus, this work is also of great importance as it systematically discusses the religious, moral and mystical teachings of al-Muḥāsibī.

5

Kitāb al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh by al-Muḥāsibī: a translation with introduction and notes by Kermit A. Schoonover, which was submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation to Harvard University in 1948.

6

'Al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri'āyah*' by Kermit A. Schoonover in *The Muslim World* (39, 1949), pp. 26–35. This article would seem to be a summary of the author's achievements in the previously mentioned work and is divided into three sections: *A. Life and works of al-Muḥāsibī*, *B. Al-Muḥāsibī and the Development of Muslim Mysticism* and *C. A Summary of 'Kitāb al-Ri'āyah'*. The first section deals with

the biographical data surrounding al-Muḥāsibī's life and provides little which is new, reiterating his dispute with Aḥmad and confirming his Ash'arite tendency. In addition to this, it provides a brief mention of the number of works written by al-Muḥāsibī⁸ and the reason behind the author's choice of *Kitāb al-Ri'āya*.⁹ In the second section Schoonover identifies the importance of al-Muḥāsibī's position within the overall development of Islamic mysticism saying:

For some time scholars have been aware of al-Muḥāsibī and his works, but his position in the history of Muslim mysticism has yet to be adequately recognised. From the point of view of date, geographic location, number of existing works, the quality of writing and the nature of his ideas, al-Muḥāsibī is in a key position to supply information for the understanding of early Islamic mysticism.¹⁰

The author then discusses the differences between al-Muḥāsibī and the later Sufis, with regard to the concept of *dhikr*, *samā'istimā'*, *zuhd* and the purpose of the mystic, which Schoonover asserts differs greatly. He moves on to discuss the relationship between differing types of mysticism in the Near East and their influence on al-Muḥāsibī. He refutes the concept that al-Muḥāsibī's teachings are based on Christian sources but concludes that, although al-Muḥāsibī's thought is essentially Islamic, an indirect Christian influence could not be ruled out.¹¹ In the third and final section Schoonover summarises al-Muḥāsibī's thought and teaching, as found in his most famous work *Kitāb al-Ri'āya*, and concludes the article with a translation from it.¹²

7

Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī by Josef van Ess in *Theologie* (vol. 4, Bonn, Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1961). Bearing in mind van Ess's meticulous scholarship, his reputation in the field of Islamic studies and the depth of the study in question, this work, along with the efforts of Smith and Mahmoud, can be considered one of the most important. Van Ess's work is extremely well structured and begins with a discussion of 'al-Muḥāsibī's Life and Works' (*Leben und Werk*), which encompasses his 'conversion', his relationship with the traditionists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) and the dispute with the Ḥanbalites, as well as the sources quoted in his works and the problem of their chronology and authenticity. The second major part of the book, 'the Human Being' (*Der Mensch*), is divided into three sections, namely: 'al-Muḥāsibī's psychology' (*Die Psychologie al-Muḥāsibīs*), which includes an examination of the heart (*al-qalb*) and the self (*al-naḥs*), 'the World and the Self' (*Die Welt des Ich*), where various negative human characteristics such as heedlessness (*al-ghafla*) and ostentation (*al-riyā'*) are discussed and 'the Conflict of the Intellect against the Self' (*Der Kampf des Verstandes gegen das Ich*), where the intellect (*al-'aql*), knowledge (*al-'ilm*) and various other esoteric qualities such as sincerity (*al-ikhhlās*) and patience (*al-ṣabr*) and their interrelationships with the ego are examined. The third part, 'God and the Human Being' (*Gott und Mensch*), is further divided into three sections and includes: 'Outward Knowledge' (*Die äußere Erkenntnis*), which

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discusses issues such as faith (*al-īmān*) and the debates surrounding God's existence and His attributes (*al-ṣifāt*), 'the Inner Encounter' (*Die innere Begegnung*), where such issues as remembrance (*al-dhikr*), spiritual audience (*al-samā'*) and the Qur'ān are examined and 'the "Friends of God"' ('Die "Freunde Gottes"') where love of the divine (*al-maḥabba*) and God's elect (*al-awliyā'*) are discussed. As can be deduced from the discussion above, van Ess's treatise is comprehensive, which makes it a major source work in the study of al-Muḥāsibī.

8

'Two works of al-Muḥāsibī' by Ahmed Ateş in *Festschrift Werner Castel: zum siebzigsten Geburtstag 5 März 1966 gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern*, ed. von Erwin Gräf (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 37–42. This article concerns two of al-Muḥāsibī's previously undiscovered works extant in manuscript form entitled *Kitāb Fahm al-Qur'ān wa Ma'ānīh* and *Kitāb al-Qaṣd ilā Allāhi Ta'ālā*. Thus, the main goal of Ateş's study is to present a basic description of these manuscripts and a succinct discussion of their contents.¹³

9

'Al-Junayd wa 'l-Muḥāsibī' by 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd in *al-Jadīd* (Cairo: September 1974), pp. 12–13. Despite the title, very little of this article is actually devoted to the relationship between al-Muḥāsibī and his principal student al-Junayd, apart from a few anecdotal statements from the biographical sources, which will be dealt with later in Chapter 2. Rather, Maḥmūd discusses the historical features of the period and the open dispute between the 'orthodox' represented by the Traditionists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) and the 'rationalists', represented by the Mu'tazila. This 'natural' conflict as Maḥmūd terms it was indicative of two irreconcilable approaches to which al-Muḥāsibī added a third – the use of rational methods to defend 'orthodoxy', which ultimately alienated him from both factions. Nevertheless, Maḥmūd posits that this 'third' method enabled him to produce some of the most important books in the Islamic tradition that pioneered the exploration of moral psychology and Sufism in general, which is witnessed by the many praiseworthy comments Maḥmūd closes his article with.

10

'Comment comprendre le Coran selon Muḥāsibī (m. 243/857)' by Michel Allard in *Bulletin D'Études Orientales*, Institut Français de Damas, Tome XXIX (1977), pp. 7–16.

This article begins by sketching the background and life of al-Muḥāsibī before turning its attention to his major work on the Qur'ān – *Kitāb Fahm al-Qur'ān*. Thus, Allard provides a brief exposition of theological underpinnings that al-Muḥāsibī provides to affirm the status of Islam's primary text within the context of the third–ninth century debates regarding the nature of revelation.

11

‘Étude stylistique du *Kitāb al-Tawahhum* le livre de la vision des Fins Dernières d’al-Muḥāsibī’ by André Roman in *Bulletin D’Études Orientales*, Institut Français de Damas, Tome XXXI (1979), pp. 167–266. In this study Roman provides little more than a rudimentary, yet comprehensive, linguistic commentary on his previously published translation of al-Muḥāsibī’s *Kitāb al-Tawahhum*.

12

‘Islam and conservation: the theologian-ascetic al-Muḥāsibī’ by L. Librande in *Arabica*, Tome 30, Fasc. 2 (June 1983), pp. 125–46.

The primary goal of Librande’s article is to provide a translation of al-Muḥāsibī’s *Kitāb al-‘Ilm* but, at the same time, he also begins the article with a discussion of how al-Muḥāsibī attempted to preserve – or as he puts it – conserve a form of religious piety deeply rooted in the concept of ‘tradition’. He suggests that it is within this scenario that al-Muḥāsibī attempts to utilise revelation in the form of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* as the very basis of knowledge (*‘ilm*) and consequently, build on this foundation with action (*‘amal*). Librande concludes the study section of his article with a brief exposition of the content of al-Muḥāsibī’s *Kitāb al-‘Ilm* and attempts to show how this fits within al-Muḥāsibī’s theoretical framework of religious piety.

13

‘Al-muṣṭalaḥ ladā al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī 165–243’ by Ḥusayn al-Quwwatī in *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* (Lebanon: December, 1983), pp. 53–9. Before embarking on his critical edition of al-Muḥāsibī’s *al-Qaṣd wa ‘l-Rujū ‘ilā Allāh*,¹⁴ al-Quwwatī provided a preliminary study of the technical terminology used in al-Muḥāsibī’s works. He begins by discussing the difficulties of studying the books of al-Muḥāsibī, this being partly due to the specific technical vernacular he uses and thus, the need for an explanation of its’ usage. Al-Quwwatī’s discussion therefore concerns the period in which al-Muḥāsibī lived, as this was a period in which many of the Islamic sciences came to fruition in a technical sense, to examine al-Muḥāsibī’s technical use of the language and to summarise his overall methodology. Al-Quwwatī also gives credit to Massingon, Ritter, van Ess and Roman for their efforts in this field previously and concludes that within al-Muḥāsibī’s writing style four major devices can be identified: first, the use of definitions (*al-ta’rīf*) in which he attempts to isolate the essence (*al-māhiyya*) of the subject in question. Secondly, the inference (*al-tafrī’*) of further information derived from the original definition; thirdly, the generation (*al-tawlīd*) of ideas and concepts from those just mentioned and finally, his use of the term *‘al-‘aql ‘an Allāh*’ to denote an intrinsic, divinely inspired perception of a subject, whether it be ethical, psychological, social or metaphysical. Bearing in mind the above discussion, it is clear this article is an essential tool for anyone who wants to gain a greater insight into the works of al-Muḥāsibī.

14

'Taḥlīl zāhirat al-ḥasad 'ind al-Muḥāsibī' by Hāmid Ṭāhir in *Dirāsāt 'Arabiyya wa Islāmiyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Zahrā', 1983), pp. 26–43. This particular article focuses on al-Muḥāsibī's treatment of the human characteristic of envy (*al-ḥasad*) as represented in his most famous work *Kitāb al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*. As such, Ṭāhir approaches the topic by addressing essentially the same subject areas that al-Muḥāsibī adopts in his work, which include: envy and rivalry (*al-ḥasad wa 'l-munāfasa*), the location of envy (*mawḍi' al-ḥasad*), the motives of rivalry (*dawāfi' al-munāfasa*), the motives of envy (*dawāfi' al-ḥasad*) and the treatment of envy ('*ilāj al-ḥasad*'). In this context Ṭāhir provides an examination, discussion and commentary on each of these subject areas interpolating his own thoughts with quotes from al-Muḥāsibī himself and other sources. Consequently, Ṭāhir has produced an excellent addition to the literature, which is extremely useful in discerning al-Muḥāsibī's method as both an author and a moral psychologist.

15

'Al-'Izāt al-Ḥassān fī Shu'ab al-Īmān' by Muṣṭafā al-Sha'rāwī in *al-Islām* (Cairo: 12 June 1987, pp. 5 and 11; 19 June 1987, pp. 5 and 12 and 26 June 1987, pp. 5 and 14). These short series of articles are little more than various quotes from biographical sources and a discussion of al-Muḥāsibī's works and writing style and as such, do not constitute a major addition to the literature other than providing an introduction to this scholar.

16

Al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī: al-'Ālim, al-Zāhid, al-Faqīh by Kāmil Muḥammad Muḥammad 'Uwayḍa (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1994). This work, published under the series '*A'lām al-Fuqahā' wa 'l-Muḥaddithīn*', is a comprehensive treatise dealing with the life and teaching of al-Muḥāsibī by a contemporary scholar. Despite its comprehensive nature it suffers from a lack of organisation, as each subject is dealt with in succession, without any sectioning or categorisation. Thus, the book contains 28 titles each dealing with a specific topic related to al-Muḥāsibī. The first 10 sections – almost half the book – are concerned with the life and works of al-Muḥāsibī: thus, we find the usual biographical information; his life, teachers, students and anecdotal statements are all included. The dispute with Aḥmad is also dealt with and a survey of al-Muḥāsibī's works, including his narration of *ḥadīth*, is also found and this area concludes with his death. The advantage of this book is, however, that all of the above information is referenced to its origin in the Arabic literature, which is of obvious importance. The rest of the book is devoted to al-Muḥāsibī's teaching and the author selects various aspects and discusses them with lengthy quotations from the author's works, so as to summarise and crystallise al-Muḥāsibī's thought and teaching in one place, which is of great service to the reader who wants to gain an overview of the scholar's ideas, without having to read all of his works.

17

Al-Fikr al-Tarbawī 'ind al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī submitted by Aḥmad Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Ḥusayn (unpublished MA thesis, Jordan: Jāmi'at al-Yarmūk, 1990). This academic thesis attempts to examine the educational theory of al-Muḥāsibī whether it be related to the etiquettes of the learner–teacher relationship or psychological and intellectual development. To this effect the author begins by providing an informed biographical section on al-Muḥāsibī and assesses the effect that his environment may have had on him. The following chapter traces the development of education until al-Muḥāsibī's time and assesses his contribution to the overall process. The next two chapters discuss al-Muḥāsibī's approach to both the psychological and intellectual development of the human being and examine the methods that this scholar employs in attempting to achieve this goal. As such this thesis is a very important addition to the literature regarding our subject as it not only examines al-Muḥāsibī's utilisation of moral psychology as an educational means but also assesses his pedagogical skill and methodology.

18

Fikr al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī al-Ṣūfī fī Mīzān al-Kitāb wa 'l-Sunna submitted by Khālīd b. Sulaymān al-Khaṭīb (unpublished MA thesis, Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Malik Sa'ūd, 1997). This thesis aims to examine the doctrinal position of al-Muḥāsibī from his *kalām*-style works by comparing it to the creed represented by 'orthodox', Sunni Islam based on the Qur'ān and the *sunna*, as well as discussing to what extent this scholar differed from the teachings of contemporary and later Sufis, in addition to assessing al-Muḥāsibī's effect on those who came after him. To this effect al-Khaṭīb begins his thesis by providing an introduction to Sufism and its development and also a biographical account of al-Muḥāsibī and his works. The bulk of the thesis, however, is concerned with an examination of the Sufi concepts of station (*maqām*) and state (*ḥāl*), where al-Muḥāsibī's views are compared to those found in apologetic Sufi works such as the *Risāla* of al-Qushayrī and the *Luma'* of al-Sarrāj. Finally, an assesment of al-Muḥāsibī's effect on subsequent scholars is made, the two examples selected being Abu Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111). Al-Khaṭīb's work is useful in the sense that it provides some good points and useful discussions but is ultimately limited by the adoption of an ultra-'orthodox' theological methodology.

19

Mawā'iz al-Imām al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1999). This work, which is part of the '*Ma'ālim fī 'l-Tarbiyya wa 'l-Da'wa*' series that examines various Muslim mystical personalities, was compiled by Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad al-Shāmī, who also produced a critical edition of al-Muḥāsibī's *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*.¹⁵ In this book al-Shāmī has provided a brief but useful introduction to the life and personality of al-Muḥāsibī and arranged the work on the basis of subject areas, providing quotes from al-Muḥāsibī according to the subject

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heading provided. As such, al-Shāmī has furnished the reader with a brief yet organised glimpse of the thought of al-Muḥāsibī and provided a quick reference to his teachings that is a useful addition to the literature concerned with this scholar.

20

‘*Kitāb mā’iyyati al-‘aqli wa ma’nāhu wa ihtilāfi al-nāsi fihi* d’ al-Hārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī (165/781–243/857)’ by Yolande de Crussol in *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph*, Vol. LVI–1999–2003, pp. 17–55. In this article de Crussol essentially provides a French translation of al-Muḥāsibī’s *Kitāb al-‘Aql* and supplements it with a brief introduction and a summarised discussion of its theoretical constructs determined in the extended study discussed below.

21

‘Al-Hārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī’s Concept of Self Examination as Reflected in His *al-Ri’āyah li Ḥuqūq Allāh*’ by Ifitāḥ Ja’far.¹⁶ This concise article consists of three main sections after a brief introduction: the first section briefly presents biographical information regarding al-Muḥāsibī; the second part briefly introduces what is regarded to be al-Muḥāsibī’s greatest work – that of *Kitāb al-Ri’āyah li Ḥuqūq Allāh*; the third section and possibly the most important, deals with al-Muḥāsibī’s concept of self-examination, or *muḥāsabat al-nafs*, where the author gives not only al-Muḥāsibī’s concept but also various scholarly interpretations of al-Muḥāsibī’s thought.

22

‘Analyse du *kitāb al-ghirra bi-llāh* le livre de l’illusion au sujet d’Allah de Muḥāsibī (*m. 243/857*)’ by Yolande De Crussol in *Bulletin D’Études Orientales*, Institut Français de Damas, Tome LIII–LIV (2001–2002), pp. 279–92. A further addition to the literature is made by de Crussol’s discussion of the specific chapter concerning self-delusion (*al-ghirra*) from al-Muḥāsibī’s *Kitāb al-Ri’āyah li Ḥuqūq Allāh*. De Crussol first examines the structure of the chapter and then analyses how this concept fits within the spiritual schema of religious life, as well as how this interacts with vital notions of the intellect (*al-‘aql*) and revelation (*al-wahy*). The article concludes with a comparison of the quality of self-delusion (*al-ghirra*) in *Kitāb al-Ri’āyah* and al-Muḥāsibī’s *Kitāb al-Waṣāyā* and discusses how this conceptualisation fits within al-Muḥāsibī’s overall teachings as a spiritual guide.

23

Le Rôle de la Raison dans la Reflexion Éthique d’Al-Muḥāsibī: ‘Aql et Conversion chez al-Muḥāsibī (165–243/782–857) (Consep: Paris, 2002) by Yolande de Crussol The significance of de Crussol’s study lies in the fact that it is the first

major monograph since van Ess's *Die Gedankenwelt*. Moreover, it examines one of the most critical facets of al-Muḥāsibī's thought – the role of the intellect (*al-'aql*) in his religious world view. With this goal in mind, de Crussol organises the study into three major sections: part one examines the nature of the intellect and how it is an intrinsic human facet. The second part of the study revolves around the ethical theory and is reminiscent of previous studies such as those by Smith, Mahmoud and van Ess. The third part attempts to link the previous two parts and illustrates the role the intellect can play in the spiritual and ethical realms of seeking God and the hereafter.

The significance of de Crussol's work is clear to see as it not only explores a little-studied aspect of al-Muḥāsibī's teaching but also attempts to explore the intersection between the spiritual and the rational within his works.

24

'Qur'ānic abrogation across the ninth century: Shafi'ī, Abū 'Ubayd, Muḥāsibī, and Ibn Qutaybah' by Christopher Melchert in Bernard G. Weiss (ed.), *Studies in Islamic Legal Theory*, Studies in Islamic Law and Society (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 75–98. Building on the work of John Burton, Melchert's contribution explores the maturing of theory of abrogation regarding the Qur'ānic text across the third–ninth centuries, by exploring the contributions of a diverse selection of scholarly writings of the period and the implications of this on later jurisprudence. With regard to al-Muḥāsibī's contribution, Melchert utilises al-Muḥāsibī's *Kitāb Fahm al-Qur'ān* and suggests that, although al-Muḥāsibī's elaboration of abrogation is much more sophisticated than previous attempts, it would be superseded by other theories that became the foundation of later juristic expositions.

Thus, in summary, despite the various entries regarding al-Muḥāsibī in the copious volumes of biographical and historical works of Islamic literature, it was not until the twentieth century that a separate, dedicated study was produced regarding al-Muḥāsibī and his life and works – this of course being the pioneering work of Margaret Smith entitled *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*. It was this in-depth study of al-Muḥāsibī that really introduced the English-speaking world to the value and importance of this scholar. Smith's work is indeed admirable since she had to work almost exclusively with manuscripts and moreover, because her work is intuitive, it is extremely well written and comprehensive. This did not hinder further studies regarding al-Muḥāsibī but rather seems to have given impetus to a number of researchers of her generation such as Arberry, Mahmoud, Schoonover and al-Yasū'ī, who have all provided valuable contributions. The next major study came from the capable hands of van Ess and, along with the early work of Smith, is possibly one of the most important studies of al-Muḥāsibī. In more recent times, equally important work in the realm of bringing the works of al-Muḥāsibī to a published form have been made most notably by 'Aṭā but his work has also been supplemented by al-Khusht, al-Sayyid, Mazālī, al-Quwwatī and Roman. Articles by authors such as Allard, Librande, de Crussol and Ṭāhir

12 Introduction

have been equally useful and have been supplemented by the academic theses of Ḥusayn and al-Khaṭīb. Thus, al-Muḥāsibī has generated a limited but steady stream of scholarship over the last 70 years or so but, despite this, no author has examined his specific methodology regarding *tazkiyat al-naḥs* and, as such, this remains an undiscovered aspect of his thought.

To assess the contribution of any historical personality, however, it is necessary to examine the period in which he lived so as to ascertain the effect of his social milieu upon him, before moving onto an exposition of his life and, indeed, this is the goal of the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 Specific reference to research concerning *tazkiyat al-naḥs* will not be provided here as this has been elucidated elsewhere. For a survey of a selected number of such studies see G. Picken, 'Tazkiyat al-Nafs: The Qur'ānic Paradigm', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vii (2): 120–3, n. 4.
- 2 In addition to the works mentioned here and those of a biographical nature quoted in Chapter 2, there are numerous works which shed light on al-Muḥāsibī but are not concerned with him specifically; these include: Muḥammad Ghalāb, 'al-Taṣawwuf wa 'l-Mutaṣawwifūn', in *Majallat al-Azhar* (Cairo: 9th Ramaḍān 1357/1938) pp. 601–4; Ghalāb, 'al-Taṣawwuf wa 'l-Mutaṣawwifūn', in *Majallat al-Azhar* (Cairo: 4th Rabī' al-Thānī 1360/1941), pp. 235–8 and Ghalāb, 'al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī li 'l-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī', in *Majallat al-Azhar* (Cairo: 2nd Ṣaḥār 1380/July 1960), pp. 166–70; Ibrāhīm Hilāl, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī bayn al-Dīn wa 'l-Falāsifa* (Cairo: Dār al-Nahḍa al-'Arabiyya, 1979), pp. 56–84; Su'ād al-Ḥakīm, 'Makānat al-Ghazzālī min al-'Ulūm al-Ṣūfiyya', in *al-Turāth al-'Arabī* (Damascus: Ittihād al-Kuttāb al-'Arab, January 1986), pp. 120–63; Muṣṭafā 'Ashwī, 'al-Insān al-Kāmil fī 'l-Fikr al-Ṣūfī – Dirāsa Naqdiyya', in *al-Tajdīd* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University, February, 2000), pp. 11–53; Arthur J. Arberry, *Sufism – An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1979), pp. 46–52; and Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), pp. 171–95.

Similarly, I have not included encyclopedia entries due to their general nature but nevertheless two well-informed articles include: Josef van Ess, 'al-Muḥāsibī', in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. Robert McHenry, 15th edn, 29 vols. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1992), vol. 8, pp. 400–1; and R. Arnaldez, 'al-Muḥāsibī', in H. A. R. Gibb, J. H. Kramer, E. Levi-Provencal and J. Schacht (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam – New Edition*, 8 vols. (Leiden and London: E. J. Brill and Luzac & Co., 1954–1960), vol. VII, pp. 466–7. It is also worth noting that a work entitled 'Sacred Mind and Profane Mind: Two kinds of 'Aql with al-Muḥāsibī and al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhi' was attributed to Douglas Kareem Crow at the following website address: <<http://www.american.edu/academic.depts/acainst/cgp/scholars.html>> (accessed 19/02/2001) and was supposedly published in the *Journal of Islamic Studies* published by Oxford University. However, on contacting the 'author' I received no reply and upon contacting the editor at *Journal of Islamic Studies* they informed me that they have no record of such an article.

- 3 Ash'arite refers to the Sunnī school of scholastic theology associated with Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ismā'īl b. Ishāq al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936), who was originally educated in the Mu'tazilite doctrine but later rejected it and openly opposed it, defending the traditional stance regarding God's divine attributes (*ṣifāt*). He himself did not give figurative interpretations (*ta'wīl*) to expressions of divine attributes but affirmed them without further qualifying them (*bi lā kayf*) and adopted as his methodology a position

- of amodality regarding the divine nature. However, those who attribute themselves to his doctrinal thought began to give figurative interpretations to such divine attributes, at a later date. See Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Mīlāl wa ‘l-Niḥāl*, 2 vols. in one book (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 2002), vol. 1, pp. 74–82; M. H. al-Johānī (ed.), *al-Mawsū‘a al-Muyassara fī ‘l-Adyān wa ‘l-Madhāhib wa ‘l-Aḥzāb al-Mu‘āṣira*, 2 vols. (Riyadh: al-Nadwa al-‘Ālamiyya li ‘l-Shabāb al-Islāmī, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 83–94; W. M. Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 64–8 and 75–97; Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd, 1948), pp. 135–64; and Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), pp. 303–16.
- 4 The inaccuracy of these claims will become apparent during the discussion of al-Muḥāsibī’s works in Chapter 3 below.
 - 5 See D. S. Margoliouth, 10 – ‘Notice of the Writings of Abū ‘Abdullah al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, the first Ṣūfī Author’ in *Transaction of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions*, IV – Religions of the Semites (Oxford: 1908), pp. 292–3.
 - 6 This work appears to be rewritten by the author in Arabic, entitled *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn: al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī* and published by Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha in 1973.
 - 7 It is interesting to note that ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd was in fact a renowned scholar of the Arab World, having a distinguished career in al-Azhar University, and was eventually awarded the prestigious title of ‘*Shaykh al-Azhar*’. In addition, his own influence in promoting Sufism was also extremely significant. For details regarding his life and influence see Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’, ‘Al-Azhar Sufism in Modern Egypt: The Sufi Thought of ‘Abd al-Halim Mahmud’, in *The Islamic Quarterly* (London: The Islamic Cultural Centre, 1988), vol. XXXII (number 4):207–35.
 - 8 It is interesting to note that Schoonover mentions that only four of these have been published and, as we shall see, this has increased greatly in the intervening period, as Chapter 3 elucidates.
 - 9 Kermit A. Schoonover, ‘Al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri‘āyah*’, *The Muslim World*, 39 (1949): 26–8.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 28. This is a view that the current author shares and hopes he is able to further contribute to.
 - 11 Schoonover, ‘Al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri‘āyah*’, *The Muslim World*, 39: 28–31 and cf. Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, p. 60.
 - 12 Schoonover, ‘Al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri‘āyah*’, pp. 31–5.
 - 13 It is worth noting that both these manuscripts have now been published, as Chapter 3 will discuss.
 - 14 See Chapter 3 below.
 - 15 See Chapter 3 below.
 - 16 This article was found at the following internet website address: <<http://www.indosat.net.id/alauddin/sufisme1.html>> (accessed 07/10/2000)

1 The ‘Abbāsīd crucible

The historical background to al-Muḥāsibī’s life

Al-Muḥāsibī was born in a highly interesting and well-chronicled era known as the Abbāsīd period. Bearing in mind that individual works have been entirely dedicated to this rich historical part of history, it is difficult to represent in a short chapter such as this. Nevertheless, this section of the book concentrates on the factors within the reign of the ‘Abbāsīds that may have directly affected the life of al-Muḥāsibī. This chapter will begin, therefore, by providing a brief impression of the ‘Abbāsīds, so as to furnish the reader with an overview of the rulers of this particular period of Islamic history. Similarly, the early ‘Abbāsīd period is often regarded as the ‘Golden Age’ of Islamic learning and thus an assessment of intellectual life under these caliphs will also be made. Thirdly, since al-Muḥāsibī spent his formative years in Basra and the better part of his life in Baghdad, both these geographical locations will be discussed to assess their influence on our author. Finally, perhaps the single most important religio-political event in this period was the *miḥna*, commonly termed the ‘Inquisition’, which affected religious praxis during a large proportion of al-Muḥāsibī’s life and therefore this event will also be examined.

The ‘Abbāsīds

The ‘Abbāsīd period covers approximately half a millennium in its entirety, spanning the years 132/750 to 656/1258.¹ Consequently, historians have commonly divided this era into three sub-periods.² The primary era, being known as the first ‘Abbāsīd period (132/750–247/861),³ is generally regarded as a period of growth and prosperity, having built upon the successes of the Umayyads. This is followed by the second ‘Abbāsīd period (247/861–447/1055),⁴ which is regarded as an era of political decline, due to the events leading to the loss of ‘Abbāsīd power. Finally, there is the third ‘Abbāsīd period, which includes the eventual collapse of the caliphate and the sacking of Baghdad at the hands of the Mongol horde (447/1055–565/1258).⁵

The ‘Abbāsīds took charge of the Islamic empire from the Umayyads with the ascension to the throne of Abū ‘l-‘Abbās ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad (r. 132/749–136/754), commonly known as ‘al-Saffāḥ’ (lit. ‘the blood spiller’) due to his merciless execution of the remaining Umayyad dignitaries. The rise of the ‘Abbāsīds was mainly due, on the one hand, to the lack of popularity of the Umayyads, who

were seen as a debauched, 'pro-Arab' aristocracy who had little regard for the welfare of their subjects, and the messianic campaign of the 'Abbāsīds for a return of authority to the house of the Prophet or '*al-riḍā' min āl Muḥammad*', as they put it, on the other. Their claim to authority came through their familial link to the Prophet's uncle al-'Abbās and they would later counter the 'Alid claim to authority – since they were also of Prophetic lineage – by showing that their link was through a male relative, i.e. al-'Abbās and not through a female one, i.e. Fāṭima, the Prophet's daughter, which was apparently still an important factor despite this being a supposed post-*jāhili*, Arab society. This call, or *da 'wa*, proved very popular and gained great support in the eastern provinces generally and in Khurasān in particular. Subsequently, it would be support from this province that would bring the 'Abbāsīds to ascendancy and remain their powerbase for years to come.⁶

The seemingly religious overtone to their claim of legitimacy as rulers was consolidated by their adoption of honorific titles synonymous with the Prophet (*alqāb*, sin. *laqab*), which was unprecedented and seemingly added to their apparent link with God and His primary worldly representative. Later, they would enhance this even further by their patronising of religious learning, which equally added to their claim of 'orthodoxy' and hence, legitimacy. Despite this, however, their powerbase constituted a departure from the 'Arab aristocracy' of the Umayyads, since the majority of their supporters were in fact of Persian origin. Thus, the early 'Abbāsīd period became synonymous with the rise of the Persian 'clients' or *mawālī*, who occupied key positions in the 'Abbāsīd administration and who seemingly 'Persianised' the running of the state along the lines of the old Sasanian model.⁷

The consolidation of 'Abbāsīd power did not lie with Abū 'l-'Abbās al-Saffāh, however, and, indeed, it was his successor Abū Ja'far Muḥammad 'al-Manṣūr' who succeeded in suppressing the 'Alid uprisings and provided the 'Abbāsīd state with a new epicentre, Baghdad, which would remain the state capital for more than half a century to come.⁸ It was into this era that our subject al-Muḥāsibī is reported to have been born in 165/782 and since he died in 243/857, he lived through a considerable portion of the entire primary period of the 'Abbāsīd era. Thus, al-Muḥāsibī lived through the reign of eight 'Abbāsīd caliphs.

1. Muḥammad b. al-Manṣūr, 'al-Mahdī' (r. 158/775–169/785)

Due to the determination, energy, political acumen and renowned frugality of his father, al-Mahdī inherited an empire that was stable, powerful and richly endowed. Consequently, al-Mahdī is remembered as being generous in comparison with his father and he used the state's substantial wealth to improve relations with the 'Alids, by offering them generous stipends and esteemed positions. Seen as a religious ruler due to his building of mosques and patronising of the pilgrimage, al-Mahdī is also remembered for his persecution of those with anti-Islamic tendencies known as *zindīqs*. At the political level, his reign is also a period in which the 'clients' *mawālī* continue to come to prominence and there is a continuation of the expansion of the new secretarial class of civil servants known as the '*kuttāb*', who helped define the administration's bureaucracy.⁹

2. *Mūsā b. al-Mahdī, 'al-Hādī' (r. 169/785–170/789)*

With his reign being so short and with the sources comparing him unfavourably with his brother Hārūn, al-Hādī is a difficult figure to assess. Despite this, we are given the impression that he was determined, forceful and on occasion hasty and ill-tempered. In many ways his reign was a reaction to his father's, as he reversed his policies regarding the 'Alids and attempted to limit the influence of both the *mawālī* and, consequently, the *kuttāb*. His greatest aim, however, was to remove his brother Hārūn from the succession and replace him with his own son Ja'far but his life was cut short in suspicious circumstances and considerable court intrigue.¹⁰

3. *Hārūn b. al-Mahdī, 'al-Rashīd' (r. 170/789–193/809)*

Arguably the most famous of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs, Hārūn al-Rashīd is well known due to his relations with Europe through the French king Charlemagne and perhaps more so for his apparent immortalisation as the caliphal character in the *One Thousand and One Nights*. Similarly, he has a privileged place in Sunni hagiography for his frequent trips of pilgrimage and his own personal support of the jihad against Byzantium. His reign would be marked, however, by his appointment of members of the Barmakid family as his closest ministers and confidantes, who essentially administered the caliphate on his behalf for most of his reign until their untimely demise in controversial circumstances under the very same caliph. Al-Rashīd's caliphate is considerably marred, however, by his almost naive decision to divide power after his death between his sons Muḥammad and 'Abd Allāh – a decision that would lead ultimately to civil war.¹¹

4. *Muḥammad b. al-Rashīd, 'al-Amīn' (r. 193/809–198/813)*

Often portrayed as politically incompetent, reckless and somewhat debauched, al-Amīn remains one of the most tragic figures in 'Abbāsīd history. Having been denied the entire caliphate to himself by his father's will, he wasted little time in attempting to manipulate it back to his own control. His step-brother's steadfastness in resisting the caliph's attempt at wresting power away from him could only have one possible outcome – a civil war. Hostilities soon ensued and culminated in a siege of Baghdad that lasted several months and destroyed great areas of the city but a more severe blow was dealt to the 'Abbāsīd caliphate when al-Amīn was executed by his brother's forces, this being the first incident of fraternal regicide during the dynasty's rule.¹²

5. *'Abd Allāh b. al-Rashīd, 'al-Ma'mūn' (r. 198/813–218/833)*

After receiving the caliphate in the most inauspicious manner, al-Ma'mūn redeemed himself somewhat by proving himself a patron of the arts through actively supporting the translation movement and is intimately associated with the celebrated 'House of Wisdom' (*Bayt al-Ḥikma*). Thus, he is remembered for his role in the

translation of Greek, Indian and Persian works on astronomy, mathematics, medicine and philosophy, as well as his encouraging of court debates on a variety of intellectual matters. His spirit of 'tolerance' was further enhanced by the fact he seemingly attempted to bridge the gap between his own family's dynasty and the rival 'Alids by appointing 'Alī al-Riḍā' as his heir but this attempt proved doomed to failure. Due to his tolerant approach to 'foreign' learning and 'unorthodox' views he was labelled 'commander of the unbelievers' (*amīr al-kāfirīn*), a title which would be given further credence in the eyes of his opponents by his adoption of the 'Inquisition' (*miḥna*) – a policy, as we will see, that would define his caliphate.¹³

6. Muḥammad b. al-Rashīd, 'al-Mu'taṣim' (r. 218/833–227/842)

On ascending the throne, al-Mu'taṣim had been requested by his brother to continue pursuing the policy of the *miḥna*, which he did reluctantly and it seems that he was satisfied to pursue it in the form of courtroom formality only. The one exception was of paramount significance, however, as it lives on in the pages of history, this being the trial of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), which will be discussed later. Al-Mu'taṣim's reluctance to pursue the *miḥna* is often attributed to his lack of intellectual learning but equally the caliph was occupied by a number of events during his reign, such as the revolt of Bābak (d. 223/838), the trial of his general Ashfīn (d. 226/841), mounting his offensive against Amorium, coping with the revolt of Mayzār, overcoming the Zoṭṭ revolt and the transfer of the capital from Baghdad to Sāmarrā'. This latter move was an attempt to relocate the army which had become influenced by its 'Turkish' contingent – a feature that would define the 'Abbāsīd political landscape for years to come.¹⁴

7. Hārūn b. al-Mu'taṣim, 'al-Wāthiq' (r. 227/842–232/847)

In many ways the reign of al-Wāthiq was also an extension of his father's, as he continued appointing 'Turks' to key positions in the military and Bughā was one of these who distinguished himself in suppressing the various revolts of the period. Although al-Wāthiq was seemingly a capable politician, he relied heavily on his two chief ministers, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik al-Zayyāt (d. 233/847) and Aḥmad b. Abū Du'ād (d. 240/854), to the extent that he consulted them in all of his affairs. It was under this latter vizier that the *miḥna* was vigorously pursued and the insurgent Aḥmad b. Nasr al-Khuzā'ī (d. 231/845) was executed seemingly not for his ill-fated coup but for his opposition to the state creed. Ibn Abū Du'ād continued to wield power within the administration until he was defeated in a debate regarding the nature of the Qur'ān and thus the caliph seems to have withdrawn his support for the *miḥna* policy.¹⁵

8. Ja'far b. al-Mu'taṣim, 'al-Mutawakkil' (r. 232/847–247/861)

Despite this general period being known as a period of decline, the ascension of al-Mutawakkil began a period of relative stability for the Islamic state. It is true

that the caliph began to lose his influence over the wider boundaries of the empire, due to the internal competition of his officers and bureaucrats but, despite this, the state stabilised due to al-Mutawakkil's ending of the Mu'tazilite policy and its consequent inquisition. In addition to this, the caliph also adopted a severe policy regarding the Shi'ite elements, destroying the mausoleum of al-Ḥusayn at Karbalā'. Thus, the rule of al-Mutawakkil had a rather authoritarian flavour, as he took his dignity as a ruler very seriously. This, however, was not sufficient for him to survive the devious plotting of his Turkish *amīrs* and they eventually succeeded in assassinating him in 247/861.¹⁶

Intellectual life in the early 'Abbāsīd period

Despite virtual autonomy in the Middle East, the Arab caliphate had little to show in terms of academic endeavour since the Arabs prior to Islam were mostly an illiterate people, whose main achievement was the eloquence of their language and the recording of their history and culture in a poetic form. This 'underachievement' was to change dramatically during the early 'Abbāsīd period for a number of reasons, the foremost of which will be alluded to here. First, the shifting of the seat of power to Iraq placed the new caliphate at the centre of the academic and cultural world; India with a long history of mathematics, medicine and science lay to the east. Alexandria, the seat of accumulated Greek thought, lay to the north as did the academic centres of Damascus and Ḥarrān. Similarly, in neighbouring Persia there were other intellectual institutions such as that at Jundīsābūr.¹⁷

Although these intellectual centres were significant during the rule of the Umayyads, they seem to have had little impact on their caliphate. Therefore, the second important factor in the flourishing of learning under the 'Abbāsīds was the changing demographic structure of its administration. The introduction of the 'clients' (*al-mawālī*) into the bureaucratic structure created a new 'civil servant' or 'secretary' class (*kuttāb*) in the administration, the vast majority of whom were non-Arabs and who were exemplified by the Barmakids and Nawbakhts and their protégés. Having access to the caliph and hence influence, this 'foreign' contingent encouraged the rulers to take an interest in the surrounding culture of science and learning of the adjacent non-Arab/non-Muslim populations.¹⁸

The response of the caliphs was forthcoming and they obliged by patronising the accessing of this knowledge of the ancient and diverse societies surrounding them. The impetus for this development came from what Gutas terms 'the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement' that existed in Baghdad and early 'Abbāsīd society.¹⁹ This was the primary cause in the development of learning in the 'Abbāsīd era and would have been impossible, however, without an important discovery – that of paper. The introduction of this technology, apparently by Chinese prisoners of war, quickly replaced the regular writing materials of the day and, although initially it was only used by the caliph for official documents and personal letters, it soon became more widely available, fuelling the learning process with an essential resource.²⁰

Although the translation of 'foreign' works was not unheard of in the Umayyad period, it was under the 'Abbāsīd reign that it flourished initially under the

policies of both al-Manṣūr and his son al-Mahdī.²¹ The same policy of translation continues among their successors but it was under the authority of al-Ma'mūn that the translation movement was at its height,²² culminating in the development of the celebrated *Bayt al-Ḥikma*, 'the House of Wisdom', which seems to have acted as an institution for the translation, copying and keeping of books.²³ It is also worth mentioning that it was not only the caliphs who played a role in this process but indeed other members of society also took part in this culture of supporting the translation of non-Arabic works; the most celebrated of these were arguably the Banū Mūsā, i.e. Mūsā b. Shākir and his three sons, who would pay as much as 500 *dīnārs* monthly for full-time translators.²⁴

As for the translators, it is worth noting that many of them were Christians, usually of the Nestorian denomination, due to their skills with Greek and more specifically, Syriac, which was an intermediary language, and Arabic. These scholars were numerous but the foremost in this field were Yaḥyā [Ibn] al-Biṭrīq, Qusṭā b. Lūqā (d. 298/912), 'Abd al-Masīḥ b. Nā'ima al-Ḥimsī, Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d. 362/974) and Abū Bisr Mattā b. Yūnus (d. 327/940).²⁵ However, the most illustrious of these scholars was the renowned Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (d. 296/910), who is reported to have translated more than 31 works, being paid 500 *dīnārs* per month and an amount of gold equivalent to the weight of the books he translated, in addition to being the court physician during the time of al-Mutawakkil.²⁶ The nature of the translated works concerned classical learning as a whole and included astronomy, mathematics, medicine and philosophy from the works of Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, Euclid, Plotinus and Ptolemy.²⁷

This is not to say that these sciences were merely academic efforts but, indeed, they were put to practical use by a number of luminaries of the period. Astronomical observation had begun in Baghdad at an observatory in the al-Shammāsiyya district, on the left bank of the Tigris, east of al-Ruṣāfa and Ibrāhīm al-Fazārī, who had translated the Indian book of Astronomy, *Sindhind*, into Arabic for al-Manṣūr and who had helped plan the foundation of Baghdad, was the first in the Arab world to make astrolabes.²⁸ This work was continued in the time of al-Ma'mūn by Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Khwārizmī, who also adapted Ptolemy's *Geographike Hyphegesis* and composed the first independent textbook on algebra (*al-jabr*), resulting in his name surviving until today in the term 'algorithm' for the formulation of the calculation method.²⁹

Medicine was always a popular topic considering its practical application and the royal court's requirement for the caliph's treatment when ill. Thus, in addition to Ḥunayn b. Ishāq there were a host of royal physicians during the 'Abbāsīd period; the earliest of these may have been Jurgis b. Jibrīl b. Bukhtīshū' who came from Jundīsābūr to Baghdad in 147/765 to treat the caliph al-Manṣūr due to his skill in Hippocratic/Galenic medicine. The Bukhtīshū' family was arguably the most influential medical dynasty, their descendants serving as a series of caliphs right up until the time of al-Mutawakkil. In addition, other Jundīsābūr families also participated in this field, including those of al-Ṭayfūrī and Māsawayh who were the most prominent, Yaḥyā b. Māsawayh being the foremost exemplar of the latter family.³⁰

Perhaps the most influential of these academic disciplines from the ancient world to have the greatest effect on the religious learning was that of philosophy. In the same way that the other translated sciences found their champions mentioned above, philosophy would find an avid supporter in the personality of Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī (d. ca. 255/870). Al-Kindī was from the well-known, aristocratic Arabic tribe of Kinda and enjoyed a privileged upbringing, his family being associated with government appointments in the ‘Abbāsīd regime, while he himself became attached to the court in the time of al-Mu‘taṣim. It would be a misrepresentation, however, to portray al-Kindī as purely a philosopher, as he was a polymath, who engaged with all of the disciplines mentioned thus far. Nevertheless, it is with philosophy that his name is synonymous and, to this end, he was one of those who introduced the Muslim world to philosophy, to the extent that he was given the honorific title of ‘the philosopher of the Arabs’ (*faylasūf al-‘Arab*).³¹

This is not to say that the only works that were translated were of a scientific nature, as in fact literary works were also transferred from one culture to another, to which Ibn al-Muqaffa‘’s (d. 139/757) translation of Bidpai’s fables, in the form of *Kalīla and Dimna*, bears witness.³² Ibn al-Muqaffa‘’s superb writing style is regarded as having given birth to Arabic prose (*adab*) as a discipline but his seminal efforts were brought to fruition by other writers who wrote not from translations but from their own literary ability. The most illustrious of these was Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (b. 250/864 or 255/869 or 256/870), who, in addition to being an ardent Mu‘tazilite, wrote prose works of outstanding quality, such as *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* and *Kitāb al-Bukhālā*.³³ A similar polymath, who followed shortly behind al-Jāḥiẓ in the field of Arabic prose, was his contemporary, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), who distinguished himself with equally impressive works such as *Adab al-Kātib*.³⁴

Despite the development of a new literary vehicle, i.e. that of prose literature, Arabic poetry remained a vibrant artistic form. Nevertheless, the style, metre and to some extent, the content differed from the more ‘classical’ Arabic style. The Arabs, for the most part, no longer lived a nomadic lifestyle in the desert but, rather, had become urbanised, living in flourishing cities and budding metropolises and, consequently, this was reflected in their poetry. The poetry also took a more ‘debauched’ feel as the subject matter was often concerned with wine drinking and illicit affairs; the most notable of the poets of this genre in the ‘Abbāsīd period were Abū Nuwās (d. ca. 198/814), whose drunken misadventures were often the subject of his poetic talent, and Bashshār b. Burd (d. 166/783), who frequented the court of al-Mahdī but whose eroticism alarmed those with religious proclivities.³⁵

Other linguistically related disciplines were also not neglected during this period and Arabic philology was a notable development. The need to examine the depth of the Qur’ānic implementation of the Arabic language became paramount so as to understand the nuances of usage and to gain insight into its multiplicity of meanings. To this end, a number of scholars began the process of formulating works in his field, which apparently resulted in competing schools in both Basra

and Kūfa. Of the early Basran contingent, Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. ca. 175/791–92) is the most famous for his dictionary *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, which employed the method of utilising classical poetical verses as proof of usage – a method that later would become the established practice. Similarly, Khalīl is credited with the creation of the basic concepts that govern poetic meter (*ʿilm al-ʿarūḍ*) and grammar (*al-naḥw*) and therefore his contribution can hardly be underestimated. Equally significant, however, are the efforts of his student, the much celebrated Sībawayh (d. 180/796), who preserved this grammatical system and developed it further. On the Kūfan side, Sībawayh's competitor was al-Kisāʿī (d. 189/804), who had taught al-Rashīd and his son al-Mahdī, as well as his disciple al-Farrāʿ (d. 207/822), who taught Qurʾānic exegesis (*al-tafsīr*) in the mosque at Kūfa and composed a work on grammatical definitions in the court of al-Maʾmūn.³⁶

It was also in this period that Muslims began to register works concerning their history and, in particular, biographical details concerning the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (*al-sīra al-nabawiyya*). One of the earliest of these works to reach us is a complete account of the Prophet's life written for al-Manṣūr by Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d. 151/768). His work was continued under al-Rashīd by the Barmakid protégé al-Wāqīdī (d. 207/822), whose efforts concerned the campaigns of the Prophet (*al-maghāzī*). Similarly, another work in the period and heavily reliant on Ibn Ishāq is one of the most famous works of the genre, the *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* of Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833). In addition to strict biographical accounts, another genre appeared – that of charting each generation from the Prophet's time to the present, commonly referred to as *ṭabaqāt* and the first scholar to construct a work in this manner was Muḥammad b. Saʿd (d. 230/845).³⁷

This biographical trend can be seen as an extension of another tradition that had seemingly continued from an early period – that of collecting narrations regarding the Prophet's actions, statements and tacit approval – also known as *ḥadīth*.³⁸ Although this process had continued for some time and had some official support under the Umayyads, it was under the 'Abbāsīd regime that it would flourish and in many ways come to fruition.³⁹ During this period there were a number of prominent *ḥadīth* collectors scattered throughout the Muslim world who included: 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Jurayj (d. 150/767) at Mecca, Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d. 151/768) and Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abū Dhī'b (d. 158/775) in Medina, Saʿd b. 'Arūba (d. 156/773) and Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167/783) at Basra, Zā'ida b. Qudāma (d. 160/777) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) at Kūfa, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Amr al-Awzā'ī (d. 157/774) in Syria, 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) in Khurasān, Hushaym b. Bashīr (d. 183/799) at Wāsiṭ, Jarīr b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (d. 188/804) at Rayy and 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb (d. 197/813) in Egypt.⁴⁰

Despite their best efforts, of the earliest *ḥadīth* works to reach us from this era is that of the imam of Medina, Mālik b. Anas's (d. 179/795) *al-Muwattaʿa*, reportedly written at the behest of al-Manṣūr,⁴¹ in addition to the encyclopedic *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), which contains nearly 30,000 narrations.⁴² These early works were followed by the most famous collections of *ḥadīth*, known as the 'six canonical works' that comprised *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of Abū 'Abd Allāh

Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870),⁴³ *al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of Abū 'l-Ḥusayn Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī (d. 261/875),⁴⁴ the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. al-Ash'ath al-Sijistānī (d. 275/889),⁴⁵ the *al-Jāmi'* of Abū 'Isā Muḥammad b. 'Isā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892),⁴⁶ the *Sunan* of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915)⁴⁷ and the *Sunan* of Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Qazwīnī [Ibn Mājah] (d. 273/886),⁴⁸ in addition to a variety of other works in the period.⁴⁹

The collection of *ḥadīth* also contributed to the development of another field of learning that was equally vibrant during the 'Abbāsīd period – that of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). The flourishing of *fiqh* during this period was facilitated by a number of factors including state support for jurists and the commissioning of jurisprudential works. In addition, the atmosphere of debate and discussion that was apparent among the scholars even took place at the royal court and there was an increase in the centres of learning and, consequently, the compilation of the first works.⁵⁰ This ultimately led to the formation of the four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence that still exist today, i.e. those of Abū Ḥanīfā al-Nu'mān b. Thābit (d. 150/767) known as the Ḥanafī school (*al-madḥhab al-ḥanafī*),⁵¹ Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) known as the Mālikī school (*al-madḥhab al-mālikī*),⁵² Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) known as the Shāfi'ī school (*al-madḥhab al-shāfi'ī*)⁵³ and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) known as the Ḥanbalī school (*al-madḥhab al-ḥanbalī*).⁵⁴ This is not to say that there were only four skilled, independent jurists (*mujtahidūn*) during this period but, indeed, this part of Islamic history was renowned for the existence of a host of prominent scholars of comparable ability who included: Sufyān b. Sa'īd al-Thawrī (d. 161/778),⁵⁵ 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Amr al-Awzā'ī (d. 157/774),⁵⁶ al-Layth b. Sa'd al-Fahmī (d. 175/791),⁵⁷ Sufyān b. 'Uyayna al-Hilālī (d. 197/814),⁵⁸ Ishāq b. Rāhawayh al-Ḥanẓalī (d. 238/853),⁵⁹ Abū Thawr Ibrāhīm b. Khālīd al-Kalbī (d. 240/854),⁶⁰ Dāwūd b. 'Alī al-Zāhirī (d. 270/884)⁶¹ and Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923).⁶²

Theological debate was no less dynamic during the reign of the early 'Abbāsīd caliphs; the Shi'ite and Khārijite tendencies of the early period were still active⁶³ and the trend towards polemics regarding man's actions and divine will was further developed by a new sectarian view termed Mu'tazilism,⁶⁴ geared towards a rational dialectic and probably fuelled by the introduction of the Greek sciences of logic and philosophy.⁶⁵ This latter trend will be dealt with briefly in the following sections but the discussion here will focus on a repercussion of this development. The general populace of the Muslim community and their scholars at this stage can be designated as being 'Sunni' and be considered in opposition to the controversies raised by the sects just mentioned. With the advent of a rational approach as proposed by the Mu'tazilites, what Watt terms 'the General Religious Movement'⁶⁶ was faced with a new challenge to their claim of 'orthodoxy'.

In the face of the onslaught of Mu'tazilite rationalism many scholars remained steadfast, doggedly holding on to the creed they inherited from their predecessors, whereas others evolved an equally rational approach to defend their 'orthodox' beliefs against the digressions of their coreligionists. This rational method of

defending orthodoxy that would be closely associated with Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935) in later times was apparent in the first generation of Sunni scholastic theologians (*mutakallimū ahl al-sunna*) long before his arrival.⁶⁷ Indeed, these scholars may be viewed as the precursors of al-Ash'arī and included such notables as: 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'īd b. Kullāb (d. ca. 239/854),⁶⁸ Abū 'l-'Abbās al-Qalānisi⁶⁹ and of most interest to us, our subject al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī.⁷⁰ As such, this trend, which was vehemently opposed by ultra 'orthodox' Sunnites such as Ibn Ḥanbal, is extremely significant as it lays the ground for the latter-day Ash'arite school of scholastic theology (*kalām*).⁷¹

In summary, when reflecting on the discussion that has been presented above it is hardly surprising that the early 'Abbāsīd period was known as the 'Golden Age' of Islamic learning. Bearing this in mind, it is appropriate now to examine the geographic locations in which al-Muḥāsibī lived, to explore what other trends may well have influenced his life and works.

Basra in the 'Abbāsīd early period

The city of Basra may well stand on the site of an old Persian settlement as it was known to the Arabs as 'al-Khurayba' (lit. the little ruin) but its life as a Muslim town can be considered a new construction. The area was chosen by the Prophetic Companion 'Utba b. Ghazwān in 17/638 on the orders of the second caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb to establish a military camp; this became known as al-Baṣra, probably due to the nature of the area's soil, as the name appears to mean 'black pebbles'. Strategically placed 15 kilometres from the Shaṭṭ al-'Arab, Basra was to afford control over the Persian Gulf and provide a base for expeditions east. The location's first dwellings were simple reed huts, which were gradually replaced by crude bricks and eventually by baked bricks due to the efforts of the Umayyad Ziyād b. Abū Sufyān (d. 53/673), who can be regarded as the architect of the city's prosperity.⁷²

Despite its early development, Basra suffered from a lack of readily available drinking water and a notoriously difficult climate but, nevertheless, due to various economic, strategic and political factors it became a great city. Being a major military encampment it was populated by some of the 'aristocratic' Arab tribes, the town being divided into five tribal sectors (*khums*, pl. *akhmās*): Ahl al-'Āliya, Tamīm, Bakr b. Wā'il, 'Abd al-Qays and 'Azd. Similarly, the population of Basra included the ranks of the *mawālī*, and a number of immigrant populations, such as Persians, Indians, Malays and people from Sind, and the Zanj, adding to the new town's 'cosmopolitan' nature.⁷³

Basra reached its zenith in the second/eighth century, being fully developed and having a large population.⁷⁴ At this stage it was very much a great city and a 'complete metropolis', as it had a commercial centre, Mirbad (the kneeling place for camels), situated at the western gate where the caravans halted and was one of the busiest parts of the city. Similarly, it contained a river port termed al-Kallā', which could accommodate ships of a fairly large tonnage and a financial centre run by wealthy non-Arabs, Christians and Jews. In addition, Basra also had an

industrial area with its arsenal and an agricultural centre famed for its variety of dates.⁷⁵ During this period Basra had the character of a semi-independent metropolis but with the foundation of Baghdad it lost most of this quality that it had possessed since its inception, becoming little more than a provincial town, and being completely supplanted by the newly founded ‘Abbāsīd capital.⁷⁶

The first ascetic school in Basra

It is hardly surprising that such a metropolis that boasted such a highly diverse demographic make-up also became a centre for intellectual endeavour and academic excellence. In fact, Basra was one of the earliest and most influential centres of learning in the Muslim world, as Louis Massignon comments, ‘Basra, in fact, is the veritable crucible in which Islamic culture assumed its form, crystallised in the classic mould, between the first and fourth centuries of the *hijra* (16/637–311/923)’.⁷⁷ As such, a number of intellectual, academic and religious movements arose in tandem with the flourishing of Basra itself. Some of these are of primary importance to the current discussion, in the sense that they may have direct relevance to the life of al-Muḥāsibī and therefore will be discussed presently.⁷⁸

Of these clearly identifiable trends is the ascetic nature of the spiritual teaching in Basra, which is almost exclusively associated with the city’s most famous son al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), and which is commonly held to be the precursor of what would later be termed Sufism. Although al-Ḥasan’s influence upon the ascetic tradition in Basra cannot be denied, upon examination we find that this trend originates long before his arrival on the scene. In fact the trend for an ascetic, spiritual lifestyle can be traced back to one of its early governors from the Companion generation, Abū Mūsā [‘Abd Allāh b. Qays] al-Ash‘arī (d. 44/665). Abū Mūsā was one of the most famous Prophetic Companions, being associated with the pietistic individuals known as ‘the people of the bench’ (*ahl al-ṣuffa*)⁷⁹ and one of the renowned reciters of the Qur’ān, who were requested by the Prophet himself to recite for him personally. With this in mind, the second caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb placed him in charge of the affairs of Basra but in addition to his administrative duties, one of his main tasks was to teach the recital of the Qur’ān – a tradition that later became a manifest quality of the Basran ascetic ‘school’.⁸⁰ In addition, he was famed for his fasting despite the heat and his rousing sermons, in which he would warn of the torments of hell and the dangers of becoming attached to the worldly life, to the extent that the audience would weep out of fear – another quality that became an intrinsic part of the spiritual teaching in Basra.⁸¹

The initial impetus supplied by Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī gave rise to a number of scholars who took up the mantle of such an ascetical teaching, each of them advancing it in their own way until we find the development of what al-Nashshār terms, ‘the first Basran school’ (*madrasat al-Baṣra al-ūlā*).⁸² This school was exemplified by a number of personalities but since an in-depth discussion of each of them individually is beyond the scope of the current work, only the prominent names will be given here: ‘Āmir b. ‘Abd [al-] Qays (d. ca. 50/670),⁸³ Harim b. Ḥayyān,⁸⁴ al-Aḥnaf b. Qays,⁸⁵ Abū ‘Āliya [Rafī‘ b. Mahrān] al-Rayyāhī

(d. 93/712),⁸⁶ Ṣila b. Ushaym al-‘Adawī (d. 62/682)⁸⁷ and his wife Mu‘ādhā bt. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Adawiyya.⁸⁸

The second ascetic school in Basra

The development of asceticism did not stop here, however, and continued into what al-Nashshār terms ‘the second Basran school’ (*madrasat al-Baṣra al-thāniya*)⁸⁹ for which Muṭarrif b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Shakīr (d. 87/706 or 95/714)⁹⁰ may be viewed as a precursor. The eponym of this school was not Muṭarrif, however, but Basra’s most illustrious inhabitant al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, whose influence in shaping religious life in general and the ascetic life in particular in Basra is proverbial. After spending his formative years in the city of the Prophet, Medina and a brief period of military service on the frontiers, he eventually settled in Basra where he became famous – like his spiritual predecessor Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī – for his fiery sermons, which are held to be masterpieces of religious rhetoric, as well as one of the earliest specimens of Arabic prose. His teaching revolved around the avoidance of sin, anticipation of the Last Judgement, and rejection of worldly attitudes and the attachment to worldly possessions. Similarly, al-Ḥasan’s practice of humility and self-scrutiny provided the cornerstone of his self-discipline and introspection and, when combined with his brotherly feeling towards his contemporaries,⁹¹ it defined him as being, as Knysh puts it, ‘the archetypal proto-Sufi’.⁹²

It is hardly surprising that such a personality influenced so many of his contemporaries and although there were many, due to the constraints of the current work, only the most prominent names will be mentioned here: Yazid b. Abān al-Raqāshī (d. between 101/719–121/739),⁹³ Muḥammad b. Wāsi‘ (d. 120/738 or 123/741 or 127/745),⁹⁴ Thābit b. Aslam al-Bunānī (d. 123/741 or 127/745),⁹⁵ Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 128/746),⁹⁶ Farqad b. Ya‘qūb al-Sabkhī (d. 131/749),⁹⁷ Ḥabīb al-‘Ajamī (d. 156/773),⁹⁸ Ayyūb b. Tamīma al-Sikhtiyānī (d. 131/749)⁹⁹ and ‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd (d. 177/794).¹⁰⁰

This generation of scholars were known as ‘ascetics’ (*nussāk*) due to their austere lifestyles, ‘reciters’ (*qurrā’*) due to their emphasis on the teaching of the Qur’ān and presumably its implementation, ‘worshippers’ (*ubbād*) due to their strict adherence to their devotions, ‘preachers’ (*quṣṣāṣ*) due to the delivery of their heart-felt sermons and ‘weepers’ (*bakkā’ūn*), due to their shedding of tears publicly when moved by eloquent speech or the remembrance of death or the hereafter.¹⁰¹ This teaching was further advanced by the students of Ibn Zayd, such as Riyāḥ b. ‘Amr al-Qaysī (d. 195/210),¹⁰² but more famously by Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 185/801),¹⁰³ who espoused the doctrine of ‘divine love’ (*al-ḥubb al-ilāhī*), which would infuse the doctrines of Sufism for centuries to come.

The Mu‘tazilite school in Basra

The other outstanding intellectual trend that may have had a direct effect on al-Muḥāsibī during the early ‘Abbāsīd era was the establishment of the Mu‘tazilite school in Basra. Quite paradoxically this too is said have been a product of the circle

of students that surrounded al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Tradition has it that a student of al-Ḥasan, Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ (d. 131/749),¹⁰⁴ was present during a debate concerning the status of a sinful believer, i.e. what would be the abode of such a person in the hereafter, paradise or hell? Wāṣil’s opinion, which he no doubt expressed, was that such a person would neither be in paradise nor hell but in an intermediate position (*manzila bayn manzilatayn*). This view was opposed by those present and Wāṣil left this gathering to which al-Ḥasan is reported to have said that Wāṣil has withdrawn (*i’tazala*). Thus, such exponents of this view were known as al-Mu‘tazila, lit. ‘those who have withdrawn’, i.e. from the views held by the majority of the community.¹⁰⁵

This ‘intellectualising’ of religious dogma seemingly set in motion by Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ developed into a rationalised approach to theology, which seems to have been associated with the acquaintances of another Basran theologian, Abū ‘Amr ‘Dīrār b. ‘Amr al-Ghaṭafānī (d. 182/800 or 204/820)¹⁰⁶ and culminated in what became known as the Mu‘tazilite school in Basra. A full discussion of this school and its views are beyond the scope of the current work and, as such, only the names of the most prominent personalities will be given here: Abū Hudhayl Muḥammad b. Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 227/842),¹⁰⁷ Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Sayyār al-Nazzām (d. 221/836 or 230/845 or 231/846 or 232/847),¹⁰⁸ Mu‘ammar b. ‘Abbād al-Sulamī (d. 214/830 or 220/835),¹⁰⁹ Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Kaysān al-Aṣamm (b. 200/816),¹¹⁰ Hishām b. ‘Amr al-Fuwaṭī al-Shaybānī (b. 218/833 or 226/841),¹¹¹ Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (b. 250/864 or 255/869 or 256/870)¹¹² and Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Shahḥām (d. ca. 266/880).¹¹³

Baghdad in the early ‘Abbāsīd period

It is a common historical feature that each dynasty upon seizing the reins of power establishes a new seat for that power, to demonstrate its identity and prestige and thus erase its predecessors from the collective memory of their subjects. In this regard, the ‘Abbāsīds were no exception; on ascending the throne al-Saffāh had moved the centre of the empire from Damascus to Kūfa and later to a purpose-built capital known as al-Hāshimiyya, in honour of the dynasty. This proved relatively unsuccessful, however, since the establishment of this new centre was attempted at four different sites in the vicinity of Kūfa and Anbar.¹¹⁴

Upon taking control of the state from his brother, al-Manṣūr maintained al-Hāshimiyya as the capital but with the riot of the Rāwandīyya in 141/758 and the close vicinity of Kūfa, which had maintained its Shi‘ite sympathies from an early period, al-Manṣūr decided to search for a new more suitable seat for his power. In addition, he decided that the new capital would remain in Iraq despite the powerbase of the dynasty being in Khurasān, as this province was far too remote from the rest of the empire for power to be wielded efficiently but, nevertheless, the ‘Abbāsīds still required a suitable location to settle their eastern partisans. After travelling to inspect various sites personally, al-Manṣūr eventually decided upon the small hamlet of Baghdād, being suitably impressed with its strategic position – on the banks of the Tigris, its pleasant climate and the legends surrounding it – the name apparently meaning ‘a gift from God’.¹¹⁵

Having chosen the site, al-Manṣūr himself was active in tracing the foundations of the new city and, having done so, summoned the local craftsman and artisans to begin work on the construction in 145/762, which was located on the west bank of the Tigris. The official name of the city was Madīnat al-Salām, 'the City of Peace', in reference to paradise in the Qur'ānic verse (6:127, 10:26) but the city was also known as al-Zawrā', 'the crooked', as well as the original name of Baghdād. At the heart of the construction was the tremendous Round City, with its huge fortifications, walls, moat and gates. At the centre of the Round City lay some administrative buildings, troops quarters, the main mosque and the caliph's palace, known as the 'Palace of Gold' (*qaṣr al-dhahab*), famous for its green dome over the audience chamber. The almost 'cosmic' design of the Round City with its four huge gates, each leading to a 'corner' of the empire (Syria [NW], Kūfa [SW], Basra [SE] and Khurasān [NE]), seemed to imply the caliph's centralising of the 'Abbāsīd power, as well as supplying him with a fortress to act as a base for his plans. The initial building process took almost one year – 146/763 – before the official caliphal administration was moved to the new capital and construction was finally completed in 149/766.¹¹⁶

The eloquent town planning of the Round City was not the only stroke of genius manifested by al-Manṣūr, however, but indeed, the surrounding and adjacent areas to the main complex were also well thought out. The neighbouring areas to the Round City were organised into quarters that were designed for a unique purpose and to be populated by a specific section of society. Most notably, these included al-Ḥarbiyya district, which housed the military contingent made up of the Khurasānī troops, and the Karkh quarter, which was a commercial district, housing the main markets of Baghdad and supplying the palace complex with its needs. Similarly, al-Manṣūr built himself a second palace termed 'Eternity' (*al-Khuld*), which later became his and many of his successors' preferred residence, possibly due to its pleasant location on the bank of the Tigris and as an escape from the pressure of the administrative centre in the Round City. In addition, the east bank also flourished with the building of bridges and a new district termed 'the Causeway' (*al-Ruṣāfa*). This was further enhanced by the establishment of a further palace for his son and heir known as 'Askar al-Mahdī, due to the encampment of his troops there, in 151/768 on his triumphant return to Baghdad. Subsequently, this had the knock-on effect of developing the market areas on the east side to the extent that they came to rival the Karkh district on the western bank.¹¹⁷

Thus, by the time al-Mahdī ascended the throne in 158/775 – some seven years before the birth of al-Muḥāsibī – Baghdad was a fully developed, thriving metropolis, acting as the new capital for a firmly established 'Abbāsīd state. With the myriad of opportunities such a new construction posed, it is not surprising that the capital also became a multicultural centre assimilating various peoples and culture in an open, Islamic context, in much the same way that Basra had done before it. Consequently, it became a 'melting pot' for new ideas, thought and learning, which was a product of its nascent demography. Moreover, numerous new intellectual trends appeared and developed to the background of Baghdad society and, this being the case, it is appropriate that the most prominent and significant of these be examined.¹¹⁸

The Mystical school in Baghdad

If the ascetic school in Basra exemplified by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and his teachers was extremely prominent, it was by no means unique in Iraq and, indeed, a similar trend existed in other cities such as Kūfa. The foundation of Baghdad, however, provided a focal point for the gathering of scholars and the accumulation and assimilation of the various trends that existed in a variety of fields of Islamic learning. Spiritual instruction was no exception and the formation of one of the earliest tendencies towards a ‘genuine’ form of Islamic mysticism – or Sufism – can be seen to develop out of the prevailing spiritual propensities in the new ‘Abbāsid capital, which has caused this development to be termed the ‘Mystical school of Baghdad’.¹¹⁹

The development of the school is relatively difficult to trace but the agent of its design in its initial stages is usually regarded as being Abū Maḥfūz Ma‘rūf b. Fayruzān al-Karkhī (d. 200/815).¹²⁰ Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī is a pinnacle personality in the nascent Baghdadi school as he was a student of Farqad al-Sabkhī, which thus links him to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and consequently, the Basran tradition as a whole.¹²¹ Though not formally trained, Ma‘rūf carried on the Basran tradition as a pious sermoniser, who preached abstinence and humility.¹²²

Bishr b. al-Ḥārith al-Ḥāfi ‘the barefoot’ (d. 227/842) was another personality associated with the Baghdadi school despite originally being a native of Merv, where he is said to have been a member of a gang and lived a particularly irreligious life. At some point, however, he left this lifestyle and journeyed east where his travels brought him into the company of the renowned jurist Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), with whom he studied jurisprudence and ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), under whose supervision he studied *ḥadīth*. Despite this ‘formal’ training in Islamic learning, he shunned the notoriety and potential wealth it could bring, preferring to live the life of a poor ascetic. Similarly, his attitude was similar to his ascetic predecessors and his teaching emphasised the importance of righteous deeds rather than theoretical knowledge.¹²³

A contemporary and seemingly a rival of al-Muḥāsibī was Sarī b. al-Mughallas al-Saqāṭī – ‘the spice seller’ (d. 253/867). The son of a peddler, Sarī too became a merchant but, as was the habit of the time, became equally interested in the study of *ḥadīth*. These aspects of his lifestyle came to an end when he heard a typically fiery sermon by Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī which ultimately led him to pursue a more spiritual approach to his religious convictions. His teaching combines the various elements of the ascetic schools up until that point and is characterised by his succinct comments regarding loyalty to one’s friends, practical virtues, the dangers of hypocrisy and the remembrance of God.¹²⁴ Although these themes seem familiar to the preceding traditions, it is Sarī’s teaching that is characteristic of the Baghdadi school and is a significant development of the basic ascetic practice of those before him. In this regard Knysch comments:

In a sense, Sarī’s religious [sic.] attitude marks a departure from the traditional asceticism of Baṣra and Kūfa. Although he built his preaching upon

basically the same assumptions as his predecessors, the accents he placed on various strands of the old ascetic tradition constitute his distinct contribution to its growth and sophistication. Moreover, his teaching reflects his internal evolution from a conventional ascetic, preoccupied with avoidance of sin and meticulous compliance with the religious and social conventions of the age, to a fully-fledged mystic immersed in the contemplation of God and, therefore, totally oblivious to the world around him.¹²⁵

Similarly, Abdel-Kader observes:

We may regard as-Saqaṭī as the founder of the Ṣūfī School of Baghdād. This school differed from contemporary Ṣūfī schools in Syria and Khorasan. The Baghdād school's main topic was Unification, *Tawḥīd*, and it developed the 'knowledge' of Unification. The school is distinguished by its symbolic expressions and by its discussions on the mystic state and station of the Ṣūfī. The members of the school are, therefore, called 'The Masters of Unification,' *Arbāb al-Tawḥīd*, like al-Junayd, an-Nūrī and ash-Shiblī.¹²⁶

The principal personalities of Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, Bishr al-Hāfi and Sarī al-Saqaṭī, among others, would in turn produce a variety of students who all contributed in their own specific ways to the Baghdad mystical tradition but, due to the limitations of the current work, cannot be discussed at length and, as such, only the few, representative names will be given here: Abū Sa'īd [Aḥmad b. 'Īsā] al-Kharrāz (d. ca. 286/899),¹²⁷ 'Amr b. 'Uthmān al-Makkī (d. 291/903 or 297/910 or 300/913),¹²⁸ Abū 'l-Ḥusayn [Aḥmad b. Muḥammad] al-Nūrī (d. 295/907)¹²⁹ and Ruwaym b. Aḥmad (d. 303/915).¹³⁰

Although the Baghdadi school produced a number of notable exponents, as exemplified in the previous list above, its most illustrious student is without doubt Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Junayd b. Muḥammad (d. 298/910). Born of Persian stock in Baghdad, al-Junayd was raised in a mercantile environment, where his father was a glass merchant (hence the appellation 'al-Qawārīrī') and he himself became a silk merchant (hence his appellation 'al-Khazzāz'). In addition to his mercantile activities, he also studied classical knowledge in terms of *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence under the auspices of the foremost jurist in Baghdad before the arrival of al-Shāfi'ī, Abū Thawr Ibrāhīm b. Khālīd al-Kalbī (d. 240/854). This 'formal' knowledge was supplemented by gatherings with a number of spiritual masters, the most notable being his paternal uncle Sarī al-Saqaṭī and our subject within this study, al-Hārīth al-Muḥāsibī.

It was through these latter scholars that al-Junayd was introduced to the now more sophisticated Baghdadi school and he himself also contributed to its development. The exact nature of this development is difficult to assess in many ways, as no more than a number of his 'epistles' (*rasā'il*) on mystical themes have reached us and their language is obscure and extremely difficult to access. Nevertheless, the Baghdadi school, under the leadership of al-Junayd, due to its heavy emphasis on extreme asceticism and its strong moral teaching, was often termed

the ‘sober school’ (*al-ṣaḥw*) of Sufism and was said to be exemplified by its chief exponent. This, ‘sober’ school, with its roots in ‘orthodox’ learning was perhaps al-Junayd’s biggest legacy, as it defined the nature of Sufism for centuries to come.¹³¹

Of al-Junayd’s illustrious students, Abū Bakr Dulaf b. Jaḥdar al-Shiblī (d. 334/946)¹³² stands out but he is eclipsed in terms of notoriety by al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). This latter personality seemingly advanced the concepts initiated by Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875) until another school developed, the so-called ‘school of intoxication’ (*al-sukr*). This second school was in opposition to the method of al-Ḥallāj’s master al-Junayd and was characterised by the so-called ‘ecstatic utterances’ (*shaṭaḥāt*), which such mystics would make whilst expressing their experience of the divine and which, as a result, often raised the hackles of the ‘orthodox’, due to their seemingly blasphemous overtones.¹³³

The Mu‘tazilite school in Baghdad

In the same way that the Mystical school of Baghdad was a product of the Basran ascetic school, when Basra was supplanted by Baghdad as the ‘Abbāsīd state capital, the trend towards rationalising the Muslim creed did not stop there and the era which Watt terms the period of ‘the Great Mu‘tazilites’¹³⁴ continued for some time. In fact many of the major personalities of the Basran Mu‘tazilite school such as Abū Hudhayl, al-Nazzām, Mu‘ammar, al-Fuwaṭī, al-Jāhīz and al-Shaḥḥām, later migrated to Baghdad at some point and were active in court affairs, particularly in the reign of al-Ma‘mūn.¹³⁵ This is not to say, however, that there was no Mu‘tazilite influence in Baghdad before the arrival of the Basran contingent. Indeed, there did exist at that time a completely independent school of Mu‘tazilism in Baghdad, which, although the Basran school is thought to predate the Baghdadi school, co-existed in a similar time frame. These scholars are remembered as having influence upon the highest echelons of ‘Abbāsīd society in Baghdad, primarily by participating in debates arranged by the famous vizier Yaḥyā al-Barmakī but more importantly, in the time of al-Ma‘mūn, where some of them even held official appointments, particularly during the *miḥna* period. Once again a full discussion of their thought and teaching is far beyond the current work but nevertheless the most famous personalities will be mentioned here: Abū Sahl Bishr b. Mu‘tamir al-Hilālī (d. 226/841),¹³⁶ Abū Ma‘n Thumāma b. Ashras al-Numayrī (d. 213/828),¹³⁷ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. Abū Du‘ād al-Iyādī (d. 239/854),¹³⁸ Abū Mūsā ‘Īsā b. Ṣubayḥ al-Murdār (d. 226/841),¹³⁹ Abū Faḍl Ja‘far b. Ḥarb (d. 235/850),¹⁴⁰ Abū Muḥammad Ja‘far b. Mubashshir al-Thaqafī (d. 233/848)¹⁴¹ and Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Iskāfī (d. 239/854).¹⁴²

The ‘Inquisition’ (*al-miḥna*)

Having briefly discussed the Mu‘tazilite schools of both Basra and Baghdad, this brings us neatly to the subject of the current section – that of the *miḥna*. This

historic event demonstrates to us the way in which this relatively obscure group of scholastic theologians (*mutakallimūn*) became a driving force in the religious life of Muslims during this period, due to their acquisition of caliphal support in the form of al-Ma'mūn. The term itself *miḥna* and its synonym *imtihān* have the connotation of 'to test, to try and to put to trial' but in the specific historical context of the early 'Abbāsīd period, it means 'a test of faith', this being synonymous with the religio-political trial introduced by al-Ma'mūn.¹⁴³ The subject of this trial of conviction may seem even more curious to the casual observer, as it concerned a seemingly hair-splitting article of faith, i.e. the nature of revelation – is the revealed word of God, in this case the Qur'ān, created or not? For the vast majority of Muslims who held the nascent Sunni view, the Qur'ān was considered to be uncreated and an intrinsic attribute of the divine being, i.e. His speech and thus, inseparable from Him.¹⁴⁴

For the Mu'tazilites, however, this contradicted one of their most basic concepts as it was at odds with their comprehension of one of their 'five principles' (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*), which are enumerated as being: 'divine unity' (*al-tawḥīd*), 'justice' (*al-'adl*), 'the promise of reward and threat of punishment' (*al-wa'd wa 'l-wa'īd*), the 'intermediate state' (*al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn*), and 'enjoining the good and forbidding the evil' (*al-amr bi 'l-ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*).¹⁴⁵ The principle in question was 'divine unity' or *al-tawḥīd*, by which they meant that God was incomparable and unique – a view common to Sunni belief but they employed it to mean that the divine attributes (*al-ṣifāt*) are not a distinct quality of divinity, as this would indicate multiplicity in the Godhead but are in fact identical with His essence and, as such, they denied their true nature to a large extent. For example, they would affirm the names of God, such as the 'All Knowing' (*al-'Alīm*) as it occurs in the Qur'ān but at the same time they would deny the fact that for God to be *al-'Alīm*, it was intrinsic that He possessed the hypostatic attribute of knowledge (*'ilm*), as this would create an additional feature in His essence and thus, multiplicity, which is diametrically opposed to indivisible nature of *al-tawḥīd*. As such, the Mu'tazilites were referred to as *al-mu'aṭṭila*, as they would 'strip' God of His attributes (*ta'īl*) and deny them (*naḥy al-ṣifāt*).¹⁴⁶

Similarly, when discussing the issue of the Qur'ān, they would imply that if it is uncreated, this must also mean that it is pre-eternal (*qadīm*) and since only God existed in pre-eternity it is impossible that the Qur'ān also existed, as this would mean that there was a duality in pre-eternity, which once again negates *al-tawḥīd*. Due to this, they believed that the Qur'ān is created as it is considered the 'work' of God and not His speech, which also dictates that the Qur'ān in their view is not eternal, as this would also indicate multiplicity. Although this view is traceable before the advent of al-Ma'mūn, as it is tangible as early as the Umayyad period in the form of Ja'd b. Dirham (d. 124/742 or 125/743), most famously in Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān and later in the reign of al-Ma'mūn's father al-Rashīd through Bishr al-Marīsī (d. 217/833 or 218/834 or 226/842), it never gained much credence outside the dialectical discussion of scholastic theologians, particularly those of the Mu'tazilites.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, al-Ma'mūn appears to have made this issue the crux of *miḥna*, which raises an important question: if the Mu'tazilites

differed with the majority on a number of tenets of faith then why select this particular dogma as the basis of the inquisition when there were many other creedal points to choose from?

To answer this question is far from an easy task but researchers have made attempts to unravel this conundrum. For example, Watt suggests that this was an attempt by al-Ma'mūn to undermine the authority of the scholarly class (*al-ʿulamāʾ*), who were the reference point for the general Muslim populace regarding matters of religion, and reassert the power of the caliph in this circle of his subjects. At the same time, by disempowering the scholarly elite this move would also afford the 'secular', civil servant class (*al-kuttāb*) more influence in the running of the state, as a created Qur'ān simply had less 'prestige', since the implication was that, as such, it is changeable and, if so, its edicts may be overruled by an inspired imam (*imam al-hudā*).¹⁴⁸ Although the initial notion may be true, i.e. that al-Ma'mūn sought to undermine the authority of the scholarly class, which is clear from the fact that he targeted many of the populist *ḥadīth* luminaries, the second aspect, i.e. that the authority of the Qur'ān was somehow to be overruled, is less convincing. As Hinds observes:

But this misses the point: for one thing, the doctrine of the created Qur'ān is a doctrine about God and more specifically God's unity, rather than a doctrine about the Qur'ān, and there is in any case no evidence whatsoever to support the view that al-Ma'mūn wanted to overrule the Qur'ān.¹⁴⁹

The extent of the Mu'tazilite influence over al-Ma'mūn is further evidenced by a *miḥna* letter quoted by Abū 'l-'Arab (d. 333/944) in his *Kitāb al-Miḥan*, which stipulated that not only the doctrine of the created Qur'ān be imposed but also the doctrine of denying the punishment in the grave (*adhāb al-qabr*), this being a popular feature of Mu'tazilite dogma.¹⁵⁰ Thus, at best we can view al-Ma'mūn as a sincere proponent of Mu'tazilism, using his considerable influence to correct the 'misguided' beliefs of the ignorant masses, or at worst a divisive politician who manipulated the Mu'tazilite creed to achieve political supremacy. It is further suggested here that in the first-case scenario, he may well have begun the reformation of the Islamic belief system with the Qur'ān due to its pivotal position in the lives of Muslims, thinking that if he could succeed here, then convincing the public of the remaining doctrines would be 'easy'.

Al-Ma'mūn's Mu'tazilite sympathies are also seen in the fact that many of the leading proponents of this school, such as Bishr b. Mu'tamir and Thumāma b. Ashras, are witnessed at an early stage at Merv in 201/817, as signatories on the document declaring Alī al-Riḍā' heir to the caliphate,¹⁵¹ long before al-Ma'mūn's move to Baghdad to assume the caliphate proper. Similarly, one of the major figures of this incident, as we shall see, is Aḥmad b. Abū Du'ād who was greatly honoured at the court of al-Ma'mūn, and was charged with supervision of the *miḥna* after his death, as the caliph apparently stipulated this in his will for his successor al-Mu'taṣim. It has been suggested that al-Ma'mūn did this due to al-Mu'taṣim's lack of intellectual acumen in dealing with such issues, yet it is

further evidence of Mu'tazilite influence at the caliph's court, as presumably al-Ma'mūn would not have appointed Ibn Abū Du'ād unless he thought he could fulfil the task, as well as being an indication of his conviction that the *miḥna* should be pursued in the first place.¹⁵² These facts and the others have caused Abū Zahra to conclude that Ibn Abū Du'ād was in fact the architect of the *miḥna*.¹⁵³ Even if we concede this, however, he could not have brought it into being without the caliph's support or will, suggesting that although al-Ma'mūn may have had some political ambition from the implementation of the *miḥna*, he was also sympathetic to the ideological foundation behind it.

As for the historical details of the *miḥna*, al-Ma'mūn is said to have been convinced of the created Qur'ān doctrine as early as 212/827 or even earlier and paved the way for its imposition by deposing the chief judge (*qādī al-quḍāt*) Yaḥyā b. Aktham, who apparently opposed the idea and replaced him with Aḥmad b. Abū Du'ād in 217/832.¹⁵⁴ Thus, in the last year of his reign in 218/833 and with his new appointee in place, al-Ma'mūn utilised his state power and initiated the *miḥna*, by sending the first of the *miḥna* letters to his deputy in Baghdad, Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm. The letter instructed this official to examine the judges (*qādī*, pl. *quḍāt*) under his jurisdiction regarding the creation of the Qur'ān and used particularly critical language, vilifying those who opposed this creed, terming them 'a people ignorant of God', 'deficient in understanding', 'those who lie about God and His creation' and the 'worst and chief in error'.¹⁵⁵ Copies of this letter were also sent to the other provinces of the caliphate but in reality seem to have had little effect due to a lack of popular support for the policy. Similarly, al-Ma'mūn wrote to Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm again ordering him to send seven prominent personalities including the traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*) Muḥammad b. Sa'd and Yaḥyā b. Ma'in (d. 233/847) to him at al-Raqqā, where he undertook the examination himself and as a result all seven succumbed to the doctrine of the created Qur'ān.¹⁵⁶

Consequently, al-Ma'mūn wrote another *miḥna* letter to his deputy in Baghdad in a similar style and manner, to continue the process. Thus, Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm gathered around 30 of the leading jurists (*faqīh*, pl. *fuqahā'*), judges and traditionists and began examining them about the Mu'tazilite creed regarding the Qur'ān. The vast majority of these scholars, some of them notably under duress, yielded and there were only two exceptions, that of Muḥammad b. Nūḥ al-'Ijlī and more significantly, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. These latter two scholars were thus despatched to Tarsus to be dealt with directly by al-Ma'mūn but the caliph's demise occurred en route (Rajab 218/August 833) and they were therefore temporarily reprieved. However, Muḥammad b. Nūḥ died on the return journey to Baghdad and Aḥmad was kept in detention upon his arrival.¹⁵⁷

Al-Mu'taṣim's advent to power saw no reprieve in the *miḥna* as a policy, as al-Ma'mūn had stipulated in his will that his brother continue with this course of action and make Ibn Abū Du'ād his closest confidante in the issue, with which he duly complied. Nevertheless, the issue of the *miḥna* during his reign is seemingly less intense due perhaps to the reluctance of the new caliph to pursue this policy. However, there was one exception – that of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. After a period of approximately two and half years in prison, Aḥmad was removed, apparently due

to the intercession of his uncle Ishāq b. Ḥanbal with the prefect of Baghdad, Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm, as his uncle thought that Aḥmad would relent. In actual fact it was possibly the worst thing he could have done as his interrogation was initiated once more. Over the next two days Aḥmad defended his position with a variety of questioners, including the caliph, and gave a good account of himself, the time in prison seemingly giving him time to formulate convincing arguments of a *kalām* style. On the third day, however, under pressure from the Muʿtazilite faction at court and despairing of Aḥmad yielding his position, al-Muʿtaṣim ordered him to be flogged, during the course of which his wrists were dislocated and he lost consciousness after 30 or so lashes.¹⁵⁸

That Aḥmad was released after the flogging seems in little doubt; the circumstances in which his release took place, however, are disputed. The hagiographic works dealing with this incident suggest that his release was due to outrage expressed by the population of Baghdad, who, when they heard of the harsh treatment of their imam, gathered angrily outside the palace in protest, which caused al-Muʿtaṣim to release Aḥmad despite the objections of Ibn Abū Duʿād. The less friendly, Muʿtazilite sources of al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn al-Murtaḍā as well as others, suggest that Aḥmad actually capitulated and his release was a result of his acknowledgement, as the caliph would have no other real reason to free him. In any case, whatever the truth regarding Aḥmad's release may be and despite this being one of the few incidents to draw attention during al-Muʿtaṣim's execution of the *miḥna* policy, it still remains the most significant.¹⁵⁹

Similarly, the *miḥna* did not relent with the advent of al-Muʿtaṣim's son al-Wāthiq. In fact, the *miḥna* can be said to have increased in severity during the beginning of his reign, as he wrote to the various regional capitals, commanding them to a renewed prosecution of the policy. This was particularly true in Egypt, where the regional *qāḍī*, Muḥammad b. Abū Layth al-Aṣamm, was instructed to implement the *miḥna* with vigour and he duly complied, leaving no prominent religious figure untouched, until the prisons were full with dissenters to the state-imposed creed.¹⁶⁰ A more peculiar incident is that of Aḥmad b. Nasr al-Khuzāʿī, who attempted an unfortunate uprising which misfired and was brought before the caliph for questioning. The interesting feature of this interrogation, however, was not the caliph's questions regarding the failed coup but that he asked this 'second' Aḥmad regarding views concerning the doctrine of the created Qurʾān. His answers, due to his opposition to the creed, are said to have enraged the caliph to the extent that he had him decapitated and his head displayed in Baghdad as a grisly deterrent to would be non-conformists. Perhaps the most significant incident, however, concerns a 'shaykh from *ahl al-fiqh wa 'l-ḥadīth*', who when brought before the caliph and questioned by Ibn Abū Duʿād regarding the creed, bettered the latter in the discussion, which ultimately led to the caliph withdrawing active support for the policy.¹⁶¹

The *miḥna* did not formally end here either, however, but was eventually abolished under al-Wāthiq's brother and successor, al-Mutawakkil. The whole process of abolition of the policy was not immediate and appears to have taken place over a period of time; the first stage seems to have been the caliphal prohibition of

debate concerning the Qur'ān throughout the empire, which took place in 234/847, being pre-empted by Ibn Abū Du'ād's paralysis the year before. Similarly, the following year many of the *miḥna qāḍīs*, including Ibn Abī Layth, the *qāḍī* in Egypt, were removed from office and this continued over the next two years. The policy was formerly brought to a close after almost 20 years of persecution and Sunni 'orthodoxy' firmly re-established in 237/851, with the dismissal of Ibn Abū Du'ād and his sons.¹⁶²

Having surveyed the most significant historical, political, cultural and intellectual events of the early 'Abbāsīd period to our study, we can see clearly that this part of history was an extremely important and interesting era. It remains to be seen, however, how these events may affect the life and development of an individual. This being the case it is equally relevant now to examine the life of our subject, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, to examine and assess the impact of these events, if any, on him, his life, his works and his teachings and, indeed, this is the goal of the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 J. J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 106.
- 2 Other historians divide this period into only two sections. See H. A. R. Gibb, J. H. Kramer, E. Levi-Provencal and J. Schacht (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden and London: E. J. Brill and Luzac & Co., 1960), vol. 1, p. 17.
- 3 'Ulā 'Abd al-'Azīz Abū Zayd, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* (Cairo: al-Ma'had al-'Ālamī li 'l-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1996), p. 17.
- 4 The point at which the second period begins is a focus of dispute among researchers in Islamic history but the general consensus suggests that the period begins with the death of al-Mutawakkil in 247/861. Abū Zayd, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, p. 63.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- 6 See Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, *Ta'rīkh al-Islām al-Siyāsī wa 'l-Dīnī wa 'l-Thiqāfī wa 'l-Ijtīmā'ī*, 7th edn, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 14–27; Muḥammad Bek al-Khuḍari, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, Muḥāḍarāt fī Tārīkh al-Umam al-Islāmiyya (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thiqāfiyya, 1999), pp. 5–54; Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1998), pp. 7–44; Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 15–16; Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate – A Political History* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1981), pp. 35–55; Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Genealogical Manual* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 7–8; and Tayeb El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography – Ḥārūn al-Rashīd and the Narrative of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilisation Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1–6.
- 7 See Ḥasan, *Ta'rīkh al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 14–19; Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 15–16; Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 35–45; Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties*, p. 8; and El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, p. 1.
- 8 See Ḥasan, *Ta'rīkh al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 27–40; al-Khuḍari, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 54–85; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 45–127; Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 16–17; Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 57–93; and El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, p. 1.
- 9 See Ḥasan, *Ta'rīkh al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 40–4; al-Khuḍari, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 85–95; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 128–70 and Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 96–108.

- 10 Hasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 44–50; al-Khuḍari, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 95–100; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 171–91; and Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 108–13.
- 11 Hasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 50–63; al-Khuḍari, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 100–52; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 192–301; Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 115–33; and El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, pp. 17–58.
- 12 Hasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 63–6; al-Khuḍari, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 152–68; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 302–37; Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 135–48; and El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, pp. 59–94.
- 13 Hasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 66–74; al-Khuḍari, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 168–220; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 338–421; Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 151–74; Cooperson, Michael, *Classical Arabic Biography – the Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilisation Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 24–69; and El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, pp. 95–142.
- 14 Hasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 74–9; al-Khuḍari, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 220–38; and al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 422–89.
- 15 Hasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 79–84; al-Khuḍari, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 238–43; and al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 490–516.
- 16 Hasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 3, pp. 4–6; al-Khuḍari, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 243–58; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 518–75; P. M. Hold, A. K. S. Lambton and B. Lewis, *The Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), vol. 1A, pp. 126–8; El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, pp. 178–215; and Dominique Sourdel, *Medieval Islam*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 143–4.
- 17 See Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture – The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsī Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 11–16; G. E. von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam: A History (600–1258)*, trans. Kathrine Watson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), pp. 80–1 and 86–8; Carl Brocklemann, *History of Islamic Peoples*, trans. Joel Carmichael and Moshe Perlmann (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 124–6; and Andre Clot, *Harun al-Rashid and the World of the Thousand and One Nights*, trans. John Howe (London: Saqi Books, 1989), pp. 207–9.
- 18 See Hasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 320–3; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 17–20; von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam*, pp. 80–1 and 86–8; and Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, pp. 207–9.
- 19 See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 1–191 *passim*.
- 20 See Khayr Allāh Sa'īd, *Warrāqū Baghdād fī 'l-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī* (Riyadh: Markaz al-Malik Fayṣal li 'l-Buḥūth wa 'l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya, 2000), pp. 127–68; and Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 13 and Gaston Weit, *Baghdad – Metropolis of the Abbasid Caliphate*, trans. Seymour Feiler (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), pp. 70–1.
- 21 See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 28–74.
- 22 See al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 384–8; Sa'īd, *Warrāqū Baghdād*, pp. 50–3; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 28–74; Watt, W. Montgomery, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962), pp. 37–9; Watt, *The Formative Period*, Oneworld Classics in Religious Studies series (Oxford: Oneworld publications, 2002), pp. 185–6; Weit, *Baghdad*, pp. 66–9; and Brocklemann, *History of Islamic Peoples*, pp. 124–6.
- 23 See Hasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, p. 348; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, p. 385; Sa'īd, *Warrāqū Baghdād*, pp. 51–3; Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, p. 1141; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 53–60; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, p. 38; Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 185; Weit, *Baghdad*, p. 68; and Brocklemann, *History of Islamic Peoples*, p. 125.

- 24 See Ḥasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, p. 346; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 121–36; Weit, *Baghdad*, p. 69; and Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, pp. 210–11.
- 25 See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 136–41; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 303.
- 26 See Sa'īd, *Warrāqū Baghdād*, p. 52; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 2–185 *passim*; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, p. 41; and Weit, *Baghdad*, p. 69.
- 27 Ḥasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 346–7; and Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 136–50 *passim*.
- 28 See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 30, 33 and 114; Brockleemann, *History of Islamic Peoples*, p. 126; Weit, *Baghdad*, p. 67; and Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, p. 210.
- 29 See Ḥasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 346–7; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 58, 113 and 117; Brockleemann, *History of Islamic Peoples*, p. 126; Weit, *Baghdad*, p. 68; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, p. 211; and M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham and R. B. Serjeant, *Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 274–89 *passim*.
- 30 See Ḥasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 353–5; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 118–19; Brockleemann, *History of Islamic Peoples*, pp. 125–6; Weit, *Baghdad*, pp. 69–70; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, p. 213; and Young *et al.*, *Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period*, pp. 343–63 *passim*.
- 31 See Ḥasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 3, pp. 380–2; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 119–20; von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam: A History*, p. 96; Brockleemann, *History of Islamic Peoples*, p. 125; Weit, *Baghdad*, pp. 68–9; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, p. 210; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 39–40; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 204–8.
- 32 See Ḥasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, p. 343; Weit, *Baghdad*, p. 66; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, p. 220; and Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, p. 34 and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 171–2.
- 33 See Ḥasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, p. 344 and vol. 3, pp. 370–2; Weit, *Baghdad*, pp. 76–7; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, pp. 221–2; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 173.
- 34 See Ḥasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 344; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 111–12; Weit, *Baghdad*, p. 77; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, p. 221; Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 173; and J. Ashtiany, T. M. Johnstone, J. D. Latham and R. B. Serjeant (eds.), *'Abbasid Belles Lettres* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 48–95.
- 35 See Ḥasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 339–43; Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1907), pp. 89–96; Weit, *Baghdad*, pp. 73–5; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, p. 216–20; and Brockleemann, *History of Islamic Peoples*, p. 117.
- 36 See Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī fī Tārīḫ al-Fiḫ al-Islāmī*, ed. Amīn Šāliḥ Sha'bān, four parts in 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995), vol. 1 (part 2), pp. 436–7; 390–2; Ḥasan, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 338–9; Weit, *Baghdad*, pp. 64–5; Brockleemann, *History of Islamic Peoples*, pp. 118–19; Jonathan Owens, *The Foundations of Grammar: an Introduction to Medieval Arabic Grammatical Theory* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin BV, 1988), pp. 5–30 *passim*; Owens, *Early Arabic Grammatical Theory: Heterogeneity and Standardization* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin B.V., 1990), pp. 1–9; Kinga Dévényi, 'On Farrā's Linguistic Methods in his work *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*' in Kees Versteegh, and Michael G. Carter (eds.), *Studies in the History of Arabic Grammar 2 : Proceedings of the 2nd Symposium on the History of Arabic Grammar, Nijmegen, 27 April–1 May 1987* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990); and Young *et al.*, *Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period*, pp. 118–38.
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- 40 See al-Khaṭīb, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 176–81; Ṣiddīqī, *Hadīth Literature*, p. 7; Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies, Authenticity, Compilation, Classification and Criticism of Hadith* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2005), pp. 22–30; and Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, Foundations of Islam (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), pp. 18–24.
- 41 See Azami, *Studies*, pp. 81–3; Ṣiddīqī, *Hadīth Literature*, pp. 7–8; Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies*, p. 29; and Brown, *Hadith*, p. 25.
- 42 See al-Khaṭīb, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 328–30; Azami, *Studies*, pp. 84–6; Ṣiddīqī, *Hadīth Literature*, pp. 46–52; Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies*, p. 32; and Brown, *Hadith*, pp. 28–31.
- 43 See al-Khaṭīb, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 308–14; Azami, *Studies*, pp. 87–93; Ṣiddīqī, *Hadīth Literature*, pp. 53–8; Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies*, pp. 32–6; and Brown, *Hadith*, p. 32.
- 44 See al-Khaṭīb, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 314–16; Azami, *Studies*, pp. 94–6; Ṣiddīqī, *Hadīth Literature*, pp. 58–60; Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies*, pp. 32–6; and Brown, *Hadith*, p. 32.
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- 46 See al-Khaṭīb, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 322–4; Azami, *Studies*, pp. 103–4; Ṣiddīqī, *Hadīth Literature*, pp. 64–7; Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies*, pp. 41–3; and Brown, *Hadith*, p. 33.
- 47 See al-Khaṭīb, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 324–6; Azami, *Studies*, pp. 97–8; Ṣiddīqī, *Hadīth Literature*, pp. 67–8; Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies*, p. 41; and Brown, *Hadith*, p. 33.
- 48 See al-Khaṭīb, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 326–7; Azami, *Studies*, pp. 105–7; Ṣiddīqī, *Hadīth Literature*, p. 69; Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies*, pp. 39–41; and Brown, *Hadith*, p. 33.
- 49 See Ṣiddīqī, *Hadīth Literature*, pp. 68–72; and Brown, *Hadith*, pp. 25–9.
- 50 See 'Umar Sulaymān al-Ashqar, *Tārīkh al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, 3rd edn (Amman: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1991), pp. 92–3; and Wael Hallaq, *Sharī'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 131–5.
- 51 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 1 (part 2), pp. 410–36; Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Shalabī, *al-Madkhal fī 'l-Ta'rif bi 'l-Fiqh al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahda al-'Arabiyya, 1985), pp. 171–84; Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law 9th–10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 48–67; Knut S. Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan: A History of Islamic Law* (London: Hurst and Company, 2005), pp. 94–7; and Hallaq, *Sharī'a*, pp. 60–71.
- 52 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 1 (part 2), pp. 446–63; al-Shalabī, *al-Madkhal*, pp. 184–91; Melchert, *Formation*, pp. 156–77; Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan*, pp. 97–100; and Hallaq, *Sharī'a*, pp. 60–71.
- 53 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 1 (part 2), pp. 464–75; al-Shalabī, *al-Madkhal*, pp. 192–9; Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: an Introduction to Sunni Usul al-Fiqh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 21–35; Melchert, *Formation*, pp. 68–87; Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan*, pp. 100–1; and Hallaq, *Sharī'a*, pp. 60–71.
- 54 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 2 (part 1), pp. 20–9; al-Shalabī, *al-Madkhal*, pp. 200–7; Melchert, *Formation*, pp. 137–55; Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan*, pp. 101–3; and Hallaq, *Sharī'a*, pp. 60–71.

- 55 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 1 (part 2), pp. 438–9; Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan*, p. 115; and Hallaq, *Sharī'a*, p. 63–4.
- 56 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 1 (part 2), pp. 436–7; Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan*, pp. 114–15; and Hallaq, *Sharī'a*, p. 64.
- 57 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 1 (part 2), pp. 439–40.
- 58 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 1 (part 2), pp. 463–4.
- 59 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 2 (part 1), pp. 29–43.
- 60 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 2 (part 1), pp. 19–20.
- 61 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 2 (part 1), pp. 29–43; Melchert, *Formation*, pp. 175–90; and Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan*, pp. 115–17.
- 62 See al-Fāsī, *al-Fikr al-Sāmī*, vol. 2 (part 1), pp. 45–7; Melchert, *Formation*, pp. 191–7; and Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan*, p. 115.
- 63 See Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 33–4 and 50–7.
- 64 See 'Alī Sāmī al-Nashshār, *Nash'at al-Fikr al-Falsafī fī 'l-Islām*, 7th edn, 3 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1978): vol. 1, pp. 314–66 *passim*; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 25–31; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 82–118 *passim*.
- 65 See al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 1, pp. 443–503 *passim*; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 54–5; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 249–50.
- 66 See Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 19–24; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 63–81.
- 67 See al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 1, p. 265; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 42–4; Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 180–6; and Young *et al.*, *Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period*, pp. 1–9.
- 68 See Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir al-Fāḍilī (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 2002), vol. 1, p. 74; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 1, pp. 265–78; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 58–9; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 286–7.
- 69 See Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, vol. 1, p. 74; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 1, pp. 278–84; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, p. 64; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 287–9.
- 70 See Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, vol. 1, p. 74; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 1, p. 284; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, p. 136; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 282.
- 71 See Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, p. 64 and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 287–9 and 311–12.
- 72 G. Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966), p. 44; Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, p. 1085 and Appendix 1.
- 73 Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 1085–6.
- 74 *Ibid.*
- 75 Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, p. 45; and Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, p. 1086.
- 76 Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, p. 1086.
- 77 *Ibid.*
- 78 Similarly, there are number of trends and developments in learning that originated in Basra but their effect on the life of al-Muḥāsibī is less tangible and therefore they have been discussed above in the general section dealing with intellectual life in the early 'Abbāsīd period.
- 79 These were the Prophet's Companions who were said to reside in his mosque and usually consisted of the emigrants from Mecca who had no place to stay, or no worldly wealth to speak of. Their state was such that they were also known as 'the strangers' [to the worldly life] (*al-ghurabā'*). They were not a specific group of people but indeed their number would vary due to their circumstances and condition. However, there were a number of the Companions who would remain in 'the bench' (*al-suffa*) at the back of the mosque on a permanent basis and these included Abū Dharr al-Ghiffārī

- (d. 32/652), Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī (d. 44/665), and Salmān al-Fārisī (d. 35/655) among others. The Prophet was known to encourage the more wealthy members of society to feed them and look after them, so that each person would take one or two of them at each mealtime to eat. It is reported that the more well-to-do members of the Medinan society would complain and request the Prophet to remove them from his company because an unpleasant odour would emanate from them (that of sheep – presumably due to their wearing of wool) but when this happened a portion of the Qur‘ān was revealed saying, ‘And be the patient with those who call upon their Lord during the morning and evening, hoping for His pleasure and not turn away from them, desiring the adornments of this world. And do not obey those whose hearts we have made heedless to Our remembrance and those who pursue their desires and whose affairs are worthless’ [Q. 18: 26]. Due to this the Prophet is reported to have shaken hands with them and would not remove his hand until they did so first. In addition, he would not leave their company until they did so first, out of respect for them. See al-Kalābādhī, *al-Ta‘arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, p. 10; ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tablīs Iblīs*, ed. Ayman Ṣāliḥ (3rd edn, Cairo, Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1999), pp. 167–8; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘at al-Fatāwā*, vol. 11, p. 7; Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1975), p. 14; Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 1989), pp. 31–2 and Alexander D. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism – A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) p. 5.
- 80 The term ‘school’ is used in a very loose way in the sense that this was not a specific group of individuals who would meet in a specific location, study a particular curriculum and express a certain number of beliefs but, rather, a nascent teaching that had identifiable trends in a particular locale, in this case Basra. Indeed, this was the case throughout the initial period of Islam’s spread throughout the region, as formulated schools in the traditional sense did not appear until much later.
- 81 See Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ishāq [Abū Nu‘aym] al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā‘*, ed. Sa‘īd Sa‘īd al-Dīn al-Iskandarī, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā‘ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2001), vol. 1, pp. 236–43; ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad [Abū al-Faraj] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, ed. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Lādiqī and Ḥayāt al-Lādiqī, 4th edn, 4 parts in 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 2001), vol. 1, pp. 262–5; and al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 106–8.
- 82 See al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 103–14.
- 83 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā‘*, vol. 2, pp. 88–94; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 141–7; al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 108–14; Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 112; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 15–16.
- 84 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā‘*, vol. 2, pp. 116–19; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 149–50; al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 114–15; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 112.
- 85 See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 139–40; and al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 115–16.
- 86 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā‘*, vol. 2, pp. 199–205; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 147–8; and al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 116–18.
- 87 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā‘*, vol. 2, pp. 217–21; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 151–3; al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 118–20; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 112.
- 88 See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 4, pp. 288–9; al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 120–1; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 112.
- 89 See al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 122–37.
- 90 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā‘*, vol. 2, pp. 183–95; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 157–60; al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 122–7; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 112.
- 91 Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 10.
- 92 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā‘*, vol. 2, pp. 126–8; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 205–6; al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at*, vol. 3, pp. 128–37; Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 112 and 119–38; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 10–13.

- 93 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 3, pp. 47–51; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 205–6; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 114; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 13–15.
- 94 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 2, pp. 309–19; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 191–4; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 3, pp. 168–71; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 114; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 13–15.
- 95 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 2, pp. 286–98; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 186–9; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 3, pp. 171–2; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 114.
- 96 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 2, pp. 320–45; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 195–205; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 3, pp. 162–8; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 114; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 13–15.
- 97 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 3, pp. 42–7; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 194–5; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 3, pp. 150–5; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 114; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 13–15.
- 98 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 6, pp. 130–4; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 226–38; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 3, pp. 150–5; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 114.
- 99 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 3, pp. 5–15; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 209–12; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 3, pp. 172–3; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 114.
- 100 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 6, pp. 135–43; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 229–32; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 3, pp. 178–83; Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 114 and 147–52; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 16–18.
- 101 See Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 113–15; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 6–7.
- 102 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 6, pp. 167–71; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 3, pp. 261–3; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 3, pp. 189–97; Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 150–2; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 26.
- 103 See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 4, pp. 292–4; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 3, pp. 197–213; Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 149–50; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 26–32.
- 104 See 'Abd al-Qādir b. Tāhir b. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 2001), pp. 115–18; al-Shahraṣṭānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, pp. 40–3; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 1, pp. 381–406; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 47–8; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 209–15.
- 105 For an in-depth discussion of these reports see Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 209–17.
- 106 See Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 42–4; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 189–95 and 219.
- 107 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 119–27; al-Shahraṣṭānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, pp. 43–6; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 1, pp. 443–81; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 46–55; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 219.
- 108 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 127–44; al-Shahraṣṭānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, pp. 46–50; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 1, pp. 484–503; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, p. 53; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 219–20.
- 109 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 144–8; al-Shahraṣṭānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, pp. 54–6; al-Nashshār, *Nash'at*, vol. 1, pp. 504–17; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 47 and 52–3; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 220.
- 110 See Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 220.
- 111 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 150–5; al-Shahraṣṭānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, pp. 58–60 and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 220.
- 112 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 164–7; al-Shahraṣṭānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, pp. 60–1; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 47 and 52–3; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 220–1.
- 113 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, p. 167; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 221.
- 114 Ḥasan, *Ta'rīkh al-Islām*, vol. 2, p. 362; Gibb et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, p. 895; Le Strange, *Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate* (London: Oxford

- University Press, 1924), pp. 5–6; Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 86 and Appendix 2.
- 115 See Abū Bakr b. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī [al-Khaṭīb] al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād – Madīnat al-Salām*, 18 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitaḥ al-‘Arabī, n.d.), vol. 1, pp. 58–62 and 66; Ḥasan, *Ta’rīkh al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 362–8; al-Wakīl, *al-‘Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 82–4; Sa’īd, *Warrāqū Baghdād*, pp. 19–22; al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya*, p. 77; Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 894–5; Le Strange, *Baghdad*, pp. 7–14; Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 86–7; Lassner, Jacob, *The Shaping of ‘Abbasid Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 159–65; Brockleman, *History of Islamic Peoples*, pp. 107–9; Weit, *Baghdad*, p. 8; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, p. 152; Michael Cooperson, ‘Baghdad in rhetoric and narrative’, *Muqarnas*, vol. 13 (1996), p. 102; Françoise Micheau, ‘Baghdad in the Abbasid era: a cosmopolitan and multi-confessional capital’, in Salma K. Jayyusi, *The City in the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), vol. 1, p. 224 and Appendix 2.
- 116 See al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, vol. 1, pp. 66–75 and 66; Ḥasan, *Ta’rīkh al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 368–74; al-Wakīl, *al-‘Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 83–7; Sa’īd, *Warrāqū Baghdād*, pp. 22–3; al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya*, pp. 77–8; Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 895–7; Le Strange, *Baghdad*, pp. 16–26; Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 88; Lassner, *The Shaping of ‘Abbasid Rule*, pp. 166–95; Brockleman, *History of Islamic Peoples*, p. 109; Weit, *Baghdad*, pp. 11–17; M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History A New Interpretation*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), vol. 2, pp. 8–9; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, pp. 152–4; Micheau, ‘Baghdad in the Abbasid era’, vol. 1, pp. 224–5 and Appendix 2.
- 117 See al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, vol. 1, pp. 75–98 and 66; Ḥasan, *Ta’rīkh al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 374–8; al-Wakīl, *al-‘Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 86–90; Sa’īd, *Warrāqū Baghdād*, pp. 23–4; al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya*, pp. 77–8; Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 895–7; Le Strange, *Baghdad*, pp. 40–2; Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 88–9; Lassner, *The Shaping of ‘Abbasid Rule*, pp. 196–229; Brockleman, *History of Islamic Peoples*, p. 109; Weit, *Baghdad*, pp. 16–30; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, pp. 155–6; Micheau, ‘Baghdad in the Abbasid era’, vol. 1, pp. 225–31 and Appendix 2.
- 118 See Ḥasan, *Ta’rīkh al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 322–55; al-Wakīl, *al-‘Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 381–401; Sa’īd, *Warrāqū Baghdād*, pp. 41–53; al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya*, pp. 130–2 and 198–214; Gibb *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 898–9; Lassner, *The Shaping of ‘Abbasid Rule*, pp. 229–41; Brockleman, *History of Islamic Peoples*, p. 110–29 *passim*; Shaban, *Islamic History*, vol. 2, p. 19; Weit, *Baghdad*, pp. 11–17 and 64–82; Clot, *Harun al-Rashid*, pp. 156–64; and Micheau, ‘Baghdad in the Abbasid era’, vol. 1, pp. 234–45.
- 119 See Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 158–60; Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd, 1976), pp. 35–47; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 43–67.
- 120 Seemingly named after the Karkh district of Baghdad, which was one of the main commercial centres housing the markets of the capital’s southern area.
- 121 He is reportedly equally linked to the Kūfan school via Dāwūd al-Ṭā’ī (d. 166/783) but this claim is contentious. See Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 48–9.
- 122 See al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā’*, vol. 8, pp. 296–316; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 592–6; Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 158–9; Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, pp. 12–18; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 48–9.
- 123 See al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā’*, vol. 8, pp. 316–22; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 596–603; Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 158–9; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 49–50.
- 124 See al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā’*, vol. 10, pp. 97–107; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 624–34; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 159; Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, pp. 8–12; Herbert Mason, ‘Hallāj and the Baghdad School of Sufism’, in *The Heritage of*

- Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), vol. 1, p. 68 and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 50–2.
- 125 Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 51.
- 126 Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, p. 11.
- 127 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, pp. 210–12; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 663–5; Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 203–5; Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, p. 41; Mason, 'Hallāj and the Baghdad School of Sufism' in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1, p. 70; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 56–60.
- 128 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, pp. 246–50; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 666–7; and Mason, 'Hallāj and the Baghdad School of Sufism' in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1, p. 70–1.
- 129 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, pp. 212–17; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 665–6; Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, pp. 40–1; Mason, 'Hallāj and the Baghdad School of Sufism' in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1, p. 69; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 60–3.
- 130 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, pp. 250–5; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 667–8; Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, p. 42; and Mason, 'Hallāj and the Baghdad School of Sufism' in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1, p. 69.
- 131 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, pp. 217–32; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn Shurayba, 3rd edn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1997), pp. 155–63; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 652–7; Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 205–9; Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, pp. 1–7; Mason, 'Hallāj and the Baghdad School of Sufism' in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1, pp. 65–72 *passim*; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 52–56.
- 132 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, pp. 317–25; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 677–80; Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, pp. 44–56; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 64–7.
- 133 See Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 209–14; Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, pp. 45–7; Mason, 'Hallāj and the Baghdad School of Sufism' in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1, p. 65–74 *passim*; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 65–82.
- 134 See Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 209–50.
- 135 *Ibid.*, pp. 209–21.
- 136 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 148–50; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, pp. 53–4; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 47–8 and 53; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 222.
- 137 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, p. 161–4; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, pp. 57–8; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 222.
- 138 See Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 222–3.
- 139 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 155–7; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, pp. 56–7; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 223.
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- 142 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 158–61; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, p. 53; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 224.
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- 145 See Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 48–53; and Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 228–49.
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- 148 See Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, p. 35; Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 179; Hinds, *Studies*, p. 242; and John A. Nawas, 'A reexamination of three current explanations for al-Mamun's introduction of the *miḥna*', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 26, No. 4 (Nov. 1994), pp. 619–21.
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- 150 Abū 'l-'Arab, *Kitāb al-Miḥan*, ed. Y. W. al-Jubūrī (Beirut: n. p., 1983), p. 451; and Hinds, *Studies*, p. 242.
- 151 See Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 222; and Nawas, 'A reexamination', p. 618.
- 152 See Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, pp. 48–51; al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 207–8; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 409–15; Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*, pp. 50–6; Hinds, *Studies*, p. 234; Nawas, 'A reexamination', pp. 616–17; Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, pp. 34–40; and El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, pp. 34–40.
- 153 Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, pp. 63–5.
- 154 See Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, p. 48; al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, p. 203; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 401–2; Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*, pp. 52–5; and Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, p. 33.
- 155 See Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, pp. 48–54; al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 203–4; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 402–5; Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*, pp. 56–61; Hinds, *Studies*, p. 233; Nawas, 'A reexamination', p. 621; Nawas, 'The *Miḥna* of 218 A. H./833 A. D. revisited: An empirical study', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 116, No. 4 (Oct. – Dec., 1996), p. 698; Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, p. 33; and Hurvitz, Nimrod, 'Miḥna as self-defense', *Studia Islamica*, No. 92 (2001), pp. 102–9.
- 156 See Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, p. 54; al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, p. 204; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, p. 403; Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*, pp. 61–5; Ira M. Lapidus, 'The separation of state and religion in the development of early Islamic society', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4

- (Oct. 1975), pp. 379–80; Hinds, *Studies*, p. 233; Nawas, 'The *miḥna*', pp. 704–6; and Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, p. 33.
- 157 See Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, pp. 54–63; al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsīyya*, pp. 204–8; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 405–9; Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*, pp. 65–85; Hinds, *Studies*, p. 233; Nawas, 'The *miḥna*', pp. 705–7; and Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, pp. 33–4 and 118–19.
- 158 See Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, pp. 69–70; al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsīyya*, p. 208; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 427–8; Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*, pp. 88–111; Lapidus, 'The separation of state and religion', pp. 381; Hinds, *Studies*, p. 235; and Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, pp. 119–24.
- 159 See Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*, p. 111; Hinds, *Studies*, pp. 235–6; Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, pp. 124–38; and Hurvitz, 'Miḥna as self-defense', pp. 97–102.
- 160 Among his victims was the prominent jurist and disciple of al-Shāfi'ī Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Buwayṭī who died while languishing in a Baghdadi jail in 231/846.
- 161 See al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsīyya*, pp. 208–9; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 500–4 and 507–10; Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*, pp. 114–22; Lapidus, 'The separation of state and religion', pp. 381; and Hinds, *Studies*, pp. 237–9.
- 162 See al-Khuḍarī, *al-Dawla al-'Abbāsīyya*, pp. 209 and 247–8; al-Wakīl, *al-'Aṣr al-Dhahabī*, pp. 531–2 and 537–8; Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*, pp. 122–3; and Hinds, *Studies*, pp. 239–40.

2 Master of the wayfarers

The life of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī

Little is known about al-Muḥāsibī other than a few, anecdotal statements and factual, historical glimpses that the biographical and historical sources provide. Nevertheless, there is sufficient material to attempt a chronological reconstruction of his life from these works to attempt to provide a coherent picture of this eminent scholar's worldly moments. Consequently, the usual biographical sketch will be attempted including a survey of his early life, his teachers, his influences, his students and ultimately his death. In addition, however, since all we have are a few anecdotal statements regarding al-Muḥāsibī, an examination of these reports will be made, as well as a discussion of the controversy surrounding Ibn Ḥanbal's dispute with him, which unfortunately affected the final days of his life, and his reputation among a section of the scholarly elite in subsequent generations. Finally, an assessment of the effect of al-Muḥāsibī's milieu, environment and period upon his life will be made to examine to what extent he was 'a product of his time'.

Al-Muḥāsibī's early life

The classical biographical and historical sources agree that al-Ḥārith b. Asad was born in the thriving metropolis of Basra but unfortunately are less forthcoming regarding the date of his entry into this world. More contemporary scholars, however, seem also to have reached a consensus that his birth occurred in the year 165/781 but this is purely a speculative opinion based on circumstantial evidence as support.¹ What is more certain is the affirmation of the appellation 'al-ʿAnazī' seemingly denoting an affiliation with the Arab tribe of ʿAnaza, which may well have been one of the Arab tribes to settle in Basra after its establishment.² Moreover, there is an even larger consensus among the biographical and historical sources that al-Ḥārith b. Asad's agnomen (*kunya*) was Abū ʿAbd Allāh; this is in spite of the fact that there is no evidence to suggest he was married or had children and, as such, this seems to be a manifestation of the cultural trend towards the use of *kunya* in Arab society rather than perhaps having a basis in reality.³

Despite his familial affiliation, there can be little doubt that al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-ʿAnazī did not reach fame under this name but rather under the appellation of 'al-Muḥāsibī'. Biographers and historians give two accounts regarding its origin:

the first and less common view posits that the appellation ‘al-Muḥāsibī’ is due to the fact that he possessed a number of small pebbles (*ḥaṣan*) that he would enumerate (*ya’udduhā wa yaḥsubuhā*) whilst engaged in the remembrance of God (*ḥāl al-dhikr*).⁴ The more established opinion regarding the appellation ‘al-Muḥāsibī’, and perhaps more befitting bearing in mind his teachings, is that it relates to al-Ḥārith’s excessive practice of taking himself to account in all circumstances (*li kathrat muḥāsabatihī li naḥsihi fī jamī’ al-aḥwāl*).⁵

Furthermore, very little is known regarding al-Muḥāsibī’s early life apart from two narrations related by Ibn Zafar al-Ṣaqlī in his *Anbā’*, one of which reads as follows:

It has reached me that al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, may God be pleased with him, whilst still a child passed by some young boys playing outside the house of a date seller and al-Ḥārith stopped to watch them play. Meanwhile, the owner came out carrying some dates with him and said to al-Ḥārith, ‘Eat these dates’. Al-Ḥārith replied, ‘What do you know about them?’ The date seller said, ‘I have just sold some dates to a man and these fell from them’. Al-Ḥārith then said, ‘Do you know him?’ and he replied ‘Yes’. Al-Ḥārith then turned his attention to the children who were playing and said, ‘Is this man a Muslim?’ to which they [the children] said, ‘Yes, yes’. Al-Ḥārith then left him and the date seller followed until he caught up with him and grabbed him saying to al-Ḥārith, ‘By God I will not release you until you tell me what you think of me’. So he replied, ‘O *shaykh* if you are a Muslim then seek out the owner of the dates and free yourself from your transaction with him in the same way that you would seek out water if you were extremely thirsty. O *shaykh* do you feed Muslim children the unlawful (*al-suḥt*) whilst you yourself are a Muslim?’ The man then said, ‘By God, I will never undertake a worldly transaction again!’⁶

This anecdotal statement is typical of the Sufi biographical tradition and, being couched in religious imagery, it sheds much light on the early life of al-Muḥāsibī. We find that al-Muḥāsibī is a regular child observing his peers at play, although not joining in their frivolity, who is then confronted by a seemingly innocuous offer of dates from a person who would be fully expected to possess them, i.e. a date seller. Al-Muḥāsibī does not just simply accept the offer, however, but rather enquires as to the source of the dates in order to ascertain their lawfulness and after finding out that they were unlawful, which is made worse by the fact that the owner of the dates is a Muslim, the devout youth flees to escape such an undesirable scene. Consequently, on confronting the date seller, he shocks him further with a pious admonishment that not only clarifies the legal aspect for him but also counsels him in a sermonising manner, showing the enormity of his crime by drawing his attention to the fact that he had not only committed a forbidden act but, in addition, intended to involve the next generation of believers in it also. Thus, the intention of this report is clear; to clarify that al-Muḥāsibī at even a young age was indeed knowledgeable, scrupulous and concerned with the

affairs of his community, which in itself is a pattern that he would follow into adulthood.

The same author provides us with another glimpse of the young al-Ḥārith in the following text:

It has reached me that a woman came to him [al-Muḥāsibī] while he was in elementary school (*al-maktab*) and requested that he write a letter for her, which he did and she gave him a *dirham* but he returned it to her, so she took it and left. The teacher (*al-mu'addib*) then said to him, 'Why did you return the *dirham* to her when she had engaged your services [and paid you] for it?' He [al-Muḥāsibī] replied, 'Because of His, the Exalted's statement, "And let no scribe refuse to write as God has taught him [to do so]"',⁷ so I wrote it [the letter] for her out of obedience to God, as He commanded, so how can I take payment for being obedient to God?' The teacher then asked, 'Then what prevented you from giving it to me if you didn't want to take it?' So al-Ḥārith replied, 'I was prevented by His, Glory be to Him, the Exalted's statement, "And they will surely carry their [own] burdens and [other] burdens in addition to their burdens and they will surely be questioned on the Day of Resurrection regarding what they used to fabricate."'”⁸

This further anecdote creates yet another image of piety for us regarding our subject al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī; an image of a boy who, when employing the skills acquired as part of his education, still refused to take payment for his efforts out of fear that it would impinge upon his sincerity and distract him from implementing the command of his Lord. The use of the Qur'ān in the report also indicates to us that, even at such a young age, he perhaps memorised a large portion if not all of the text, as he quotes from disparate places at will. What is far more significant is the application of this knowledge in a practical manner, even in the minute details of his life. He implements this knowledge further with the teacher, reminding him that despite the *dirham* which he enquired about being of little worth and seemingly insignificant in this life, its implications would be much greater in the hereafter, thus admonishing him in the process. Similarly, al-Muḥāsibī may have well left the issue at refusing to take the money but instead attempts to avert a disaster in the hereafter for not only one of his peers but also one of his elders. Once again we are given a portrait of a youth full of devotion, who shows his concern for those in his community but also demonstrates his highly honed spiritual insight. In addition, he is shown to prefer the lasting pleasures of the hereafter to the fleeting comforts of the worldly life and, as such, it is not surprising that he lived in poverty for most of his life, as his religious conviction would not allow him to make a living at the expense of his service to God.

In another report, we find an equally impressive account of al-Muḥāsibī's religious zeal, as once again Abū Nu'aym relates in his *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*:

I heard Abū 'l-Ḥasan b. Muqsim say: I heard Abū 'Alī b. Khayrān al-Faqīh say: I saw Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith b. Asad at Bāb al-Ṭāq (the Gate of the

Archway)⁹ in the middle of the road clinging to his father whilst the people gathered [around them] saying to him, ‘Divorce my mother as you are upon one religion and she is upon another’.¹⁰

This report concerning his relationship with his father indicates that by this time al-Muḥāsibī and his family had moved to Baghdad and so this incident must have taken place there. What is more striking, however, is the zealous approach of al-Muḥāsibī regarding the issue of his father’s theological stance, from which it is quite apparent that he thought of it as innovative from a religious perspective and, thus, completely rejected. So much so that he felt it necessary to proclaim his disapproval of this publicly, hence the significance of the incident taking place at Bāb al-Ṭāq.

Notwithstanding, his request for his father to divorce his mother is equally significant, as this cannot be regarded as an act of scrupulousness (*waraʿ*), which by its nature is a supererogatory act, but we can only assume that al-Muḥāsibī held his father’s belief to be an act of disbelief (*kufr*), as there is no other explanation for his insistence that a solemn marriage vow be broken. Thus, we can conclude not only that al-Muḥāsibī was pious and scrupulous as a young man but also that his religious fervour was intense, to the extent that even his closest family members were not spared.

Al-Muḥāsibī’s scrupulousness, first seen as a young boy in Ibn Zafīr al-Ṣāqī’s reports above, was to manifest itself further in adulthood in another narration, which Abū Nuʿaym relates in his *Hilyat al-Awliyāʾ*:

Jaʿfar [al-Khuldī] informed me that Abū ʿAlī-Ḥasan told him that he heard al-Junayd say: On the day that al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī’s father died al-Ḥārith was in desperate need of a silver *dāniq*¹¹ and his father had left a huge sum of money¹² but he took nothing from it; he [al-Ḥārith] would say, ‘The people of two [differing] religions do not inherit from one another’,¹³ as his father was a Wāqifī.^{14, 15}

There can be little doubt that this text is indicative of al-Muḥāsibī’s extreme scrupulousness (*waraʿ*) as, indeed, he forfeited what can be considered a huge fortune, which was rightfully his and in spite of his grave need, for the sake of avoiding any remote chance of there being the slightest doubt (*shubha*) regarding his father’s wealth.¹⁶ The same report, upon reflection, is also indicative of other factors, however; for example, it informs us that al-Muḥāsibī, despite his later poverty, may have been raised in a household with considerable wealth. This in turn may also cause us to conclude that due to this financial stability he may have been privy to a high standard of religious education, which was common to the period in his places of residence, both Basra and Baghdad. This is also confirmed by his familiarity with both the lawful (*al-ḥalāl*) and the unlawful (*al-ḥarām*) as indicated in the first two reports and his knowledge of *ḥadīth*, as indicated by the third. In addition, the fact that his father held such a theological stance is indicative not only of the extent of the controversy concerning the created Qurʾān but

also of the fact that al-Muḥāsibī's father was equally acquainted with the issue and, consequently, may have been equally conversant with other aspects of religious knowledge and learning.

Al-Muḥāsibī's teachers¹⁷

The primary education indicated in the anecdotes mentioned above was not only acquired by al-Muḥāsibī at the basic level but, like so many scholars of his period, he also undertook studies of an advanced type. Perhaps one of the most common forms of study was that of *ḥadīth* and, as with many of his contemporaries, he undertook instruction in this discipline with a variety of traditionists of the period. The very nature of *ḥadīth* transmission, i.e. its narration-based format, dictates that the number of narrations transmitted from a single *shaykh* may vary from one scholar to another and in this sense al-Muḥāsibī was no different. Those from whom he relates only singular narrations include: Hushaym b. Bashīr (d. 183/799)¹⁸, Marwān b. Shujā' (d. 184/800),¹⁹ Wakī' b. Jarrāḥ (d. 197/813),²⁰ 'Abbād b. al-'Awwām (d. 185/801),²¹ 'Alī b. 'Āṣim (d. 201/816),²² Sulayman b. Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 203/818),²³ Abū Nu'aym al-Faḍl b. Dukayn [ʿAmr b. Ḥammād al-Taymī] (d. 219/834)²⁴ and Abū Bakr b. Abū Shayba (d. 235/849)²⁵ Similarly, there were other scholars from whom he related more than one narration and these included: Yahyā b. Abū Bukayr (d. 209/824),²⁶ 'Abd Allāh b. Bakr (d. 208/823),²⁷ Ḥujayn b. al-Muthannā (d. 205/820),²⁸ Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839),²⁹ Sunayd b. Dāwūd al-Miṣṣīṣī (d. 226/841),³⁰ Surayj b. Yūnus (d. 235/849),³¹ 'Affān al-Baṣrī (d. 220/835),³² 'Abd al-'Azīz b. 'Abd Allāh³³ and Muḥammad b. Kathīr.³⁴ In addition, it is well documented that the most famous of his *ḥadīth shaykhs* was Yazīd b. Hārūn (d. 206/821), from whom he received a great many *ḥadīth*.³⁵

In addition to *ḥadīth*, one of the other foremost religious disciplines studied at the time was jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and once again it is not surprising that al-Muḥāsibī also underwent a form of juridical training, which is apparent in many of his works but especially in *Fahm al-Ṣalāt*, *Kitāb al-Makāsib* and *Kitāb al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*. What is more striking, however, is that al-Muḥāsibī is not linked with one of the many, perhaps more obscure, personalities but, indeed, is documented as being a pupil of none other than Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), the founder of the Shāfi'ī school of jurisprudence (*al-madhhab al-shāfi'ī*). However, many of the scholars of this school contest the notion that al-Muḥāsibī was a direct disciple of al-Shāfi'ī and maintain rather that he was included in the first generation of jurists to follow al-Shāfi'ī who were not his direct pupils, as the following statement from Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 643/1245) indicates:

Abū Manṣūr al-Tamīmī regarded him [al-Muḥāsibī] as being from the first generation (*al-ṭabaqa al-ūlā*) of the Shāfi'ī scholars who associated [directly] with (*ṣaḥība*) al-Shāfi'ī, saying, '[al-Muḥāsibī is an] imam of the Muslims in jurisprudence (*al-fiqh*), principles (*al-uṣūl*), Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf*), prophetic narration (*ḥadīth*) and scholastic theology (*kalām*). His books in these

disciplines are the foundation for whoever desired to write on such subjects. [In addition], most of the theologians of al-Ṣifāṭiyya³⁶ are linked with him.’ He [al-Tamīmī] also said, ‘If there had been no one else than al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī from the companions of al-Shāfi‘ī in jurisprudence (*al-fiqh*), scholastic theology (*kalām*), principles (*al-uṣūl*), analogical deduction (*al-qiyās*), abstinence (*al-zuhd*), scrupulousness (*al-wara’*) and gnosis (*al-ma‘rifā*), it would have been “dust in the faces” of his opponents and all praise is due to God for that’.³⁷

Ibn Ṣalāḥ then states:

I haven’t seen his [al-Muḥāsibī’s] association with al-Shāfi‘ī, may God be pleased with him, mentioned by anyone other than him [al-Tamīmī]. In this regard, Abū Maṣṣūr is not an expert, such that a unique opinion of his would be relied upon and, in fact, corroborating evidence bears witness to the lack of al-Muḥāsibī’s association with al-Shāfi‘ī.³⁸

Commenting on this appraisal, al-Subki (d. 771/1370) says:

If Abū Maṣṣūr has clearly stated that he [al-Muḥāsibī] associated [directly] with al-Shāfi‘ī, then an objection to this is appropriate, otherwise when he said, ‘The first generation’, he must have meant of those who were contemporaries of al-Shāfi‘ī and, as such, those who were of the generation who took from his knowledge. Abū ‘Āṣim al-‘Abbādī also mentioned him in the first generation, saying, ‘He was from the contemporaries of al-Shāfi‘ī and chose his school’, and he didn’t say, ‘He was of those who associated [directly] with him’. So perhaps this is what Abū Maṣṣūr meant.³⁹

Thus, it would seem that al-Muḥāsibī did not in fact directly study with al-Shāfi‘ī but, nevertheless, it is apparent from these excerpts also that he was clearly regarded as a pupil of al-Shāfi‘ī’s in the sense that he adopted his principles and adhered to his school.

In addition to traditionist and jurisprudential studies, al-Muḥāsibī also acquired knowledge concerning the Arabic linguistic tradition and the sciences of the Qur’ān (*al-lughā wa ‘l-Qur’ān*). These disciplines were studied in particular with Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839), who is famous for the works *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth* and *Kitāb al-Amwāl* and with whom al-Muḥāsibī also studied *ḥadīth*. It is likely, therefore, that under the tutelage of Abū ‘Ubayd, al-Muḥāsibī mastered the concepts of abrogation (*al-nāsikh wa ‘l-mansūkh*) and other Qur’ānic sciences such as the ‘general’ and the ‘specific’ (*al-‘āmm wa ‘l-khāṣṣ*), which are apparent in his work entitled *Fahm al-Qur’ān*. From this it is clear that from an early period al-Muḥāsibī understood that many of the disputes which raged in his time revolved around linguistic concepts regarding the Qur’ānic text and to this effect we find that many of his narrations from Sulaymān b. Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 203/818), Surayj b. Yūnus (d. 235/849) and Yazīd b. Hārūn (d. 206/821) are related to these issues.⁴⁰

Thus, it is clear from the accounts above that al-Muḥāsibī enjoyed an excellent education, typical of what the period offered in terms of instruction and the extent of which is apparent from the variety of sources that he quotes.

Al-Muḥāsibī's sources⁴¹

In addition to and most probably as part of the learning al-Muḥāsibī undertook, we can identify numerous sources which he quotes, both to clarify his thought and add credence to it. As such, al-Muḥāsibī, in addition to quoting the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* literature, provides a rich mosaic of opinions from the early generations of scholars, which at times reads like a 'who's who' of famous and important Islamic personalities.⁴²

Thus, in the Companion generation (*al-ṣaḥāba*) we find a variety of names including the following: Abū Bakr [al-Ṣiddīq] (d. 13/634), 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (d. 35/655), 'Alī b. Abū Ṭālib (d. 40/660), 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd (d. 32/652), 'Abd Allāh b. al-'Abbās (d. 57/678), Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān (d. 36/657), Mu'ādh b. Jabal (d. 17/639), Abu Dardā' ['Uwaymar b. 'Abd Allāh] (d. 32/653), Abū Hurayra ['Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sakhr al-Dawsī] (d. 58/677), Abū Mūsā ['Abd Allāh b. Qays] al-Ash'arī (d. 44/665), 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amr al-'Āṣ (d. 79/698), Tamīm al-Dārī, Ka'b al-Aḥbār (d. 32/652) and 'Abd Allāh b. Salām (d. 43/663) among others.⁴³

In the following generation of the Successors (*al-tābi'ūn*) we find an equally impressive array of personalities upon whom al-Muḥāsibī relies, including: Abū 'Āliya (d. 90/708), Sa'īd b. al-Musayyib (d. 91/709 or 94/712), Ibrāhīm al-Taymī (d. 92/710), 'Abd Allāh b. Qays (d. 103/721), Mujaḥid b. Jabr al-Makhzūmī (d. 104/722) and Ṭawūs b. Kaysān al-Yamanī (d. 105/723). However, the most important authorities of this generation with regard to al-Muḥāsibī's works are Abū 'Abd Allāh Wahb b. Munabbih al-Dimārī (b. 110/728) and the celebrated al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728). Of the later luminaries of this period we also find 'Atā' b. Abū Rabāḥ (d. 115/733) and the mystic students of al-Ḥasan, Thābit b. Aslam al-Bunānī (d. 123/741 or 127/745), Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 128/746) and Ayyūb b. Tamīma al-Sikhtiyānī (d. 131/749).⁴⁴

Similarly, from around the middle of the second–eighth centuries we find the following authorities quoted: Sulaymān b. Mihrān al-'A'mash (d. 148/765), Ibn Jurayj al-Makkī (d. 150/767), 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Amr al-Awzā'ī (d. 157/773), Abū 'Uthmān Wuhayb al-Makkī (d. 153/773), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/777) and Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 160/777). Following on from this group of scholars we then find a number of al-Muḥāsibī's contemporaries who are also quoted: Fuḍayl b. 'Iyād (d. 188/803), Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/809), Sufyān b. 'Uyayna (d. 198/814), Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830), Bishr b. al-Ḥārith al-Ḥāfi'ī (d. 227/842) and Dhū 'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/860).⁴⁵

The selection of authorities quoted by al-Muḥāsibī alluded to in this section has been provided merely to demonstrate the range of al-Muḥāsibī's learning and familiarity with a variety of fields of study and their major personalities.

Thus, within this representative collection we find scholars famous as Qur'ānic exegetes (*mufasssīrūn*), traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*) and jurists (*fuqahā'*), all of whom al-Muḥāsibī quotes effortlessly, not only exemplifying his own level of knowledge and understanding but also adding – indirectly – ‘orthodox’ authority to his own works. Further, these quotations also indicate to us that al-Muḥāsibī did not consider himself to be ‘innovating’ a new technique of spirituality and purification of the soul but rather, that he based his teaching on ‘classical’ Islamic sources of learning. Yet, at the same time, he was developing his own unique approach to moral psychology in an Islamic framework drawn from these very sources, which would be utilised by mystics for centuries to come.

Al-Muḥāsibī's students⁴⁶

The foremost student of al-Muḥāsibī is without doubt Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Junayd b. Muḥammad (d. 298/910), the celebrated latter-day leader of the Baghdadi school and through whom we have retained a great deal of information regarding al-Muḥāsibī, particularly in Abū Nu‘aym’s *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*.⁴⁷ Another of the primary figures of the Baghdadi school who became synonymous with it and who was also associated with al-Muḥāsibī was Abū 'l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Nūrī (d. 295/907).⁴⁸ Similarly, Abū 'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Masrūq al-Ṭūsī (d. 298/910) also gained a considerable reputation within Sufi circles and was likewise an associate of al-Muḥāsibī, providing us with some of the anecdotal phrases we find regarding his *shaykh* in Abū Nu‘aym’s *Hilya*.⁴⁹ Another of al-Muḥāsibī's associates who also had mystical proclivities and was also a traditionist, yet of whom little is known, is Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Abd al-Jabbār 'al-Ṣūfī al-Kabīr' (d. 306/918) who transmitted *ḥadīth* from his teacher.⁵⁰ Perhaps the greatest contributor after al-Junayd to our portrait of al-Muḥāsibī in *Hilyat al-Awliyā'* is the little known Abū 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Khawwāṣ, whose many narrations also indicate his intimacy with our subject.⁵¹

Of the less well-known disciples of al-Muḥāsibī was Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim al-Farā'idī (d. 310/932), the brother of Abū Layth, who led an extremely ascetical lifestyle and who also related *ḥadīth* from his teacher.⁵² More famous in Sufi circles, being celebrated in their hagiographic works, was Abū Ḥamza Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Bazzāz [al-Baghdādī] (d. 269/883), who famously taught his ideas publicly and seemingly enjoyed the approval of Ibn Ḥanbal.⁵³ A close associate of al-Muḥāsibī was Abū Bakr Ismā'īl b. Ishāq al-Sarrāj (d. 286/899) to the extent that his teacher would gather in the aforementioned student's house with his other disciples.⁵⁴ Finally, perhaps an unexpected associate of al-Muḥāsibī was Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn b. Ṣāliḥ Ibn Khayrān (d. 310/923), who was a renowned Shāfi'ī jurist (*faqīh*) known for his scrupulousness to the extent that he refused a judgeship (*al-qaḍā'*), yet despite his juridical background we find him narrating directly regarding al-Muḥāsibī, thus once again indicating his intimacy with our subject.⁵⁵

Related anecdotes regarding al-Muḥāsibī

Since the historical and biographical works offer us very little information about the life of al-Muḥāsibī, other than a series of anecdotal statements, it is appropriate here that a selection of these be examined to assess exactly what kind of picture we are presented with regarding his life and personality.

Much of this information is provided by his foremost student Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Junayd, from whom the following narration is transmitted in Abū Nu'aym's *Hilya*:

Al-Ḥārith was very emaciated and as he passed by one day while I was sitting at our door, I saw that his face was further shrunken due to hunger, so I said to him, 'O uncle, if you enter you can partake of something we have'. He replied, 'Would you do that?' and I said, 'Yes, and by doing so you will have pleased me and honoured me'. So I entered and he followed; I proceeded swiftly to my uncle's house, as it was more spacious than ours and was never empty of sumptuous foods, the like of which we didn't have in our house.⁵⁶ I then brought a variety of foods and set them before him. He then stretched out his hand and took a morsel, raising it to his mouth; I saw him chew it but he did not swallow it and then he left without speaking to me. The next day I met him and said, 'O uncle you pleased me and then you caused me distress'. So he replied, 'O my son, as for my need it was great and I made every effort to partake of the food you set before me but there is a sign between myself and God⁵⁷ – if the food is not acceptable to Him, a rancid odour arises in my nose from it, which I cannot accept,⁵⁸ so I threw that morsel in your porch way and left'.⁵⁹

In some reports the narration continues with al-Junayd asking, "Will you enter today?" and he said, "Yes!" So I set before him a piece of bread that we had and he ate it and said, "If you offer anything to the destitute (*al-faqīr*)⁶⁰ then offer such as this"⁶¹. The reports in the primary sources vary somewhat regarding this particular anecdote, casting some doubt as to its authenticity yet, at the same time, the main features remain consistent. The first identifiable feature is al-Muḥāsibī's desperate state of poverty being evidenced by his emaciated appearance, which was clearly visible to his disciple. Despite this being an indication of his otherworldliness, we can also conclude that this was not necessarily a state which he chose, since when he was invited to eat by his student, he dutifully accepted, fulfilling the Prophetic guidance on the subject. Where his true spiritual status is indicated is in the next part of the story; previous anecdotal narrations have shown al-Muḥāsibī's extreme sense of scrupulousness but here, in this narration, this characteristic is enhanced further, as al-Muḥāsibī is held in a kind of 'divine custody' where, due to his own efforts at being scrupulous, God has granted him an elevated state of protection from all that is unlawful and doubtful from the perspective of sacred law.⁶²

As such, this is indicative of not only his advanced spiritual station but also his preference of his Lord's pleasure as opposed to the ephemeral enjoyments of the

worldly life, as he forsakes the food from the wedding feast – usually the most delicious and well-prepared – for food which is not only lawful in a strictly legal sense but has also gained God’s approval. This is further evidenced by the addition to the narration, which shows al-Muḥāsibī’s preference for the simple, humble sustenance of a true devotee of God, i.e. a simple piece of bread that will suffice his hunger and please his Lord, rather than a sumptuous banquet of ‘doubtful’ origins, suggestive of the fleeting pleasures of this life.

In another report preserved in *Ḥilya* we find that Abū Nu‘aym narrates on the authority of Ja‘far al-Khuldī that al-Junayd stated:

I would often say to al-Ḥārith, ‘Seclusion is my delight and you extract me [from it] to the alienation of seeing people and [the “dangers” of] the streets’, so he replied, ‘How often you say that seclusion is your delight! Yet if half of [God’s] creation came close to me I would find no delight [in their company] and if the other half distanced themselves from me I would not feel alienated due to their remoteness’.⁶³

In this statement we also find a variety of features that are used to indicate his spiritual station and ascetical nature. The first feature is al-Muḥāsibī’s correction of the misplaced notion that being detached from the world in a spiritual sense or to refrain from sin requires that one remain secluded from society. On the contrary, al-Muḥāsibī clarifies for his student that being detached from the world requires no physical detachment but rather a spiritual detachment of the heart from the world and those who exist within it. This in turn clarifies for us not only al-Muḥāsibī’s concept of this issue but also that this was indeed his own spiritual experience as he is talking from a purely personal perspective. In addition, it also gives a further indication of al-Muḥāsibī’s ability to discern the finer, more subtle qualities of human nature and, similarly, his pedagogical skill in providing guidance to an aspirant upon the spiritual path.

In a seemingly related narration, again it is al-Junayd, who informs us in Abū Nu‘aym’s *Ḥilya*:

Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī would come to our house and say, ‘Come with me and let’s go to the desert’. So I would reply, ‘Would you turn me out from my seclusion and the security of my soul to the [“dangers” of] the streets, tribulations and to witness carnal desires?’ He replied, ‘Come out with me and do not fear’. So I went out with him and it was as if the street was empty, such that we saw nothing that we disliked. When I reached the place where he would sit he said, ‘Ask me’, to which I would reply, ‘I have no question to ask’, and he would repeat, ‘Ask me about what occurs in your soul’, and questions would crowd in on me such that I would ask him and he would answer me immediately and then return home, writing them as books.⁶⁴

This narration begins by further reiterating the main message of the last anecdote, i.e. that al-Muḥāsibī was not merely an exoteric ascetic – although he was known

for his outward renouncement of the world – but for him, it was an esoteric asceticism of the heart, which was also vitally important. Similarly, we find him portrayed as a man entirely certain of his reliance on God, as when questioned anxiously by his disciple he simply replies, ‘Come out with me and do not fear’, thus instilling a sense of calm and serenity in his student, allaying his genuine concern. Another, ‘miraculous’ event then ensues, with al-Muḥāsibī’s certainty proven true as God seemingly rewards his trust in Him by emptying the street of all that al-Junayd feared – which serves as a further indication of his elevated status and proximity to God.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this narration, however, is the section relating to al-Muḥāsibī’s questioning of his associate, which is equally suggestive of his concern for his student and also of his quest to reach the depths of human experience and provide answers to the spiritual ailments of his peers. The very nature of the question and answer format referred to in the report – which also adorns many of his works – is also indicative of his intimate relationship with his disciples and a specific and unique, esoteric approach to purification of the soul, rather than relying on a merely ritualistic enactment of physical acts of worship. In essence al-Muḥāsibī strives to reach the very core and nature of the soul so as to enhance its positive qualities and leave it bereft of the negativity of its base proclivities. Consequently, this unique and very ‘hands on’ approach supplied al-Muḥāsibī with the basis for his essential works on moral psychology for which he became renowned. Consequently, al-Muḥāsibī demonstrates a profound knowledge of human nature and its weaknesses that predates Freud by a millennium, albeit in a religious context, and reveals ‘the discerning wisdom and inspired insight of a true spiritual director and shepherd of souls’.⁶⁵

In another such anecdote we find the following story related in al-Hujwārī’s (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077) *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*:

He [al-Muḥāsibī] possessed a ‘king bird’ (*shāhmurghī*), which used to sing aloud. One day, Abū Ḥamza al-Baghdādī, who was al-Ḥārith’s pupil and an ecstatic man, came to see him and during his visit the bird sang and Abū Ḥamza shrieked out loud. Al-Ḥārith rose, seizing a knife and declared, ‘You are a disbeliever’, and would have executed him had it not been for the intervention of his disciples. Then he [al-Ḥārith] said to Abū Ḥamza, ‘Become a Muslim O reprobate!’ His disciples exclaimed, ‘O *shaykh*, we all know him to be one of the elect saints and monotheists, why does the *shaykh* regard him with suspicion?’ Al-Ḥārith replied, ‘I do not suspect him, his opinions are sound and I know that he is a profound monotheist but why should he do something that resembles the incarnationists (*al-ḥulūliyyūn*), which has the appearance of being derived from their doctrine? If a senseless bird sings capriciously after its fashion, why should he behave as though its song were the voice of God? God is indivisible and the Eternal does not become incarnate, united with creation or merged with it.’ When Abū Ḥamza perceived the *shaykh*’s insight, he said, ‘O *shaykh*, although I am right in theory, nevertheless, since my action resembled those of heretics, I repent and withdraw’.⁶⁶

In this excerpt, al-Muḥāsibī is portrayed as a strict adherent to ‘orthodox’ doctrines, not tolerating for one moment phrases resembling the ‘ecstatic utterances’ (*al-shaṭaḥāt*) of the so-called intoxicated school of Sufism (*al-sukr*), exemplified by such notables as Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875) and al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣnūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). Furthermore, al-Muḥāsibī is seen as a paragon of strict orthodox virtue, defending the beliefs of Islam to the extent of threatening one of his own students with the most severe of consequences for his errant misdemeanour. Similarly, al-Muḥāsibī is also portrayed as an erudite spiritual master, explaining the reason for his apparently extreme reaction and, consequently, clarifying for his students his views regarding spiritual purification and development on the path to God. Thus for al-Muḥāsibī his goal is not divine union (*al-ittiḥād*) or incarnation (*al-ḥulūl*) like that of the ‘ecstatic’ Sufis but rather an evacuation of all falsehood from the inner sanctuary of the soul, to allow it to be purified and thus elevated by attaining closeness to God.

In summary, in al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī we are presented with an image of a man who was erudite in the fields of learning of his day and strictly ‘orthodox’ in his belief, yet at the same time a man who had acquired great spiritual insight and a window upon the human soul, to the extent that his spiritual state and proximity with regard to God was of the highest rank. This is particularly true of the Sufi hagiographical works and their apologia, where al-Muḥāsibī is regarded as one of the early exemplars of their tradition, being held in the highest esteem. Nevertheless, despite this ‘positive press’ al-Muḥāsibī was not without his detractors and, indeed, his personality is equally couched in controversy within sections of the biographical and historical literature.⁶⁷

Al-Muḥāsibī’s death

Although there is no confirmed report of the date of al-Muḥāsibī’s birth, the historical biographers are in agreement that his death occurred in 243/857, approximately two years after that of his contemporary Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. With regard to this incident, we find the following report:

Al-qāḍī al-Ḥusayn b. Ismā‘īl al-Maḥāmīlī said Abū Bakr b. Hārūn b. al-Mujaddar told me, ‘I was present at the demise of al-Ḥārith – meaning al-Muḥāsibī – and he said to us, “If I see that which pleases me then I will smile at you but if I see something else [other than that which pleases me] you will find it apparent on my face”.⁶⁸ Then he smiled and passed away’.⁶⁹

This ‘pleasant’ end, indicative of piety in the hagiographical literature, was certainly short-lived at his funeral, as, even if God had accepted his efforts during his life, the people of Baghdad were less forgiving, apparently due to Ibn Ḥanbal’s abjuration of al-Muḥāsibī and the population of Baghdad’s fanaticism for the great traditionist. In this regard we find that Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-Naṣrābādī (d. 367/977–8) narrates:

It has reached me that al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī had spoken [on issues] regarding scholastic theology (*al-kalām*), so Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal repudiated him and he [al-Muḥāsibī] went into hiding in a house in Baghdad, dying therein; only four people prayed over him [at his funeral] and he passed away in the year two hundred and forty three.⁷⁰

The place of al-Muḥāsibī's burial is therefore confirmed as being Baghdad yet there is some dispute as to the actual location of his grave⁷¹; al-Mustawfī (d. 750/1349), for example, proposes in his work *Nuzhat al-Qulūb* that his grave is on the west side of Baghdad. On the contrary, al-Bundanjī (d. 1283/1866) in his *Jāmi' al-Anwār* goes into great detail, suggesting that al-Muḥāsibī is buried on the east side of Baghdad on the site of a mosque formally known as 'Zāwiyat al-Mawlawiyya' built by Dāwūd Bāshā and now known as 'Jāmi' al-Āṣawīyya'.⁷²

The effect of al-Muḥāsibī's milieu on his life

Having selectively examined the era in which al-Muḥāsibī lived in the last chapter and consequently shed considerable light on his personal biography in the current chapter, it is equally befitting here to discuss to what extent this historical period had an effect on our subject, to try and assess the extent that his surroundings played in shaping his life. Although in reality little biographical detail is available regarding the specifics of al-Muḥāsibī's life, one factor that is confirmed is that his birth and formative years were in Basra. Similarly, the suggested date of his birth is 165/781 and at that time we may assume that Basra was at the beginning of its decline as a major urban centre, coinciding naturally with the rise and flourishing of Baghdad.

Nevertheless, one may also assume that the ascetic tradition that was associated with Basra did not die overnight and indeed, bearing in mind that this social trend is said to originate with the Prophetic Companion Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, one may suggest that this world view was deeply rooted in certain sections of Basran society. In fact this early pietistic trend was further developed with the group of individuals whom al-Nashshār terms 'the first Basran school' (*madrasat al-Baṣra al-ūlā*), which culminated in the life and personality of Basra's most famous son al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and the development of another group of ascetics who formed the basis of 'the second Basran school' (*madrasat al-Baṣra al-thāniya*). Although al-Muḥāsibī was far too young to have met most of these personalities, some of them such as 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd and his student Riyāḥ b. 'Amr al-Qaysī were still alive in his childhood years and, despite having no firm evidence to support their meeting, it seems reasonable to assume that the trend towards religious austerity and moral excellence was still prevalent in his early life, a fact which seems confirmed by the two narrations from Ibn Zafar al-Ṣāqilī.

This was not the only tangible influence that may have had an effect on his early life in Basra, however, as the trend towards rational and dialectical theology seems also to have started there. Indeed, one of the earliest incidences of this sort – as the tradition would have it – appears to have occurred within the circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, ultimately leading to the exit of one of his students Wāṣil b.

‘Aṭā’. This incident is quoted as being the historical starting point for the Mu‘tazilite movement and, consequently, al-Muḥāsibī was contemporaneous with some of the Basran school’s greatest figures, including Abū Hudhayl and al-Nazzām. Despite this, al-Muḥāsibī did not join or indeed even accept the teachings of the early Mu‘tazilites but rather, in the tradition of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, remained strictly ‘orthodox’ in his outlook. At the same time, however, one cannot help but feel that this familiarity with such a methodology at an early stage may well have influenced his use of scholastic theology at a later stage.

Having spent his formative years in Basra, he moved to Baghdad with his family at an early age, most probably due to the perceived opportunities therein and the relative decline of Basra, as Baghdad had now been established as the ‘Abbāsīd state capital for at least 20 years or more. It is here that al-Muḥāsibī seems to have flourished as a young man, particularly in terms of his learning. It will be remembered from the last chapter that this period is often referred to as ‘the Golden era’ of Islamic learning and, despite that fact that there is no evidence to suggest that al-Muḥāsibī was involved with the ‘secular’ disciplines of medicine, philosophy and astronomy, there is ample evidence of his engagement with religious learning. Indeed, it is equally clear from the second quotation from Ibn Ḍafr al-Ṣaqlī that al-Muḥāsibī’s training began very early in the basics of reading, writing and memorising the Qur’ān, and we may assume that this process continued after his move to Baghdad. In fact al-Muḥāsibī himself alludes to this at the beginning of his work *al-Naṣā’ih*, and his studies in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*, as well as *fiqh*, have already been alluded to earlier in this chapter.⁷³

The tendency towards the learning and teaching of the Qur’ān, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* was not the only intellectual trend that was present in Baghdad, however, and, indeed, the inclination towards a moralising, spiritual asceticism that was prevalent in both Kūfa and Basra prior to the establishment of Baghdad continued in a new form in the new state capital. The manifestation of this trend seems to have been a reaction to the affluence and somewhat ‘irreligious’ lifestyle that was a remnant of the old Umayyad dynasty but continued – albeit in a form cloaked in a much more religious appearance – with the advent of the ‘Abbāsīds and the expansion of their empire. As a consequence, such trends evolved in Baghdad became the first ‘model’ to which the subsequent generations of Sufis would turn to for inspiration, being known as the ‘Mystical school of Baghdad’. This ‘school’ combined a variety of ascetical and spiritual teachings and was developed by the efforts of a number of prominent personalities such as Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī, Bishr b. al-Ḥārith al-Ḥāfi and Sarī al-Saqāfi, as well as al-Muḥāsibī himself, and culminated with the ‘sober’ (*ṣaḥw*) school of Sufism associated with al-Junayd. Such eminent company was no doubt a great influence on the life and teachings of al-Muḥāsibī and combined with the introspective asceticism of the Basrans, as exemplified by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, provided the essence of much of his thought.

What is equally apparent, however, in addition to the deep, spiritual tendencies found in the teachings of al-Muḥāsibī, is his staunch stance regarding the Mu‘tazilites, of which there was by now a second school in the capital of Baghdad and, chronologically at least, many of their most famous exponents such as Bishr

b. Mu‘tamir were also his contemporaries. His defence of ‘orthodox’ Sunni doctrines reaches its pinnacle – as will be seen in the next chapter – in his works *Māhiyyat al-‘Aql* and *Fahm al-Qur’ān* but is equally tangible in his own personal life with both of the narrations elucidating his relationship with his father, all of which indicates not only the widespread extent of the Mu‘tazilite doctrines but also the effect that this dispute had on him personally. One may also assume that this was a major factor in his employing scholastic theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*) as an approach, so as to hold a discourse with the Mu‘tazilites, in an attempt to defeat them using their own vernacular and methodology.

Related to this of course is the most singularly significant religio-political event during al-Muḥāsibī’s life, i.e. that of the *miḥna*, since this was intrinsically linked to the Mu‘tazilite movement and the caliph’s support for it at a state level. Bearing in mind al-Muḥāsibī’s strong refutation of Mu‘tazilite doctrines, one may have expected to find his name intrinsically associated with the event as a whole. However, in contrast, one finds that al-Muḥāsibī has no mention whatsoever during the *miḥna* accounts and this in itself requires some pause for thought. This is especially true if we consider the fact that he was involved in a public display of disavowal of the Mu‘tazilites’ doctrines when he openly disowned his father at Bāb al-Ṭāq – an event that in all likelihood could not have failed to escape the attention of the state authorities. In this case, the incident may be explained from the perspective that al-Muḥāsibī was still fairly young and, as such, had no common backing or power – either religious or political – to wield, being relatively unknown, and thus having little or no popular support.

This does not explain, however, his indirect attack on the state doctrine by the writing of specific refutations of the Mu‘tazilites such as those found in *Māhiyyat al-‘Aql* and *Fahm al-Qur’ān* but this may also be understood in a number of ways: first, al-Muḥāsibī wasn’t a judge (*qāḍī*) and did not occupy any other state appointment. Likewise, he was not even a popular preacher or renowned scholar of *ḥadīth* and therefore was not in the direct ‘line of fire’ in terms of the caliphal administration, as it was only such people who could command popular support and who seem to have been targeted in the initial period at least. Secondly, it may have been the case that even if al-Muḥāsibī had been suspected, he would have been left alone as he was more commonly known for his exposition of spiritual matters rather than his scholastic theology or his political ambition. Indeed, al-Ma’mūn is even reported to have entertained those whom he considered ‘ignorant ascetics’.⁷⁴ Finally, and most probably in the opinion of this writer, is that al-Muḥāsibī wrote works containing refutations of the Mu‘tazilites such as *Māhiyyat al-‘Aql* and *Fahm al-Qur’ān* in the post-*miḥna* period, when the situation allowed him to do so due to the apparent ‘pro-Sunnism’ stance of al-Mutawakkil, or at the very least if al-Muḥāsibī did write such works in a pre-*miḥna* period, he kept them very close to his chest.⁷⁵ In any case, the presence of an anti-Mu‘tazilite trend within his works, in addition to the disavowal of his father, is sufficient proof that al-Muḥāsibī was clearly affected by the impact of such theological issues to the extent that he took action in his own, personal way to uphold a belief, which he felt was under a critical attack and which he felt duty bound to defend.

Thus, in summary we may regard al-Muḥāsibī as very much a product of his time in the sense that he engaged himself with the various fields of learning of the day and making the most of his presence in the thriving state capital. Indeed, he appears to have developed his own scholarly methodology in dealing with the deep, moral introspection of the human soul and actively engaged in the theological debates of his era, so as to provide a rational defence of Sunni ‘orthodoxy’. At the same time, however, this very approach, which in many ways seems diametrically opposed to the staunch traditionist stance, caused him to be reviled in his own time and in consequent generations and, as such, by the same token he may be viewed equally as a ‘victim’ of his own era, falling foul of the scholars whose very view he was trying to defend.

Moreover, what is certain is that despite the Baghdad population’s disavowal of this scholar, this city and the Muslim community at large lost one of their greatest, erudite and innovative scholars of his generation. Consequently, his real value would only be sufficiently realised in the years to come, through the examination of his legacy of works, which is the goal of the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 Much of this is based on subsidiary historical information, such as the fact that al-Muḥāsibī related *ḥadīth* from the same *shaykhs* as Ibn Ḥanbal and that his father was involved in the theological controversies of the time. Despite this, however, there remains no clear statement in the classical literature regarding this issue but nevertheless, the date supplied has little to refute it and, in the absence of an alternative, may be used from a practical perspective. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri’āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 6; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, ed. al-Quwwatī, pp. 12–13; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, p. 31; ‘Uwayda, *al-Hārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*, p. 7; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 5; Schoonover, ‘al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri’āya*’, p. 26; and Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 54.
- 2 See al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 56; ‘Izz al-Dīn b. al-Athīr al-Jazarī, *al-Lubāb fī Tahdhīb al-Ansāb*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1980), vol. 2, pp. 361–2; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 5.
- 3 Similarly, there is no information regarding siblings, if they existed at all.
- 4 See ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān [Ibn Ṣalāh] al-Shahrazūrī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā’ al-Shāfi’iyya*, ed. Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Alī Najīb, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 1992), vol. 1, p. 438; and ‘Umar b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn Mulaqqin, *al-‘Iqd al-Mudhahhab fī Ṭabaqāt Ḥamalāt al-Madhhab*, ed. Ayman Naṣr al-Azharī and Sayyid Muḥannā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), no. 686.
- 5 See al-Shahrazūrī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā’ al-Shāfi’iyya*, vol. 1, p. 438; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A’yān wa Anbā’ Abnā’ al-Zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977), vol. 2, p. 58; ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. ‘Alī [Tāj al-Dīn] al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyya al-Kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Tanāhi and ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥulw, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Iṣā al-Bābi wa Shurakā’ihi, 1964), vol. 2, p. 275; ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Asnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyya*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1987), vol. 1, p. 25; Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr, *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā’ al-Shāfi’iyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad ‘Umar Hāshim and Muḥammad Muḥammad Gharb (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thiqāfiyya al-Dīniyya, 1993), vol. 1, p. 126; Ibn Mulaqqin, *al-‘Iqd al-Mudhahhab*, no. 686; Ibn Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā’*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn Shurayba (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifā, n.d.), p. 175; Abū Bakr b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Alīm Khān, 4 vols. (Hyderabad:

- Maṭba‘at Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1978), vol. 1, p. 9; ‘Isā Ṣafā’ al-Dīn al-Bundanjī, *Jāmi‘ al-Anwār fī Manāqib al-Akhyār – Tarājum al-Wujūh wa ‘l-A’yān al-Madfūnīn fī Baghdād wa mā Jāwarahā min al-Bilād*, ed. Usāma Nāṣir al-Naqshabandī and Mahdī ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Najm (Beirut: Dār al-‘Arabīyya li ‘l-Mawsū‘āt, 2002), p. 290; and al-Jazarī, *al-Lubāb*, vol. 3, p. 171.
- 6 Muḥammad b. Abū Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn Zafr al-Ṣaqlī, *Kitāb Anbā’ Nujabā’ al-Abnā’* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1980), p. 148–9.
- 7 Qur’an (2: 282).
- 8 Qur’an (29: 13); and Ibn Zafr al-Ṣaqlī, *Kitāb Anbā’ Nujabā’ al-Abnā’*, pp. 149–50.
- 9 A thriving commercial district on the east side of Baghdad, which challenged the Karkh district on the west side, being denoted by its large gate (*bāb*). See Le Strange, *Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 218; Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad*, pp. 173–6 and Appendix 2.
- 10 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā’*, vol. 10, p. 65; al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, vol. 8, p. 214; al-Shahrazūrī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā’ al-Shāfi‘īyya*, vol. 1, p. 441; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 277; al-Mizzī, Yūsuf, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā’ al-Rijāl*, ed. Bashshār Awād Ma‘rūf, 8 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1998), vol. 2, p. 10; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Waḥyāt al-Mashāhīr wa ‘l-A‘lām*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī, 45 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1991), vol. 18, p. 206; and al-Dhahabī, *Siyar ‘Alām al-Nubalā’*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt and Ṣāliḥ al-Samr, 23 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1983), vol. 12, pp. 110–11.
- 11 A common unit of currency at the time worth one sixth of a *dirham*, which was of little value and used here to indicate the abject poverty in which he lived.
- 12 In differing reports the amount varies, being sometimes quoted as 30,000 *dinārs*, 70,000 *dirhams* and 90,000 *dirhams*. In any case, whatever the actual amount, it was a considerable sum of money for the time and certainly not an amount to be rejected so easily.
- 13 This phrase is based on a statement attributed to the Prophet. See Sulaymān b. al-Ash‘ath [Abū Dāwūd] al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1999), p. 423.
- 14 The nature of his father’s theological stance is variably quoted as being Qadarite, Rāfiḍite and Magian. However, I have selected ‘Wāqifi’ here as it is quoted more commonly and fits more conveniently with the historical context, as a Wāqifi was someone who held back (*waqafa*) in giving an opinion on the issue of the created Qur’ān, i.e. is it created or not? This of course was the great debate of the day, which ultimately led to the *miḥna* described above. It is also worth noting that the term Qadarite was almost synonymous with being a Mu‘tazilite at this point and this too cannot be ruled out.
- 15 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā’*, vol. 10, p. 65; al-Kalābādhi, *al-Ta’arruf*, p. 165; al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, vol. 8, p. 214; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, p. 429; Ibn Zafr al-Ṣaqlī, *Kitāb Anbā’ Nujabā’ al-Abnā’*, p. 150; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, p. 623; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa ‘l-Umam*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā and Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā, 18 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1992), vol. 11, p. 243; al-Shahrazūrī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā’ al-Shāfi‘īyya*, vol. 1, p. 440; Ibn Khallikān, *Waḥyāt al-A’yān*, vol. 2, p. 57; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 277; Ibn Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā’*, p. 176; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 10; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Waḥyāt al-Mashāhīr wa ‘l-A‘lām*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī, 45 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1991), vol. 18, p. 206; al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uthmān, *Siyar ‘Alām al-Nubalā’*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt and Ṣāliḥ al-Samr, 23 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1983), vol. 12, p. 110; Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad [Ibn Hajar] al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Zaybaq and ‘Ādil Murshid, 4 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 2001), vol. 1, p. 326; al-Bundanjī, *Jāmi‘ al-Anwār*, p. 291; Khalīl b. Ayyub al-Safādī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi ‘l-Waḥyāt*, ed. Shukrī Fayṣal, 22 vols. (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981), vol. 11,

- p. 257; and Farīd al-Dīn Attār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, trans. A. J. Arberry, as *Muslim Saints and Mystics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 144.
- 16 The 'doubt' here, of course, being the inference that a 'Wāqif' stance regarding the Qur'ān is paramount to infidelity (*kufṛ*), which was hardly as cut and dried as al-Muḥāsibī's decision would have us believe.
 - 17 An in-depth discussion of each of al-Muḥāsibī's teachers is beyond the scope of the current discussion and as such only a brief mention of their names will be made here.
 - 18 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 7, pp. 418–22; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 4, p. 280–2; and al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Ḥusayn al-Quwwatī, 3rd edn (Beirut: Dār al-Kindī, 1982), pp. 13–14.
 - 19 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 7, p. 73; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 4, p. 51; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 14.
 - 20 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 7, pp. 461–7; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 4, pp. 311–14; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 14.
 - 21 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 4, pp. 52–3; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 2, pp. 279–80; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 14.
 - 22 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 5, pp. 265–9; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 3, pp. 173–5; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 14.
 - 23 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 3, pp. 272–4; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 2, pp. 90–2; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 15.
 - 24 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 6, pp. 30–5; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 3, pp. 387–90; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 15.
 - 25 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 4, pp. 264–6; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 2, pp. 419–20 and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 15. It should also be noted that this traditionist's name is 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad not 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd al-Malik as al-Quwwatī suggests.
 - 26 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 8, p. 20; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 4, p. 344; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 15.
 - 27 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 4, pp. 95–6; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 2, pp. 309–10; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 15.
 - 28 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 71; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, pp. 365–6; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 15.
 - 29 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 6, pp. 66–70; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 3, pp. 410–12; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 16.
 - 30 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 3, pp. 318–19; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 2, p. 120; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 16.
 - 31 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 3, pp. 111–12; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, pp. 686–7; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 16. Surayj is the actual name of this traditionist rather than Shurayḥ as al-Quwwatī suggests.
 - 32 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 5, pp. 187–90; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 3, pp. 117–19; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 17.
 - 33 Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 10.
 - 34 Ibid.
 - 35 See al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, vol. 8, p. 211; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, p. 623; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa 'l-Umam*, vol. 11, p. 243; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 10 and vol. 8, pp. 154–6; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 205; al-Dhahabī, *Ṣiyar 'Alām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 12, p. 110; al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-'Iṭidāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 430; al-Dhahabī, *al-'Ibar fī Khabar man Ghabar*, ed. al-Turāth al-'Arabī Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Munajjad, 5 vols. (Kuwait: n.pub., 1960), vol. 1, p. 440; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 276; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 326 and vol. 4, pp. 431–3; 'Abd al-Ḥayy b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā'ūt and Maḥmūd al-Arnā'ūt, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1988), vol. 3,

- p. 197; al-Jazarī, *al-Lubāb*, vol. 3, p. 171; ‘Umar Riḍā Kahāla, *Mu‘jam al-Mu‘allifīn*, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 174; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur‘ān*, pp. 16–17.
- 36 A term used in the initial period that indicated all of the earliest generations (*al-salaḥ*) who would affirm the divine, eternal attributes of God (*yuthbitūna li Allāh ṣifāt azaliyya*), whether they were essential attributes (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) or ‘active’ attributes (*ṣifāt al-fi‘l*), as opposed to stripping God of them (*al-ta‘īl*) or figuratively interpreting them (*al-ta‘wīl*), which was the methodological approach of the Mu‘tazilites and thus they were known as ‘al-Mu‘aṭṭila’, this being almost an antonym of ‘al-Ṣifātiyya’. See Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa ‘l-Niḥal*, vol. 1, pp. 73–4.
- 37 See al-Shahrazūrī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā’ al-Shāfi‘īyya*, vol. 1, p. 439; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 275; al-Asnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya*, vol. 1, p. 25; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā’ al-Shāfi‘īyyīn*, vol. 1, p. 126; Ibn Mulaqqin, *al-Iqd al-Madhdhab*, no. 686; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya*, vol. 1, p. 9; and al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 327.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 275.
- 40 See, for example, al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur‘ān*, pp. 394–5 and 436.
- 41 Similarly, an in-depth discussion of each of al-Muḥāsibī’s sources is beyond the scope of the current book and, as such, only a brief mention of their names will be made here so as to provide a representative selection.
- 42 It is also worth noting that much of what is related is concerned with the ‘spiritual’ and ‘esoteric’ facets of religious practice as opposed to the more ‘legalistic’ or ‘exoteric’ aspects.
- 43 See Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 64–70; and Kermit A. Schoonover, *Kitāb al-Ri‘āya li-Ḥuqūq Allāh* by al-Muḥāsibī: a translation with introduction and notes, unpublished Ph.D thesis (Cambridge: Department of History and Philosophy of Religion, Harvard University, March 1948), pp. xlv–liv *passim*.
- 44 See Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 61–4; and Schoonover, *Kitāb al-Ri‘āya li-Ḥuqūq Allāh* by al-Muḥāsibī, pp. xlv–liv *passim*.
- 45 See Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 70–84; and Schoonover, *Kitāb al-Ri‘āya li-Ḥuqūq Allāh* by al-Muḥāsibī, pp. xlv–liv *passim*.
- 46 Similarly, an in-depth discussion of each of al-Muḥāsibī’s students is beyond the scope of the current work and, as such, only a brief mention of their names will be made here.
- 47 See al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’*, vol. 10, pp. 64–92 *passim* and 217–32; al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, pp. 155–63; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 430–1; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifāt al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 652–7; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 10; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 205; al-Dhahabī *Siyar ‘Alām al-Nubalā’*, vol. 12, p. 110; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 276; al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 326; Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 170 and 205–9; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 27–30; Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, pp. 1–7; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 52–6.
- 48 See al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’*, vol. 10, pp. 212–17; al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, pp. 164–9; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 438–9; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifāt al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 665–6; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 31–4; Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, pp. 40–1; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 60–3.
- 49 See al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’*, vol. 10, pp. 64–92 *passim* and 179–82; al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, pp. 237–41; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, p. 432; al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdad*, vol. 8, p. 211; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifāt al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 4, pp. 367–8; al-Shahrazūrī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā’ al-Shāfi‘īyya*, vol. 1, p. 439; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 10; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 205; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar ‘Alām al-Nubalā’*, vol. 12, p. 110; al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-‘ūdāl*, vol. 1, p. 430; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 276; al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 326; al-Jazarī, *al-Lubāb*, vol. 3, p. 171; Kahāla, *Mu‘jam al-Mu‘allifīn*, vol. 3, p. 174; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 170; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 34–5.

- 50 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, pp. 91–2; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 10; al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-ʿIṭidāl*, vol. 1, p. 430; al-Dhahabī *Siyar ʿAlām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 12, p. 110; al-Dhahabī *Tārīkh al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 205; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿīyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 276; al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 326; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 170; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 38.
- 51 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, pp. 64–92 *passim*; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 38.
- 52 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, pp. 91–2; al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 56; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 10; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 205; al-Dhahabī *Siyar ʿAlām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 12, p. 110; al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 326; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 170; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 37.
- 53 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, ed. al-Iskandarī, vol. 10, pp. 273–4; al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, p. 295–8; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī ʿIlm al-Taṣawwuf*, p. 395; and Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, pp. 29–31.
- 54 See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 10; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 205; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar ʿAlām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 12, p. 110; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿīyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 276; al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 326; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 170; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 35–6.
- 55 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, p. 65; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifāt al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 673–4; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 10; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 205; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar ʿAlām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 12, p. 110; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿīyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 276; al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 326; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 170; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 36.
- 56 In some reports the food is said to be from a relative's wedding feast ('*urs*). See al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 112 and 429–30; Ibn Zafar al-Ṣaqlī, *Kitāb Anbā' Nujabā' al-Abnā'*, p. 149; Ibn Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā'*, pp. 176–7; and al-Bundanījī, *Jāmi' al-Anwār*, p. 291.
- 57 Equally, the 'sign' ('*allāma*') is said to be that a vein in his finger would throb if the food was doubtful (*fīhi shubha*), yet this view seemingly has little textual evidence. See Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, vol. 2, p. 58; al-Bundanījī, *Jāmi' al-Anwār*, p. 291; al-Ṣafādī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi'l-Wafayāt*, vol. 11, p. 258; and Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, p. 144.
- 58 The phrase used in Abū Nu'aym's *Hilya ʿirtafa'a ilā anfi zamnahu fawratan* appears to be a mistake but perhaps should read '*irtafa'a ilā anfi minhu zafratun/zafūratun*'. See al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, vol. 8, pp. 213–14; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifāt al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 622–3; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 11; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 207; and al-Dhahabī, *Siyar ʿAlām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 12, p. 111.
- 59 For this specific report and versions of it see ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAlī [Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj] al-Ṭūsī, *al-Luma'*, ed. Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Hindāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1999), pp. 43 and 285; Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ishāq [Abū Nu'aym] al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā' wa Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyā'*, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988), vol. 10, pp. 74–5; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 112 and 429–30; al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, vol. 8, pp. 213–14; Ibn Zafar al-Ṣaqlī, *Kitāb Anbā' Nujabā' al-Abnā'*, p. 149; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifāt al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 622–3; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 11; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 207; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar ʿAlām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 12, p. 111; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, vol. 2, p. 58; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿīyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 276; Ibn Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā'*, pp. 176–7; al-Bundanījī, *Jāmi' al-Anwār*, p. 291; al-Ṣafādī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi'l-Wafayāt*, vol. 11, p. 258; and Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, p. 144.
- 60 I have translated this term in its strict linguistic context but it is equally possible that the technical term being synonymous with 'Sufi' is meant.
- 61 See al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 112 and 429–30; Ibn Zafar al-Ṣaqlī, *Kitāb Anbā' Nujabā' al-Abnā'*, p. 149; Ibn Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā'*, pp. 176–7; al-Bundanījī, *Jāmi' al-Anwār*, p. 291; and Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, p. 144.

- 62 This, of course, is considered in the Sufi apologetic works to be an indicator of his highly elevated status with God, being considered a miraculous divine gift (*karāma*). See al-Ṭūsī, *al-Luma'*, pp. 42–4 and 284–5; and al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 109–15.
- 63 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, ed. al-Iskandarī, vol. 10, p. 64; al-Baghdādī, *Ta'riḫ Baghdād*, vol. 8, p. 213; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, vol. 2, p. 622; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, p. 11; al-Dhahabī, *Tāriḫ al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 207; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar 'Alām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 12, p. 111; and al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 276.
- 64 See al-Aṣḫānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 10, p. 64; al-Baghdādī, *Ta'riḫ Baghdād*, vol. 8, p. 213; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 2, pp. 10–11; and al-Dhahabī, *Tāriḫ al-Islām*, vol. 18, pp. 206–7.
- 65 Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 45.
- 66 See 'Alī b. 'Uthmān al-Jullabī al-Hujwārī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* (The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism), trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial (London: Luzac and Company, 1959), pp. 182–3 with some editing.
- 67 Al-Muḥāsibī's primary difficulty in this regard seems to have stemmed from a somewhat fractious relationship with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. The exact nature of the apparent dislike that Ibn Ḥanbal displayed towards al-Muḥāsibī is not at all clear but I have attempted to shed some light on this topic in a separate work. Needless to say, however, that incurring the wrath of one of Sunni Islam's most heroic figures has not always endeared al-Muḥāsibī to the religion's scholarly elite. See Gavin Picken, 'Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Muḥāsibī: A study of early conflicting scholarly methodologies', *Arabica (Revue d'études arabes et islamiques)*, 55: 3 (September, 2008): 337–61.
- 68 Al-Subkī affirms the phrase '*tanassantum fī wajhī*' but I feel the original proposed by al-Khaṭīb, '*tabayyantum fī wajhī*', is more accurate.
- 69 See al-Baghdādī, *Ta'riḫ Baghdād*, vol. 8, p. 215; al-Shahrazūrī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā' al-Shāfi'īyya*, vol. 1, p. 441; and al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, pp. 277–8.
- 70 See al-Baghdādī, *Ta'riḫ Baghdād*, vol. 8, pp. 215–16; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 11, p. 309; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, p. 241; Ibn Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 5, p. 298; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, vol. 2, p. 58; al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-'itidāl*, vol. 1, p. 430; al-Dhahabī, *Tāriḫ al-Islām*, vol. 18, p. 209; al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 327; al-Jazarī, *al-Lubāb*, vol. 3, p. 171; and Abū 'l-Fidā', *al-Mukhtaṣar*, p. 40.
- 71 Both these claims are virtually impossible to verify almost 1200 years on but they have been mentioned here to make the survey of the literature complete.
- 72 See al-Bundānījī, *Jāmi' al-Anwār*, p. 297 and Ya'qūb Na'ūm, 'Dafn Jāmi' al-Āṣawīyya' Sarkīs, in *Lughat al-'Arab* (vol. 3, year 6, 1928), pp. 181–2.
- 73 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīz Aḥmad (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qur'ān, 1992), p. 11.
- 74 See, for example, Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, pp. 44–8.
- 75 It is suggested here that al-Muḥāsibī wrote such works in the post-*miḥna* period, as this would have given sufficient reason for Ibn Ḥanbal to repudiate him. This is because from Ibn Ḥanbal's perspective this issue was now gratefully over and, similarly, we must not forget his personal feelings on the issue, as he had personally suffered torture and imprisonment because of it. Therefore, for al-Muḥāsibī to retread the whole issue of the *miḥna* in his works by refuting the Mu'tazilite views must have been not only objectionable to Ibn Ḥanbal but also very painful for him, potentially inciting his anger in the process.

3 The wayfarer's legacy

The works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī

Since so little is known about the life of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, it is worth surveying the works of this eminent scholar to glean more information regarding his thought and teaching, which will lay the foundation for the final chapter. To this effect al-Muḥāsibī himself has made our task easier, as it has been reported by al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) that al-Muḥāsibī authored approximately 200 works.¹ If, as al-Subkī claims, al-Muḥāsibī was indeed such a prolific writer then we have little evidence of it, due to the simple fact that only a fraction of these works has actually reached us. Consequently, the earliest generation of researchers in the modern period recorded less than 25 works being attributed to al-Muḥāsibī.² However, as the various manuscript libraries throughout the world began to be catalogued, many of al-Muḥāsibī's works came to light; not only this but a new generation of scholars began the process of editing al-Muḥāsibī's works for publication.³ Thus, both these factors have had an extremely important effect on the research that has been carried out on al-Muḥāsibī and, bearing this in mind, the goal of this chapter is to survey the works of al-Muḥāsibī mentioned in the literature, so as to provide an overview of the material written by this scholar.

The published works

1.

*Kitāb al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*⁴ (*wa 'l-Qiyām bihā*)⁵ ['Vigilant observance of the rights of God (and their application)']. This is arguably al-Muḥāsibī's most famous if not his greatest work⁶ and therefore the discussion regarding the writings that have reached us will start here.⁷ If we were to ask a simple question, 'If no other work of al-Muḥāsibī's was available to us, would *Kitāb al-Ri'āya* suffice us in understanding al-Muḥāsibī and his thought?' In fact the answer to this query would almost certainly be in the affirmative. This is due to the fact that *al-Ri'āya* contains all of the main ideas found in his other works such as *al-Waṣāyā*, *al-Tawahhum*, *al-Makāsib*, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, *Ādāb al-Nufūs* and *al-Masā'il fi A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*. Not only does *al-Ri'āya* encompass the ideas expressed in these works but it is also more comprehensive, better organised and more logical.⁸

Accentuating this notion, al-Quwwatī summarises:

This book represents the pinnacle in the development of al-Muḥāsibī's thought: in it he leaves scholastic theology (*'ilm al-kalām*) well behind him. Indeed, he leaves jurisprudence (*al-fiqh*) also; he uses *ḥadīth* sparingly and concentrates entirely on mystical subjects, which concerned every part of the Islamic world at that time. He becomes more precise and delves deeply into fine points of Sufism, along with a focus upon his favourite topic: the etiquettes, desires and faults of the soul (*al-nafs*), including its treatment and its taking to account. Isn't this al-Muḥāsibī?⁹

Thus, if *al-Ri'āya* had been lost, we would still be able to acquaint ourselves with al-Muḥāsibī via his other works, but it is only through *al-Ri'āya* that we see the real quality of al-Muḥāsibī in exposing the secret hidden depths of the human soul and the consequent alleviation of its ills. It is here that we see al-Muḥāsibī as a true scholar in the disciplines of religion, an expert in human behaviour and a physician of the ego.¹⁰

Part of this is indeed due to the fact that al-Muḥāsibī had a particular and specific goal in mind in writing *al-Ri'āya*, as the title would suggest, which is to clarify for the human being what is incumbent upon each individual with regard to fulfilling the command of God. Despite this, however, he does not tackle the topic directly but believes that the human being requires wise advice at the beginning, before his travelling to the greater goal, which will open his heart and which will make his intellect attentive to the discourse.¹¹ Similarly, al-Muḥāsibī, despite the title of the book, does not simply concentrate on quoting the permissible and the prohibited in religion but concerns himself with a methodology, which can be employed to perform these commands practically with sincerity. Bearing this goal in mind, al-Muḥāsibī observes that people in every place are slowly distancing themselves from this path day by day¹² and therefore, he provides a description of the route to repentance and the subsequent return to God.¹³ In addition, in this particular work, al-Muḥāsibī is more concerned with giving precise meanings to the terms used, almost providing the reader with a series of definitions of the various concepts he discusses.¹⁴

The work itself is in the form of counsels given to the seeker in reply to his questions regarding the above-mentioned methodology. The book contains eight major books (*kitāb*, pl. *kutub*), each with numerous subsections (*bāb*, pl. *abwāb*), and indeed the first of these books is preceded by various chapters (*abwāb*) discussing a variety of topics.¹⁵ Thus, he begins by giving advice regarding being attentive while listening (*ḥusn al-istimā'*) and then he approaches the topic of the book, not in depth or with extensive explanation but simply clarifying the necessity of submitting of the ego's will to the will of God. This is because it is through this submission that piety (*al-taqwā*) springs forth and it is this which will lead the person to fulfil the command of God and shun that which He has forbidden.¹⁶

Al-Muḥāsibī then begins to explain the nature of *al-taqwā* defining it as being, 'Shunning associating partners [with God] (*shirk*) and every sin lesser than this

from that which God has forbidden, or neglecting any obligatory act, which He has prescribed'.¹⁷ He then continues to explain the nature of this *taqwā* and its virtues, clarifying the preparation that is required to be ready to stand before God on the Day of Judgement. He then defines scrupulousness (*al-wara'*), warning not to be deceived by external aspects of worship, and continues by describing exactly what steps need to be taken first by the devotee on his journey on the path to his Lord.¹⁸

Having realised this aspect, varying levels of repentance (*al-tawba*) are reached and the intention that worship is sincerely for God alone. However, at this point the aspirant will be at odds with what may be termed 'elements of evil' (*'anāshir al-sharr*), which may cause him to err from the straight path through heedlessness (*ghafla*). These elements are particularly dangerous, as they are continuously on the alert and are constantly feeling out their prey in the human being, who is by his nature weak.¹⁹ Al-Muḥāsibī considers there to be two main 'elements of evil'; the first of these is the soul (*al-nafs*), which he considers to be the internal element of evil,²⁰ whereas the Devil (*Iblīs*) is the external element, who manipulates the first element by inspiring it to evil. He therefore cautions the reader concerning them and the complexity of their strategies.²¹ Al-Muḥāsibī does not stop there, however, but also warns against the other elements of evil such as negative companionship (*ikhwān al-sū'*) and corrupt environments (*mujtama'āt al-fasād*).²²

Having clarified the dangers of these aspects of human existence, al-Muḥāsibī further explains that this is not sufficient to know; indeed, he then draws our attention to the aspect of sincerity to God (*al-ikhhlās*), which is the foundation of all action and through which a person is rewarded. Having described this essential aspect of human endeavour, he then explains at length the quality that destroys such actions due to its opposing *al-ikhhlās*, which is ostentation (*al-riyā'*).²³ Al-Muḥāsibī concentrates on this topic, as it is an aspect of behaviour that lowers the quality of the human being, since this is essentially his field. He continues to discuss other negative human character traits by examining self-conceit (*al-'ujb*), arrogance (*al-kibr*), self-delusion (*al-ghirra*) and envy (*al-ḥasad*), dedicating a complete book (*kitāb*) of *al-Ri'āya* to each of them. He is not satisfied, however, with merely describing these faults and their consequences but also clarifies their causes, how they can be avoided and how they can be treated.²⁴

Al-Muḥāsibī concludes his book with the section entitled *Kitāb ta'dīb al-murīd* in which he describes a programme designed to govern the conduct of the slave 'by day and by night', being always mindful of the One Whom he serves, of the constant self-discipline required to remain on this path and to guard against the temptations, which may assail him after he has begun to serve God with his whole body, mind and soul.²⁵ It may seem an oversimplification but *al-Ri'āya* is essentially a book concerning sincerity to God, cleansing the heart, purification of the soul and a life of complete moral, ethical and behavioural perfection.²⁶ In summary, we quote Smith, who has captured the essence of *al-Ri'āya* when she said:

This is al-Muḥāsibī's great treatise on the interior life, which reveals a profound knowledge of human nature and its weaknesses, while in the means

which he suggests for combating these weaknesses and for attaining to the single-hearted service of God, he shews also the discerning wisdom and inspired insight of a true spiritual director and shepherd of souls.²⁷

2.

*Kitāb al-Waṣāyā/al-Naṣā'ih al-Dīniyya*²⁸ [‘The book of counsels’]. After *al-Ri‘āya* this work is one of the longest of al-Muḥāsibī’s books to reach us and therefore will be discussed next.²⁹ In a similar manner to *al-Ri‘āya*, this work represents a foundation in the skill of examining the soul, as it delves into its depths and qualities, which are seemingly hidden from the vast majority of people.³⁰

As ‘Atā’ puts it:

This book, along with the other works of al-Muḥāsibī, was a new development in the field of Islamic psychology (‘*ilm al-naḥs al-Islāmī*’) for the ascetics (*zuhhād*) of the third century [*hijrī*] and the master of this development was indeed al-Muḥāsibī – the splendour of the scholars (*zahrāt al-‘ulamā’*), the pride of the ascetics (*fakhr al-zuhhād*), the imam of the path of the people of God (*ahl Allāh*).³¹

In addition to this, however, one of the most important aspects of this work is the fact that al-Muḥāsibī sheds light on his own life, his personal search for the truth and his despair at not finding the guidance he sought. He also sheds considerable light indirectly on the period in which he lived, in particular the political situation and the state of the people in his environment generally.

These points become apparent from the very first statement which he makes: ‘It has reached us that “This community (*umma*) will split up into seventy-three sects; of them only one will be saved”,³² and God knows best regarding the remainder of them’.³³ By this very statement al-Muḥāsibī indicates his own mood and the mood of the period in general, as we know the state of the sects attributed to Islam at this time in addition to the political discord sewn through the dispute between al-Amīn and al-Ma‘mūn. He continues by mapping out his own personal journey in seeking the truth, acquiring knowledge and practice of the religion. During this process he identifies various types of people within the members of society he has come across and clarifies his own stance regarding the path to take. Based on the *ḥadīth* mentioned above, he then searched for the ‘saved sect’ and after much hardship he finally found what he was looking for.³⁴

Al-Muḥāsibī divides his work into 41 sections (*abwāb*) on a variety of topics. He proposes various counsels as to how to identify the faults of the soul via long research and reflection, thus clarifying his path, and as a result it contains a summary of his experience. He does this by discussing his own thoughts and ideas but also lends great importance to the revealed texts also, with the goal of perfecting the human soul. He is concerned with avoiding misguidance due to the turmoil of the soul and the various facets of personality and, consequently, he attempts to deal with illness at its root.³⁵

To this effect al-Muḥāsibī begins by reminding the reader that the origin of happiness lies in God-consciousness (*taqwā*) and that the basis of discontent is love of the worldly life (*ḥubb al-dunyā*).³⁶ Al-Muḥāsibī then discusses one of the main topics of *al-Waṣāyā* which is the love of wealth, the desire to accumulate it and the power this has over the individual.³⁷ He discusses this in a general manner but also discusses the position of the Companions regarding this issue, proving, as far as he is concerned, their extreme dislike of wealth and attachment to the worldly life.³⁸ Whilst discussing this topic he covers the following areas: the earning of wealth in a permissible manner, being economical in the use of the sustenance provided, being careful not to waste what you have (*isrāf*) and at the same time avoiding being miserly (*bakhīl*).³⁹

After explaining the importance of freeing oneself from the power that wealth can have over the human being, al-Muḥāsibī turns his attention to the topics for which he is familiar, i.e. those dealing with the internal workings of the mind, heart and soul. He deals with issues we have already seen, such as satisfaction with the God's decree (*al-riḍā bi qadā' Allāh*), the traps of the Devil (*makā'id al-Shayṭān*), self-conceit (*al-'ujb*), arrogance (*al-kibr*), as well as dealing with the soul (*al-nafs*) and the heart (*al-qalb*).⁴⁰ He then devotes space to warning the reader against the disputes within the community,⁴¹ and the concept of 'being observant of God's rights' (*ri'āya li ḥuqūq Allāh*) is frequently quoted throughout *al-Waṣāyā*.⁴²

In addition to this, al-Muḥāsibī also gives importance in this work to the subject of knowledge (*al-'ilm*), clarifying the significance of having sound knowledge, as this is the basis of sound action. He also indicates the importance of the intellect but at the same warns against misuse of both these important faculties, as well as discussing the defects knowledge can cause in character, if it is not kept in check.⁴³ Another interesting aspect of *al-Waṣāyā* is al-Muḥāsibī's in-depth discussion of the physical acts of worship that are either incumbent on all Muslims or are highly recommended. As one might expect, al-Muḥāsibī does discuss these in traditional jurisprudential manner, but links the legal element of these actions to their hidden, internal aspects. Thus, we find him discussing such aspects as presence of mind in prayer (*al-khushū' fi 'l-ṣalāt*) and not just the physical mechanical movements of prayer and fasting but he also includes fasting from that which God has forbidden and not just from food, drink and sexual relations. In addition, he advises increasing the superogatory acts (*al-nawāfil*) as a means of fulfilling the compulsory duties and as a means of erasing the sins committed.⁴⁴ He also mentions the importance of supplicating (*al-du'ā*) in private, having presence of heart whilst speaking and reflecting and contemplating whilst reciting the Qur'ān.⁴⁵ Al-Muḥāsibī continues throughout the various sections mentioned and continues in the latter part of the work by discussing more issues regarding the soul and heart and concludes his book by discussing sincerity to God in acts of obedience (*ikhhlāṣ al-tā'a*), as if to close the discussion on this fundamental point, which is of course the very cornerstone of much of his teaching.⁴⁶

In summary we quote 'Aṭā who clarifies clearly the result of implementing the methodology of al-Muḥāsibī in this work:

Thus if a person has been able to remove the power that wealth and knowledge have [over his soul], correct his intention in acts of worship, desire to work for God alone and has knowledge that pushes him forward, then he will be a human being who enjoys perfection of his soul and has complete peace of mind.⁴⁷

3.

*Kitāb al-Tawahhum*⁴⁸ [‘The book of imagining’]. This work is one of al-Muḥāsibī’s most famous works and has received a great deal of attention, being published several times.⁴⁹ This is indicative of the importance of this work and therefore it will be discussed here after *al-Ri‘āya* and *al-Waṣāyā*. The work itself is a short treatise of an eschatological nature, which discusses the events that all human beings will face in the hereafter (*al-ākhirā*). To this effect al-Muḥāsibī begins sequentially, starting with death, its pain and its agonies, describing how each person struggles with the throes of death and the events that occur in the grave, immediately after death, such as the questioning of the two angels and gazing into paradise and hell.⁵⁰

Al-Muḥāsibī continues by painting a vivid picture of the resurrection where every soul will be summoned to stand before its Lord on the Last Day. He describes the events in detail; how all will stand equal in front of their Lord bereft of the virtue of wealth, status and position, which they enjoyed in the worldly life, as only faith and righteous deeds will avail them in the trials ahead. Due to this their state is one of fear, astonishment, desperation and regret. Not only this, but the other creatures that God created will be summoned devoid of their animal tendencies, standing still and humbly in front of their Lord; all will be gathered and wait meekly for the judgement of the King of kings.⁵¹ The heavens will then be cast asunder, being destroyed for ever, and the angels in all their glory, power and immense size and incredible creation will pour forth surrounding the assembly. The sun will then be drawn close and the resurrected will begin to sweat in accordance with the actions they did in the worldly life and there will be no shade from this intense heat except in the shade of the throne of God.⁵²

Every soul will then cry for its own fate as the messengers of God are questioned regarding the message that they brought and each individual tries to flee from even the most beloved people to them in this life. The deeds of each soul will then be weighed and their records distributed, as God questions them regarding all that they did. The records will then be given, in the right hand of those who were successful and the left hand for those who are disgraced to dwell in eternal paradise or hell respectively.⁵³ Each individual will then travel the bridge over hellfire (*al-ṣirāt*), that is ‘finer than a hair and sharper than a sword’s blade’, the speed at which they pass across it being proportionate to the deeds that they performed in the worldly realm, to reach paradise on the other side or to fall from it into eternal damnation in hellfire.⁵⁴

As for those who survive this treacherous journey, their faces are enlightened and made radiant as they enter the gates of paradise, joyous in the company of the

righteous. They delight in the foods, drinks, clothing, vessels and palaces which have been prepared for them and, most of all the sheer unadulterated beauty of their companions, with whom they dwell therein.⁵⁵ This, however, is not the only pleasure of paradise; in fact the greatest and most honourable of its bounties is still to come as it has been saved for God's beloved elect (*al-awliyā'*); they will be summoned, the veils will be set aside and there they will gaze upon their Lord in all His majesty and splendour.⁵⁶

The value of this work lies not only in the fact that al-Muḥāsibī substantiates it with a variety of verses from the Qur'ān, Prophetic narrations and statements of the earliest generations, providing it with authenticity from a traditional perspective. It is also significant due to the eloquent style in which it is written and because it constitutes an early example of prose writing in the formative period. Moreover, the vivid images he portrays are a decisive tool in effecting spiritual change via the power of imagination. *Kitāb al-Tawahhum* would also seem a very personal work, as it is clear from the expression of the thoughts that al-Muḥāsibī had actually imagined taking the same journey and thus is extremely significant due to the extent it may have influenced others.⁵⁷

4.

*Risālat*⁵⁸/*Kitāb al-Makāsib wa 'l-Wara' wa 'l-Shubha wa Bayān Mubāḥihā wa 'l-Maḥzūrihā wa Ikhtilāf al-Nās fī Ṭalabihā wa 'l-Radd 'alā 'l-Ghālīṭina fīhi*⁵⁹ ['The book of licit earnings']. The effect of al-Muḥāsibī's environment becomes apparent on him again here as he discusses the manner in which daily provision and gainful employment should be sought. Thus, al-Muḥāsibī begins by presenting the importance of the concept of putting absolute trust and reliance on God (*al-tawakkul*) and realising that He alone is their Sole Provider, the Sovereign over all things and the Most Generous of those who give. This, by its very nature, dictates that mankind be grateful, put their complete trust in Him and remember the bounty of their Lord but at the same time it does not mean that they should refrain from taking lawful means to earn a livelihood, or live idly at the expense of others.⁶⁰ Al-Muḥāsibī then turns his attention to the topic of scrupulousness (*al-wara'*), explaining that this is to abstain from that which God has forbidden and that which is objectionable to Him, whether in word or deed, thought or motive and this can only be achieved through extensive self-examination prior to action.⁶¹

Having discussed various spiritual and theological dimensions of how provision is earned, al-Muḥāsibī utilises the second half of the book to discuss a variety of issues of a juristic nature and gives his opinion regarding them. Such issues include the rulings regarding inheriting from a father who is a transgressor, doubtful matters (*al-shubha*), the permissible and the prohibited (*al-ḥalāl wa 'l-ḥarām*) and the permissibility of accepting gifts from rulers, as well as seeking out the 'purest'⁶² forms of sustenance.⁶³ He also uses this work to discuss various ascetic practices familiar at the time, including a refutation of those who claim that hunger is in itself an act of worship. He concludes this treatise with a discussion

of various juristic issues regarding the categories of land used for agriculture and the rulings regarding the permissibility of gaining sustenance from them.⁶⁴ Consequently, this work is also significant in presenting the personality of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, as it not only presents his spiritual theology and his environment's influence upon him but also his ability as a jurist, his familiarity with legal issues and the opinions of the scholars before him. Thus, it clarifies a further facet to his already impressive list of subject areas in which he was well versed.

5.

(*Risālat*) *Ādāb al-Nuḥūs*⁶⁵/*Risāla fī 'l-Akhlāq* [‘Etiquettes of the soul’/ ‘A treatise on moral character’]. In this work al-Muḥāsibī focuses attention on the two words used in the title; namely etiquettes (*ādāb*) and the soul (*al-naḥs*). He combines these two concepts effortlessly throughout the work, combining both of these fundamental elements of the path to God in the form of counsels and extolling the reader to adopt such lofty qualities.⁶⁶ In addition to discussing manners and etiquettes, it is in the argument regarding the soul that al-Muḥāsibī excels, providing an in-depth examination of the *naḥs* and its related topics. It is here that we glimpse the thought of al-Muḥāsibī first hand as he clarifies that the root of the cause must be dealt with first before going forward any further. By this he means that the soul should be corrected first before even considering performing supererogatory acts since there is no use in pruning the branches of a tree to assist its growth when it is the roots that are diseased.⁶⁷

Al-Muḥāsibī, in a similar vein, also discusses the importance of purifying the soul of every blameworthy characteristic before performing any action. His rationale is simple; human beings are required to refrain from all forms of evil but are not ordered to perform all forms of good. Thus, they must be able to distinguish between the two and prioritise regarding the actions that they perform, so that a good action is not mixed with evil, or consequently the whole action will be invalidated. This, however, requires knowledge of such blameworthy characteristics and al-Muḥāsibī allots much time to this, as well as the praiseworthy characteristics that directly counter such negative attributes and which are consequently, absolutely necessary.⁶⁸ The essence of the soul's rebellious nature is its love of the worldly life and the soul's adoption of it as its only concern and goal. As a result the soul separates the worldly life from that of the hereafter but, by doing so, fails to realise the true nature of the worldly life, which is that it is nothing more than a trial to test those who are best in action. Thus, the cure for many of the diseases of the heart and soul is to remember the hereafter and, in particular, death.⁶⁹

It is true to say that al-Muḥāsibī has discussed much of the content of *Ādāb al-Nuḥūs* in other works in more depth, such as *al-Ri'āya*, but despite this the work has in return summarised much of what is contained in such extensive works without the reader having to consult them.⁷⁰ Consequently, it is an invaluable contribution to the field of works concerned with the human soul and, as al-Sayyid summarises, ‘This book is considered one of the hidden treasures that has reached from the earliest generation regarding the soul and its etiquettes’.⁷¹

6.

*Sharḥ al-Maʿrifā*⁷² *wa Badhl al-Naṣīḥa*⁷³ [‘An exposition of intimate knowledge and the provision of good counsel’]. In this concise treatise al-Muḥāsibī deals with two fundamental elements concerning the disciplining of the soul, i.e. that of essential knowledge (*al-maʿrifā*) and appropriate advice (*al-naṣīḥa*), regarding the journey back to God.⁷⁴ The importance of these two issues is clear, as they have an effect on both the individual and the community. As for *al-maʿrifā*, it plays an essential role in developing the individual because it teaches him the nature and essence of life, so that he can eventually contribute to his society and it provides him with a basis on which to act. With regard to *al-naṣīḥa*, it plays the equally important role of removing the ills of the individual and the society by correcting it with subtlety and wisdom.

As for the subject of *al-maʿrifā*, al-Muḥāsibī is not concerned here with discussing the theory of *al-maʿrifā*, as is done by the Sufi philosophers,⁷⁵ but he is concerned with what could be termed ‘essential’ *maʿrifā*, which every Muslim should have a grasp of.⁷⁶ This is summarised in the following topics:

- (a) The knowledge of God the Magnificent and Exalted (*maʿrifat Allāh ʿazza wa jall*). Al-Muḥāsibī begins discussing this element of *maʿrifā* by extolling the names and attributes of God in a manner which not only lists them but also shows how they play a practical role in the human being’s life.⁷⁷ Al-Muḥāsibī is not content with this, however, but also describes the method, the means and the results of absorbing this form of *maʿrifā*.⁷⁸
- (b) The knowledge of Satan, the enemy of God (*maʿrifat Iblīs ʿaduw Allāh*). This element of *maʿrifā* is deemed equally important since it is not sufficient just to know who God is and His rights upon every individual but, indeed, it is of vital importance also to know one’s enemy on the path back to God. Al-Muḥāsibī begins his discussion by informing the reader that God has ordered His devotees to be at war with Iblīs and struggle against him at every moment. This is because Iblīs was the first enemy of Ādam and thus of every prophet and of mankind as a whole. The danger arises from this adversary because of his continuous vigilance in trying to cause the devotee to falter; not only this, but his goal is not only to cause them to sin but also ultimately to disbelieve in God and, consequently, dwell in hellfire eternally just as he will. Al-Muḥāsibī stresses that every one is in a tremendous struggle against this cunning opponent and that each and every person must turn to God in humility and humbleness to ask for assistance in overcoming this devious enemy.⁷⁹
- (c) A person’s knowledge of his own soul (*maʿrifat al-insān nafsahu*) In this regard al-Muḥāsibī adopts his familiar position in warning of the danger of this internal element by advising the reader to approach the issue of one’s own soul by reflecting on how its creator described it in the Qurʾān, i.e. that it ‘urges to evil’.⁸⁰ Indeed, al-Muḥāsibī considers this ‘internal enemy’ more dangerous than Iblīs due to its nature and tendency to serve its own interests; Iblīs uses it to manipulate the human being, causing him to falter regarding

his duty to his Lord. Despite this, however, al-Muḥāsibī is not satisfied with this warning only but also briefly alludes to the manner in which one can combat the soul, which includes opposing it (*mukhalāfatuhā*), taking it to account (*muḥāsabatuhā*), knowing it (*maʿrifatuhā*), expending effort against it (*mujāhadatuhā*) and keeping it under strict observation (*murāqabatuhā*). Al-Muḥāsibī concludes by advising the seeker to expend effort in being sincere to God, seeking His assistance in combating the *nafs* and as a result he will acquire His pleasure.⁸¹

- (d) The knowledge of actions performed for God's sake (*maʿrifat al-ʿamal li Allāh*). In this element of *maʿrifa* al-Muḥāsibī establishes a principle at the beginning of the discussion which lays the foundation for the rest of the section. Here he distinguishes two categories of actions; the first of which are those that God has ordered and which as a result he considers to be obedience (*al-tāʿa*). The second type of action is that which God has forbidden and which, as a result, he considers an act of disobedience (*al-maʿṣiya*). In addition to this, he once again reminds the reader that both of these types of actions require a third factor, which has also been ordered, that of sincerity (*ikhlās*); this is clearly the most important concern of al-Muḥāsibī, as it is this factor which will determine the intention behind the action and which, if corrupted, will cause all actions to become acts of disobedience regardless. Thereafter he once again warns of the dangers of Iblīs, in the sense that he tries to invalidate these actions, not only by trying to make the devotee commit sins or corrupt his intentions but also by trying to make the person perform a lesser form of obedience rather than a more elevated one.⁸²

Based upon these four types of *maʿrifa*, al-Muḥāsibī describes the way in which a person should act; he should neither intend an action nor perform it without first considering these four issues. This in turn has an important subsequent effect upon the soul, as it plays an essential role in taking the soul to account (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*); consequently, every claim that the soul makes can be examined in the light of this *maʿrifa* and, as a result, it can be seen in its true reality, despite the deception it may try to manifest regarding the good qualities it purports to have.⁸³

The second half of the book contains a variety of pieces of practical and moral advice for those wishing to purify their souls and traverse the path leading to the hereafter and ultimately to their Lord, as is al-Muḥāsibī's usual habit. In addition to discussing the usual topics for which al-Muḥāsibī is well known, he also includes a section where he discusses 10 characteristics (*khiṣāl ʿashara*), which all aspirants should have if they wish to reach the highest degrees of righteousness.⁸⁴

7.

*Kitāb Badʿ Man Anāba ilā Allāh*⁸⁵ (*taʿālā*)⁸⁶ [‘The book concerning the beginning of the return to God’]. Once again this work, despite its small size, represents one of the most important sources of al-Muḥāsibī's thought and, in particular, his training of the soul, its self-discipline and its purification.⁸⁷ During the course of

the book the author maps out the path that one must take in order to reach the truth for those who have committed sins, disobeyed God and whose hearts have hardened and are devoid of fear. He then presents the means and principles which will assist in disciplining the soul and so drive the human being to the straight path.⁸⁸

The outstanding feature of this work, however, is that the author proceeds gradually, chapter by chapter, to produce discussions of vital importance regarding the soul. By doing so he imagines it as a separate entity whose nature is evil; this in turn is opposed by the facet of conscience, which is constantly anxious and in a state of turmoil due to the soul's remoteness from the path of God. Al-Muḥāsibī here spends his utmost efforts to warn the reader and to ensure that he or she understands that the conscience must overcome the *naḥs*, so that it can avert it from the amusement of the worldly life and return it to the path of God, which is its ultimate goal. Not only this, but in addition, al-Muḥāsibī expresses this internal struggle between the human being and his or her soul in such a vivid manner that it has the most profound effect on the reader.⁸⁹

8.

*Kitāb al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*⁹⁰ ['The book concerning issues related to actions of the heart and limbs']. In this treatise, as the title would suggest, al-Muḥāsibī sheds light on a number of issues which concern both the interior and exterior forms of religion. He begins by stressing the importance of hiding some actions from the eyes of people and also when it is permissible to perform such actions openly. This leads quite naturally to the topic of notoriety (*al-shuhra*) and the seeking of it, where he provides a discussion involving the statements of the previous generations (*al-salaf*), regarding what is and is not permissible. In addition, he warns of a number of issues which the aspirant should be wary of, as well as discussing the merits of performing supererogatory acts.⁹¹

Al-Muḥāsibī then turns his attention to the heart, its duties, characteristics, its diseases, their cure, how the heart and soul may be purified and the different categories of people in this regard. He then discusses the merits and ordinances of silence and speech, including a section on debate and defence of the honour of a fellow believer. Al-Muḥāsibī also presents a section regarding entrusting one's affairs to the will of God (*al-tafwīd*), its causes, types, the way in which people differ with regard to it and the relationship between this and trusting in God (*al-tawakkul*).⁹²

In the next section al-Muḥāsibī returns to his favourite subject of the soul (*al-naḥs*) but here discusses the relationship between it and the heart and how this may result in the attainment of true knowledge (*ma'rifa*). He also discusses how both heedlessness (*al-ghafla*) and forgetfulness (*al-nisyān*) affect each individual, the difference between them, their types and their differing influences on believers and non-believers alike. Al-Muḥāsibī concludes this work by presenting various juristic issues regarding what is and is not permissible to look at (*al-naẓar*) and the rulings regarding the swearing of oaths (*al-nudhūr*).⁹³

9.

(*Mukhtaṣar*)⁹⁴ *Kitāb Fahm al-Ṣalāt*⁹⁵ [‘The book concerning comprehending prayer’]. Once again we find that despite the concise nature of this short work it sheds a great deal of light on not only the subject matter but also on al-Muḥāsibī as a scholar and an author. Here we see al-Muḥāsibī the jurist (*al-faqīh*) expounding issues concerning one of the most important elements of Islamic faith and practice – prayer (*al-ṣalāt*). In this sense we see him deal with the classical juristic issues such as ablution (*al-wuḍūʿ*), ritual bath (*al-ghuṣl*), the prerequisites of prayer (*shurūṭ al-ṣalāt*), the actions and what is read in prayer (*afʿāl wa aqwāl al-ṣalāt*), as well as what is forbidden in prayer (*mā nuhiya ʿanhu fī ʿl-ṣalāt*) in much the same way that we might expect to find in any classical juristic text.⁹⁶ Despite this, however, *Kitāb Fahm al-Ṣalāt* is not an average *fiqh* manual but, as is expected, al-Muḥāsibī deals with the spiritual elements of prayer also, linking them directly to the juristic points he raises. As a result he provides a perfect and complete picture of how to pray in Islam in a way that not only fulfils the requirements of the Islamic Law (*al-sharʿīa*) but is also pleasing to God and gratifying for the soul.

10.

*Kitāb Māʿiyyat (Māhiyyat)*⁹⁷ *al-ʿAql wa Maʿnāhā (wa Ikhtilāf al-Nās fihā)*⁹⁸⁹⁹ [‘The book concerning the essence of the intellect and its’ meaning’]. If we were to pose the question: ‘What is the intellect and what is its purpose?’ then we would find the answer forthcoming in this concise but valuable treatise by al-Muḥāsibī. Bearing in mind the great importance of this seemingly innocent question during al-Muḥāsibī’s era, it is clear that he felt it needed addressing so as to clarify the role of the intellect from his interpretation of Islam’s primary sources.¹⁰⁰ In answering this question al-Muḥāsibī begins by defining the intellect (*al-ʿaql*) as being an innate quality of the human being and not, as some scholastic theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*) suggest, the essence of the soul.¹⁰¹ Having dispelled this theory, al-Muḥāsibī then turns his attention to the use of the intellect to comprehend and gain understanding of God (*al-ʿaql ʿan Allāh taʿālā*), which manifests itself in the form of complete obedience to Him.¹⁰² Al-Muḥāsibī concludes this brief treatise by discussing various issues related to the intellect to clarify the subject further and manifest the true meaning of the intellect and its role in human discernment.¹⁰³

In summary, the importance of this work cannot be underestimated due to several factors; first, this work represents one of the first, if not the first such work, in Islamic literature to deal with the subject of the intellect and its purpose within the human being. Secondly, this work is indicative of the historical era in which al-Muḥāsibī lived, as it addresses the very essence of the debate of revelation versus reason, which raged between the so-called ‘rationalists’ (al-Muʿtazila) and the ‘orthodox’ scholastic trend, represented by the traditionists (*al-muḥaddithūn*).¹⁰⁴ Finally, in this work al-Muḥāsibī lays the methodological foundation for the remainder of his written legacy, as much of what he discusses in his other works is dependent on the ground rules put in place in this treatise.¹⁰⁵

11.

*Kitāb Iḥkām al-Tawba wa radd Maẓālim al-'Ibād wa Khalāṣ minhā qabl al-Ma'ād*¹⁰⁶ [‘The book concerning perfecting repentance’]. This treatise deals with the issue of repentance, as its title would suggest, and in it al-Muḥāsibī affirms his position that repentance is a duty upon the devotees as imposed on them by God. In addition, he employs this work to discuss the major (*al-kabīra*, pl. *al-kabā'ir*) and minor sins, as well as affirming the need to repent for both.¹⁰⁷

12.

*Kitāb al-Mustarshid*¹⁰⁸ [‘A book for the seeker of guidance’]. Despite this being one of al-Muḥāsibī’s shorter works, it is nevertheless a very important one. This lies in the fact that this book contains all of the ideas and advice of the author that we find explained at length in his other works. Thus, this treatise summarises his teachings in much the same way that the classical short texts (*matn*, pl. *mutūn*) of later writers did, which then would be memorised by students and studied later with their accompanying commentaries (*sharḥ*, pl. *shurūḥ*). Many of these *mutūn* would often be put into poetry to make memorisation easier and here once again we find a common factor with this work as much of the text is rhyming prose.¹⁰⁹ For the sake of analogy, *Kitāb al-Mustarshid* fulfils the role of such a *matn*, whereas al-Muḥāsibī’s longer works such as *al-Ri'āya* serve the purpose of a *sharḥ*.

The work itself takes the usual form of a series of counsels for the ‘seeker of guidance’, which are short, concise, rich in meaning and often build on one another to link the various subjects the author wishes to present. The subject matter of *Kitāb al-Mustarshid* is, as already mentioned, a summary of al-Muḥāsibī’s thought and therefore, it contains the various subjects already discussed in detail above. Although it is slightly repetitive in parts, al-Muḥāsibī links the repetitive parts of *Kitāb al-Mustarshid*, to new topics so as to create a different link between them.

In summary, *Kitāb al-Mustarshid* is a concise manual for the wayfarer journeying to God, which maps out the path before him and shows him how to adorn himself with all the etiquette and fine manners that the *sharī'a* endorses,¹¹⁰ as Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Makhlūf says, after discussing the nature of ‘true’ *taṣawwuf*, ‘And in *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn* there is evidence to support what we have mentioned, as there is in it: instruction for the souls (*tarbiya li 'l-nufūs*), refinement of human nature and true knowledge for anyone who reads it precisely and carefully.’¹¹¹

13.

*Kitāb Fahm al-Qur'ān*¹¹² [‘The book concerning comprehending the Qur'ān’]. This treatise is one the longest of al-Muḥāsibī’s works to reach us intact and therefore is of considerable importance in clarifying further his teaching and thought. This point is compounded by the fact that *Fahm al-Qur'ān* is one of al-Muḥāsibī’s works in which he discusses many of the theological issues that were prevalent at

the time. In essence *Fahm al-Qur'ān* is not only a book which discusses how the Qur'ān should be comprehended but is also concerned with how belief in God should be understood and is a refutation of those who do not conform to the theological methodology therein.

To this effect we can identify six categories which al-Muḥāsibī discusses.

(a) *The Qur'ān*

Since the Qur'ān has such an essential and important role in the understanding of Islam and since it is 'the guardian of the intellect', al-Muḥāsibī uses this section to discuss this fundamental element of the religion. In doing so, al-Muḥāsibī extols the virtues of the Qur'ān (*faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*), describing the various qualities that it contains and the various disciplines related to it. In addition, he also makes mention of the excellence of Qur'ānic reciters (*faḍā'il al-qurrā'*), their virtues, merits, etiquettes and the special position given to them by God.¹¹³

(b) *The jurisprudential issues within the Qur'ān (fiqh al-Qur'ān)*

Since the Qur'ān is also the primary source of Islamic Law, there are a series of disciplines that are required for the reader of the Qur'ān to understand so that they can comprehend its legal aspects. In this regard al-Muḥāsibī sheds light on several of these legalistic elements, including the abrogated and abrogating verses (*al-nāsikh wa 'l-mansūkh*), its precise and ambiguous verses (*al-muḥkam wa 'l-mutashābih*), the general and specific verses (*al-'āmm wa 'l-khāṣṣ*), as well as its unusual vocabulary (*gharīb al-Qur'ān*).¹¹⁴

(c) *The permissibility of abrogation (al-naskh)*

Having discussed abrogation in the previous section, al-Muḥāsibī elaborates further here to clarify when abrogation is permissible in the Qur'ān and when it is not. From the aspects of the Qur'ān in which there is no room for abrogation he includes the names and attributes of God (*asmā' Allāh wa ṣifātuhu*) and information given by God regarding past or future events (*akhbār Allāh ta'ālā 'ammā kāna wa yakūn*).¹¹⁵ Therefore, as a result, al-Muḥāsibī concludes that abrogation is permissible in only issues which involve legal rulings, as it is only that which has been ordered and that which is forbidden (*al-amr wa 'l-nahy*) which can be changed.¹¹⁶

(d) *Al-Mu'tazila*

Bearing in mind that *al-Mu'tazila* were the foremost sect at the time of al-Muḥāsibī, due to the state support of the Caliph, it is hardly surprising that he deals with them in a specific part of this work. This is compounded by the fact that many of their opinions, which differed from those of the traditionists (*al-muḥaddithūn*) of the time,¹¹⁷ were misinterpretations of concepts found in the Qur'ān and therefore it is to be expected that al-Muḥāsibī, being grounded in the traditionist method of

learning, would deal with them here.¹¹⁸ Consequently, al-Muḥāsibī refutes their views, stating that they went to extremes in their use of analogy (*al-qiyās*), in addition to their ignorance of the Qur'ān's interpretation and its sciences.

(e) *Abrogation in legal rulings*

Having dealt with the erroneous views of various sects during his era and their refutation, al-Muḥāsibī then turns his attention to subjects which would be traditionally termed 'Qur'ānic Sciences' (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*) and, in particular, the issue of abrogation (*al-naskh*). In this section al-Muḥāsibī identifies 15 categories of abrogation, based on his extensive knowledge of the Qur'ān, once again proving his authority on the subject.¹¹⁹

(f) *Qur'ānic stylistics*

Al-Muḥāsibī concludes this work with a discussion of various fields of knowledge related to Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān*) and in particular those related to linguistics, such as grammar (*al-naḥw*) and rhetoric (*al-balāgha*). In this sense al-Muḥāsibī discusses the bringing forward and delay of certain words (*al-taqdīm wa 'l-ta'khīr*) to create emphasis, ellipsis (*al-iḍmār*), additional words (*hurūf al-zawā'id*) to give the meaning more depth and eloquence, and the separation and combination of words (*al-faṣl wa 'l-waṣl*) to give the meaning continuance.¹²⁰

In summary, once again one cannot underestimate the importance of this work with regard to his thought and teaching. His position regarding various issues of the day are presented here, including his refutation of what he considered innovation (*bid'a*) in religion, proposed by the sects that were manifest during his lifetime, such as the 'rationalists' (*al-Mu'tazila*) and the Shi'ites (*al-Rāfiqa*). In addition to his vast knowledge of Islam's belief system displayed in this work, he also demonstrates his equally extensive knowledge regarding the Qur'ān, as he discusses topics which had not been codified at that time and therefore his contribution to the discipline of Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān*) as a primordial science is also considerable.

14.

*Kitāb al-'Ilm*¹²¹ ['The book of knowledge']. This once again is a very short treatise by al-Muḥāsibī but, despite its concise nature, it sheds a great deal of light upon al-Muḥāsibī's own particular understanding of this facet of Islamic learning. He classifies knowledge (*al-'ilm*) as being of three types: first, the knowledge of legal matters, quite literally the *ḥalāl* and the *ḥarām*, which are rulings concerning this world and, as such, are considered as outward knowledge (*'ilm al-zāhir*).¹²² The second type of knowledge is that which concerns the affairs of the hereafter, dealing with the heart and soul, along with their various diseases and states and, as such, is inward knowledge (*'ilm al-bāṭin*).¹²³ The third and final form of knowledge is that concerning God and the manner in which He deals with His creation in this life and the next.¹²⁴

In addition, al-Muḥāsibī informs us of three categories of people who in turn involve themselves in each type of knowledge.¹²⁵ As for the first group, who are concerned with legal issues only, they have an outward appearance of piety but in reality they are corrupted internally as they have allotted none of their time or effort to curing the heart and soul of their diseases. As for the second group, they are those who have devoted themselves to the identification of every internal fault and every hidden sin, being concerned constantly with the second type of knowledge in their quest for purification. The third group are the elite, having concerned themselves with a knowledge which is ‘a bottomless ocean’, as they are the scholars from the people of true faith.¹²⁶

15.

*Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*¹²⁷ [‘Repremanding the soul’]. This is yet another short treatise by al-Muḥāsibī expounding the virtues of returning back to God, causing each individual to reassess the way in which he lives his life. The work concerns three main topics: that of the heart (*al-qalb*), that of the soul (*al-nafs*) and the relationship of both of these with their Lord. Thus, the primary section concerning the heart deals with the means by which the heart can regain its awareness of its Sustainer to the extent that it becomes aware of God’s observance of both the inward and outward actions of the devotee. The advantage of this is that faith in the divine decree (*al-qadar*) becomes a reality and the constant awareness of God guides ultimately to the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). In addition, al-Muḥāsibī discusses the diseases of the heart, warning of their effect on making the heart hard and indifferent to the remembrance of God, clarifying that this leads ultimately to God’s rejection of this category of the heart.¹²⁸

As for al-Muḥāsibī’s treatment of the soul, he begins by reminding it that it is unable to bear the wrath of God, extolling it to the remembrance of death, to be ashamed in the presence of its Lord and to compare the punishment of the hereafter to its pleasures.¹²⁹ When discussing the relationship of the human being with his Lord, al-Muḥāsibī reminds the wayward soul to always seek the aid of God through supplication, to always bring to mind that God forgives all sins and to remember that it is destitute without the provision of God and His mercy.¹³⁰

While following al-Muḥāsibī’s exposition of the above-mentioned subjects, the reader is struck by the unusual style that he employs throughout. He continually addresses each subject, i.e. the heart, soul and God, as if they were in front of him and he is conversing with them directly.¹³¹ One feels that these are an outpouring of al-Muḥāsibī’s thoughts, feelings and emotions, which have been written down and which, as a result, give us a very intimate view of the writer’s personality, thus making it an important addition to the literature concerning him.

16.

*Al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh*¹³² [‘Wayfaring to God and the return to Him’]. This is an interesting addition to the works of al-Muḥāsibī as it sheds light on his own

path in searching for knowledge of the hereafter. The reason for this is that this work, like much of what al-Muḥāsibī wrote, takes the form of a conversation, where the aspirant asks his guide regarding the path returning back to God. The difference here, however, is that in this particular case al-Muḥāsibī himself is the questioner.¹³³ This point is clarified by the editor, ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, when he says:

This book runs the same course as most of his works: answers given in reply to questions proposed by his companions but in this book he says that he is the questioner and that Muḥammad b. Mūsā ‘Abū Ja‘far’ replies. He also mentions him in ‘*A‘māl al-Qulūb wa ‘l-Jawāriḥ*’ with the name ‘Abū Ja‘far’ only without mentioning Muḥammad b. Mūsā.¹³⁴

As Aṭā has just mentioned, this work covers many of the topics that are included in his other works, but this particular source is also very important as it discusses many topics which are not included, for example in such works as *al-Ri‘āya*, gnosis (*al-ma‘rifā*), and wisdom (*al-ḥikma*).¹³⁵ As for the actual content of *al-Qaṣd wa ‘l-Rujū‘ ilā Allāh*, Aṭā summarises it, saying:

The book is a summary regarding the return to God beginning with repentance and ending with the fear of God, passing through honesty (*al-ṣidq*), gnosis (*al-ma‘rifā*), wisdom (*al-ḥikma*), asceticism (*al-zuhd*), scrupulousness (*al-wara‘*), certainty (*al-yaqīn*) and satisfaction (*al-riḍā*), as well as other stages that a Muslim must pass through on his path to God.^{136; 137}

17.

*Kitāb al-Khalwa wa ‘l-Tanaqqul fī ‘l-‘Ibāda wa Darajāt al-‘Ābidīn*¹³⁸ [‘The book of spiritual retreat and wayfaring through the categories of worship and ranks of worshippers’]. Al-Muḥāsibī begins this work by extolling the virtues of spiritual retreat from the worldly life (*al-khalwa*) and in particular when this is performed with constant reading of and reflection upon the Qur’ān. He then continues by describing various states of worship – all internal of course – and various degrees and levels people reach regarding each of them. He facilitates this by presenting a series of counsels and answers to questions proposed by a would-be aspirant on the path to God.¹³⁹ The first virtue that al-Muḥāsibī discusses is that of certainty in God (*al-yaqīn bi Allāh*) that is the basis of faith. The next best action after this is the acknowledgement of divine bounties (*ma‘rifat al-ni‘am*) and as a result the manifestation of gratitude (*al-shukr*). Al-Muḥāsibī then clarifies the various states that a devotee may find himself in and the ability to progress from one stage to the next, which he considers to be intrinsically related to the knowledge of the soul’s faults (*‘uyūb al-nafs*).¹⁴⁰ He continues by urging the reader to maintain silence and to consider any speech that he is forced to make as a disaster that has struck. In addition, he warns of the importance of opposing one’s desires, as failure to do this is a quality which all people suffer from.¹⁴¹ He completes this section of the

work by discussing one of his familiar topics, such as that of ostentation (*al-riyā`*), and rulers (*al-mulūk*) are singled out for particular criticism.¹⁴²

Al-Muḥāsibī also discusses the importance of distinguishing between fear (*al-khawf*) and hope (*al-rajā`*) and that both of these will not be fulfilled except through a process of intimidating the soul (*al-tarhīb*) and awakening its desire (*al-targhīb*).¹⁴³ He then furnishes us with his views regarding the importance of truthfulness (*al-ṣidq*) in the actions performed for the sake of God and even more importantly, the essence of the action, the intention (*al-irāda*). This concept is further developed and its importance discussed with regard to the compulsory acts (*al-farā`id*) in particular and, in addition, the supplementary acts (*al-nawāfil*), as well as the internal virtues of fear (*al-khawf*) and hope (*al-rajā`*).¹⁴⁴ Al-Muḥāsibī concludes this work with a long discussion concerning the importance of maintaining a good opinion with regard to God (*ḥusn al-zann*) and restraining oneself from despondency and despair (*zajr* 'an *al-qunūf*), as well as discussing the necessity of realising the dangers of sin (*al-sayi`a*) and preoccupying oneself with the performance of good (*al-ḥasana*).¹⁴⁵

In summary this work, as with *Ādāb al-Nufūs* before it, is representative of much of al-Muḥāsibī's teachings in his other works, in particular *al-Ri`āya*¹⁴⁶ and *al-Naṣā`ih*.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this work, as with *Ādāb al-Nufūs* is of equal importance, as it not only summarises his teaching in a concise manner but also, to some degree at least, reflects the period in which he lived.

18.

*Kitāb Masā`il fī 'l-Zuhd (wa Ghayrihi)*¹⁴⁸¹⁴⁹ [‘The book of issues related renunciation’]. From the title of this work it would be reasonable to expect a discussion regarding ascetic theology in Islam (*al-zuhd*) and in this sense al-Muḥāsibī does not disappoint but it would be misleading to think that this work deals exclusively with asceticism, as in fact it deals with numerous issues. He does begin this treatise, however, with the discussion concerning worldly renunciation (*al-zuhd*) and clarifies its various types and rulings, as well as discussing the characteristics of the true ascetic (*al-zāhid*). Al-Muḥāsibī then turns his attention to the topics of silence (*al-ṣamt*) and reflection (*al-fikra*), stressing their important effect on the heart and the internal faculties they bestow. He then presents his views regarding the true nature of wealth (*al-ghinā*), poverty (*al-faqr*) and gratitude (*al-shukr*) for the bounties bestowed upon the devotee by his Lord.¹⁵⁰

In the following sections al-Muḥāsibī deals with familiar topics which he has also dealt with in his other works such as arrogance (*al-kibr*), ostentation (*al-riyā`*), satanic incitement (*al-waswisa*) and the dangers of the desires (*al-hawā*).¹⁵¹ He continues by discussing the best of the acts of worship, in which he discusses such topics as the knowledge of God (*al-`ilm bi Allāh*), prayer (*al-ṣalāt*), having sympathy with those less fortunate and coming to the aid of others.¹⁵² Al-Muḥāsibī continues this work with a discussion of the way a person can identify the suggestions of Satan (*ḥadīth al-Shayṭān*) from those of the soul (*ḥadīth al-nafs*) and concludes with a number of counsels on a variety of subjects.¹⁵³

Works attributed to al-Muḥāsibī

1.

*Kitāb al-Ba‘th wa ‘l-Nushūr*¹⁵⁴ [‘The book of the resurrection’]. This text is an eschatological work charting the events that will occur after death and the details of which have been discussed by other authors.¹⁵⁵ I will not, however, attempt an overview here as this work is said to be attributed to al-Muḥāsibī only but, in fact, is not one of his works at all.¹⁵⁶

2.

(*Kitāb*) *Dawā’ Dā’ al-Qalb* [‘The book concerning treatment of the heart’s diseases’]. Sprenger attributes this work to al-Muḥāsibī but he would appear to be mistaken and, again, it will not be treated as one of al-Muḥāsibī’s works here.¹⁵⁷

Works surviving in manuscript

1.

*Risālat*¹⁵⁸ *al-‘Azama*¹⁵⁹ [‘The treatise on divine majesty’]. This work is a refutation of *al-Thanaẓīya*¹⁶⁰ who had started to arrive in Baghdad and began ‘spreading an atmosphere of atheism (*zandaqa*)¹⁶¹ and scepticism (*tashkīk*)’.¹⁶² During the course of this work al-Muḥāsibī discusses the unity of God, His oneness and the impossibility of there being a second or third deity. Al-Muḥāsibī’s evidence for this is a rudimentary form of creationism that depends upon the ‘unity of creation’, which espouses the idea that every created being has a known place in the scheme of things and a purpose for its creation. In addition, every created being is dependent on another and, as such, the creation as a whole is like a chain with many links so that consequently, if one were to break, the whole chain would collapse. This ‘unity of creation’ is thus indicative of a sole Creator Who is bounteous to His creation, as He provides them with sustenance from the very moment they are brought into existence. In addition, al-Muḥāsibī exposes the fate of previous societies who rejected faith in such a Creator and suggests that anyone who reflects on this cannot fail but believe in God and His unity. It is through such a faith that al-Muḥāsibī suggests human beings will be guided, enter Paradise and reach perfect satisfaction with their Lord.¹⁶³

2.

*Risāla fī*¹⁶⁴ *‘l-Taṣawwuf* [‘A treatise on Sufism’]. No author gives an account of what this work contains but there does appear to be a copy of this manuscript in the Municipal Library of Alexandria (no. 3121 *jīm*). Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā states that he is in the process of publishing this work but the author was unable to source this published version. However, it is also worth noting that al-Khaṭīb suggests this is indeed just another copy of *Sharḥ al-Ma‘rifa*, but

without access to the primary manuscript it is impossible to reach a conclusion. Thus, this may not in fact be a separate work but it is tentatively included here for the sake of completeness.¹⁶⁵

3.

Al-Khiṣāl al-‘Ashra allatī Jarabahā Ahl al-Muḥāsaba [‘The ten qualities enjoyed by the people of introspective examination’]. Aṭā mentions this work but gives no account of its content. However, he does state that there is a copy of the manuscript in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, no. 4184 *taṣawwuf*, the original being in the Berlin Library.¹⁶⁶ Having consulted the Berlin manuscript, however, I can confirm that this very small fragment is in fact another copy of *Sharḥ al-Ma‘rifā*. Thus, al-Muḥāsibī did not author a separate work entitled *al-Khiṣāl al-‘Ashra allatī Jarabahā Ahl al-Muḥāsaba*, but rather this is the section from *Sharḥ al-Ma‘rifā*.

4.

Muḥāsabat al-Nafs [‘Introspective examination of the soul’]. There appear to be three copies of this manuscript; two in Berlin, no. 2814 (*fols.* 80b–81a), written in 813/1410 and a small fragment, *fols.* 1b–7b. The other is located in the British Museum (no. 1244).¹⁶⁷

5.

Mukhtaṣar al-Ma‘ānī [‘The abridgement concerning deep spiritual meaning’]. Mazālī states that the original is under Bengal, number 1167, *fols.* 15–17.¹⁶⁸

6.

Al-Murāqaba wa ‘l-Muḥāsaba [‘Vigilance of God and introspective examination’]. A copy of this manuscript is in Shahīd ‘Alī library, Istanbul, in the *taṣawwuf* section, number 137. In addition there is also a copy of this manuscript in the The Chester Beatty Library, under number 4893. Abū Ghudda also makes reference to a work entitled *Risālat al-Murāqaba* which may well be the same work which Mazālī also makes reference to, citing copies in Berlin. In addition, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā states that he is in the process of publishing this work but the author was unable to source this published version. Once again, however, it is worth noting that al-Khaṭīb suggests this is also just another copy of *Sharḥ al-Ma‘rifā* and, as such, this may not be in fact a separate work; similarly, it is tentatively included here to make the study more comprehensive.¹⁶⁹

7.

*Naṣīḥat al-Ṭālibīn (wa ‘l-Farq bayn al-Taḥqīq wa ‘l-Mudda ‘īn)*¹⁷⁰ [‘Advice for the seeker and the difference between true realisation and those who claim it’]. A

copy of this manuscript is in the Shahīd ‘Alī library, Istanbul, number 3319. However, Mazālī quotes the same number but suggests this copy is in Saīb, Ankara (*fols.* 23a–36b), being copied in 731/1331. In addition he also suggests the presence of another manuscript in the same collection under number 5281 (*fols.* 1a–8b).¹⁷¹

8.

Al-Radd ‘alā ba‘d al-‘Ulamā’ min al-Aghniyā’ ḥaythu iḥtajjū bi Aghniyā’ al-Ṣaḥāba [‘A refutation of certain wealthy scholars who use the Prophet’s wealthy companions to justify their state’]. There are two manuscripts of this work, both located in al-Istāna, Istanbul under numbers 3706–20 and 701/1.¹⁷²

9.

Tanbīh alā A‘māl al-Qulūb [‘An admonition concerning actions of the heart’]. Smith mentions that only a fragment of this work is extant¹⁷³ and the existing piece deals again with Islamic monotheism (*tawḥīd*), providing rational arguments to prove the point, in much the same way that *Risālat al-‘Azama* does.¹⁷⁴ A version of this manuscript is available in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, number 4064 *taṣawwuf*, having been copied from an original in Carullah, Istanbul. Abū Ghudda also makes reference to this work with the addition *fī ‘l-Dalāla ‘alā Waḥdāniyat Allāh*.¹⁷⁵

10.

Kitāb al-Ṣabr wa ‘l-Riḍā [‘The book of patience and satisfaction’]. Only a short fragment of this work is extant as only the last three pages still exist.¹⁷⁶ The work itself concerns two of the most important principles of worldly renunciation (*al-zuhd*), namely patience (*al-ṣabr*) and satisfaction (*al-riḍā*), regarding the decree of God (*qadar Allāh*), whether they be favourable or unfavourable, along with complete submission to God’s will. In addition, the work is written in the form of a dialogue between the guide (*al-murshid*) and the aspirant (*al-murīd*), which is a common method employed by al-Muḥāsibī throughout his writings. Al-Hujwārī (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077) discusses the aspect of *riḍā* in al-Muḥāsibī’s teaching in detail in his *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* and may well have derived it from this work in its complete form.¹⁷⁷ He also presents al-Muḥāsibī’s teaching as being a new exposition of this topic, which was then adopted by later writers.¹⁷⁸

11.

Risāla [‘A treatise’]. This treatise has no title but nevertheless is attributed to al-Muḥāsibī. The manuscript is located in Bursa under number 4/1428 (*fols.* 34b–40a), being copied in the eighth/fourteenth centuries.¹⁷⁹

The lost works**1.**

Risāla fī 'l-Akhlāq [‘A treatise on moral character’]. It is interesting to note that Massignon makes mention of an extant manuscript entitled *Akhlāq*, which may indeed be this ‘lost’ work but without direct access to the manuscript it is impossible to verify this.¹⁸⁰

2.

*Kitāb*¹⁸¹ *Akhlāq al-Ḥakīm* [‘The book concerning the moral character of the wise’]. Al-Muḥāsibī mentions this work in his *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*.¹⁸²

3.

Kitāb al-Taḥakkur wa 'l-I'tibār [‘The book of meditation and reflection’]. Ibn Nadīm mentions this work in his *Fihrist*.¹⁸³

4.

Kitāb al-Ghayba [‘The book of the unseen’]. Once again it is suggested that Ibn Nadīm mentions this work in his *Fihrist* and in addition the work is also mentioned by Abū Bakr b. Khayr in *Bibliotheca Arabico-Hispana*.¹⁸⁴

5.

Kitāb Fahm al-Sunan [‘The book concerning comprehending Prophetic practice’]. Al-Zarkashī mentions this work in his *al-Burhān*.¹⁸⁵ In addition al-Suyūṭī quotes al-Muḥāsibī from this work in his *al-Itqān* whilst discussing the 18th category of the Qur’ān Sciences ‘concerning its collection and sequence’ (*fī jam'ihī wa tartībihī*). The actual text reads as follows:

Writing of the Qur’ān was no novelty, for the Prophet used to order that it be written down, but it was in separate pieces, on scraps of leather, shoulder blades and palm risp, and [Abū Bakr] al-Ṣiddīq ordered that it be copied from the [various] places to a common place, which was in the shape of sheets, these [materials] were found in the house of the Prophet in which the Qur’ān was spread out, and he gathered it all together and tied it with a string so that none of it was lost.¹⁸⁶

6.

Kitāb al-Dimā' / Kitāb al-Kaff 'ammā Shuḥira (Shajara) bayn al-Ṣaḥāba [‘The book of blood that was spilt’ / ‘The book concerning avoiding the disputes that

occurred between the Prophetic companions’]. There can be no doubt that one of the most controversial topics in Islamic history is that of the disputes that occurred between the Companions of the Prophet (*al-ṣaḥāba*). In addition, the period in which al-Muḥāsibī lived was clearly affected by such disputes, as they were the subject of continuous critique, which can readily be seen in the various opinions of both the Mu‘tazila¹⁸⁷ and the Shi‘a¹⁸⁸ regarding the Prophet’s Companions.¹⁸⁹ Consequently, it is not surprising that al-Muḥāsibī authored a specific work on this topic and, in fact, this is stated by various authors.¹⁹⁰

In actual fact, al-Muḥāsibī has touched on this topic in various places within his works, in addition to the specific treatise mentioned here.¹⁹¹ On examining these various extracts one finds that his stance regarding the issue is clear. We find that al-Muḥāsibī, whilst addressing this issue, attempts to find a middle ground between the extreme views of both the Mu‘tazila and the Shi‘a, whose stances towards the issue by that time were well known. In addition, as we have already seen, he was concerned not only with scholastic theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*) but also its use in defending the classical Sunni position as far as he was concerned. After witnessing his defence of classical Sunni positions on such issues as the beatific vision and the divine attributes, it is no surprise that al-Muḥāsibī also refutes the ‘unorthodox’ position of various sects regarding the Prophetic Companions.¹⁹²

On examining his approach to the topic, we can identify various aspects which are worthy of mention. First, whilst adopting the role of guide, al-Muḥāsibī advises his ‘brothers’ by warning them to avoid delving too deeply into this complex issue concerning the early generations of the Muslim community. The reason for this is then made clear; the cause of the disputes of those who came after the era of the Companions was their examination of and delving into the reasons behind these disputes. In addition, they then used the Qur’ān’s ambiguous verses (*al-mutashābihāt*)¹⁹³ as opposed to its unambiguous verses (*muḥkam*) as proof for their stance as well as the various narrations (*āthār*) from the Prophet and the Companions, which were also open to interpretation.¹⁹⁴ In addition, their ‘misguidance’ (*dalāl*) is compounded by the fact that they fought, killed and apostatised anyone who opposed their whims. Al-Muḥāsibī includes within these sects the Qadariyya,¹⁹⁵ i.e. the followers of Ma‘bad and Ghaylān, then the followers of Wāsil b. ‘Aṭā’¹⁹⁶ (who later became the Mu‘tazila), the Murji‘a,¹⁹⁷ the Rāfiḍa (i.e. the Shi‘a),¹⁹⁸ the Jahmiyya¹⁹⁹ and the Ḥarūriyya (i.e. the Khawārij).^{200; 201}

Al-Muḥāsibī suggest that the safest path to adopt is to avoid delving into such complexities as the danger of doing so lies in the fact that these groups were all brothers before they adopted this position and, in addition, it is impossible to find a solution which will satisfy everyone.²⁰² Consequently, al-Muḥāsibī proposes that the path to salvation is by adopting that which the Muslim community (*al-umma*) has agreed upon (*mujma‘ ‘alayhi*) in terms of faith in God, His messengers (*rusūlihi*), His angels (*malā’ikatihī*), His books (*kutubihī*), the limits set by Him (*hudūdihī*), the acts made compulsory by Him (*farā’idihī*), the legal injunctions of His religion (*sharā’i‘ dīnihī*) and all the issues that reached the status of consensus during the period of the earliest generations (*al-salaf*), as all of this is guidance (*al-rushd*) and truth (*al-ḥaqq*).²⁰³

Despite the advice proposed by al-Muḥāsibī regarding this sensitive issue, he also clarifies his own personal point of view regarding the disputes that occurred between the Companions. In this sense, once again we find him proposing the position of a classical *sunni* scholar. He considers ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī both to have been killed unjustly²⁰⁴ and considers ‘Alī to have been correct regarding the disputes with ‘Ā’isha, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr and Mu‘āwiya.²⁰⁵ That is not to say that he is critical of this latter group either²⁰⁶; in fact, he considers them to have exercised their personal judgement but to have been mistaken in the conclusions they formulated (*mujtahidūn mukhti’ūn*).²⁰⁷ This being the case, it is easy to deduce and there can be no doubt that al-Muḥāsibī’s goal of such a discussion was to absolve them of responsibility and any associated sin.²⁰⁸

For example, al-Sam‘ānī in his book *Kitāb al-Anṣāb* quotes Abū ‘Alī b. Shādhān (d. 350/961) as stating that al-Muḥāsibī wrote a book entitled *Kitāb al-Dimā* ‘describing the circumstances in which the Companions’ blood was spilled and that these events did not affect the unity of Islamic faith. In fact, Ibn Shādhān goes as far as to say that this book was relied upon by him and his associates.²⁰⁹ Similarly, Smith quotes al-Dhahabī as mentioning a work by al-Muḥāsibī entitled *Kitāb al-Kaff ‘ammā Shuḥira*²¹⁰ *bayn al-Ṣaḥāba* regarding the same topic.²¹¹ It is interesting that both Smith and Maḥmūd conclude that these two works are in fact one treatise, despite the differing titles, as it is highly improbable that al-Muḥāsibī wrote two books on the same topic.²¹² In either case, this work concerns the latter period of ‘Uthmān’s era and the disagreements that occurred, which ultimately led to his death, as well as the dispute between ‘Alī on the one hand and ‘Ā’isha and Mu‘āwiya on the other.²¹³

7.

Kitāb al-Ḥubb li Allāh wa Marātib Ahlihi [‘The book of divine love and the ranks of lovers of the divine’]. Smith is alone in mentioning this work²¹⁴ and identifies it with *Faṣl al-Maḥabba*, included by Abū Nu‘aym in his *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’*.²¹⁵ She states that this is the most mystical of al-Muḥāsibī’s writings, in which he describes:

The love of God for His saints, and the signs by which these lovers of God may be known while they dwell in this world among men. To such lovers is granted the Vision of God and that communion with Him, which is the aim of the mystic, the in-dwelling of the human by the divine.²¹⁶

The chronological sequence of al-Muḥāsibī’s works

Having discussed the works of al-Muḥāsibī at length and in some detail, one is left with the issue of their chronological sequence. This is no easy task, since neither the classical Arabic scholars nor contemporary Western writers have contributed a great deal in this regard. In addition, there is little in al-Muḥāsibī’s works to assist us in this task as he provides only a minimum of historical detail.²¹⁷ Consequently, it is also worth mentioning here the efforts of some scholars to provide a

chronological sequence for these works in order to assess the various stages that al-Muḥāsibī may have gone through as an author and writer. There have been two seminal attempts to provide such information, namely by Maḥmūd, in his *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn* and al-Quwwatī in his edited version of *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*.

The chronological sequence of al-Muḥāsibī's works suggested by Maḥmūd

The essence of Maḥmūd's discussion revolves around the concept of al-Muḥāsibī as a Sufi and he begins with the basic and logical premise that al-Muḥāsibī was not born a Sufi and therefore must have undergone various stages of development before he reached the level expressed in his more complex and in-depth works. Similarly, we do not find any evidence of al-Muḥāsibī changing 'overnight' in adopting a spiritual path, nor do we find him reaching an elevated form of Sufism until the latter period of his life. In fact, we find that al-Muḥāsibī at the beginning of his career as a writer can be observed to have adopted the general style of religious writings of the period.²¹⁸

However, as he progressed in his path to Sufism, he also grew older and as a result became more mature in his thinking, as it is at this stage that a person relies upon not only the knowledge he has acquired but also the experience he has gained. Consequently, al-Muḥāsibī gained a higher level of spirituality at this stage but this is not all, as this stage of al-Muḥāsibī's life and career was also characterised by an outstanding ability to examine and diagnose the faults, diseases and treatment of the soul for which, of course, he later became renowned.²¹⁹ Consequently, as he grew older and gained in spiritual experience, he reached the pinnacle of his Sufi teachings. It is in this period that we find al-Muḥāsibī began writing works filled with counsels aimed at those searching for the correct path regarding spiritual matters and that the examination of the human soul becomes less frequent as if it became only an echo of the previous stage.²²⁰

In summary we can say that Maḥmūd separates the stages of al-Muḥāsibī's life with regard to his Sufism into the following three categories:

1. An initial stage where al-Muḥāsibī was essentially influenced by the style and writing of the scholars of his era.²²¹ Maḥmūd exemplifies this in al-Muḥāsibī's *Fahm al-Qur'ān*, as this work concerns various religious issues and matters concerning belief, being written in a typically argumentative style which was common during this period.²²²
2. An intermediate period where he progressed in his path to Sufism and became more mature in his thinking,²²³ characterised by an outstanding ability in his examination of the human soul.²²⁴ Maḥmūd exemplifies this in al-Muḥāsibī's *al-Ri'āya*, as this work shows his skill in determining the faults of the soul, his depth of comprehension regarding their cure and his powerful intellectual capacity.²²⁵
3. The advanced stage of his life where he reached the peak of his teaching,

turning his attention to guidance of others specifically and reaching the pinnacle of Sufism. Maḥmūd exemplifies this in al-Muḥāsibī's *al-Waṣāyā*, as this work concerns the advice on how to attain the true path by advising the aspirant of the course of action he or she must adopt.²²⁶

The chronological sequence of al-Muḥāsibī's works suggested by al-Quwwatī

In assessing the chronological sequence of al-Muḥāsibī's works, al-Quwwatī appreciates the suggestions made by Maḥmūd, but differs from him in the sense that he suggests only two periods in the chronological sequence of al-Muḥāsibī's writing. He recognises the initial period suggested by Maḥmūd but pays little attention to it as he considers the information regarding this primary stage to be unreliable and, consequently, he distinguishes two main periods²²⁷:

1.

A period that he terms 'a transition phase' (*fatrat al-taḥawwul*), which he considers to last from 195/811 to 207/823.²²⁸ By this al-Quwwatī seems to suggest that this is a period in which al-Muḥāsibī's tendency to intellectualism (*al-naz'at al-'aqliyya*) is apparent in his writing, before a definitive change to Sufism became manifest. To this effect al-Quwwatī, quite surprisingly, contradicts Maḥmūd by including *al-Waṣāyā* as being from al-Muḥāsibī's works in this period.²²⁹ In addition, other works included by al-Quwwatī in this period are *Kitāb al-Khalwa wa 'l-Tanaqqul fī 'l-'Ibāda wa Darajāt al-'Ābidīn*,²³⁰ *Ādāb al-Nufūs*,²³¹ *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*²³² and *al-Tawahhum*.^{233; 234}

2.

A period which he terms 'an instruction phase' (*fatrat al-tadrīs*), in which al-Muḥāsibī taught his thought to others and which al-Quwwatī suggests lasted from 207/823 to 236/851. During this phase al-Quwwatī alludes to the fact that al-Muḥāsibī's tendency towards scholastic theology (*al-naz'at al-kalāmiyya*) dominates the early period of this part of his life and begins to be mixed with a tendency also for Sufism. In addition, he also begins to include a large number of narrations to support his views, which al-Quwwatī suggests was in reply to the harsh reaction of the Ḥanābila to his refutation of the sects common at that time. Al-Quwwatī also suggests that it was in this era that al-Muḥāsibī's writing style reached its pinnacle in terms of eloquence and subject matter. As for the works included by al-Quwwatī in this period, they are: *Kitāb Mā'iyyat al-'Aql wa Ma'nāhā*,²³⁵ *Kitāb al-'Aẓama*, *Kitāb Iḥkām al-Tawba*,²³⁶ *Kitāb al-Dimā'*,²³⁷ *al-Makāsib*, *Kitāb Masā'il fī 'l-Zuhd wa Ghayrihi*, *Kitāb al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*²³⁸ and *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*.²³⁹

In conclusion, it would seem that Maḥmūd's survey of the chronological sequence of al-Muḥāsibī's works is far more useful than that of al-Quwwatī as it

is not only more representative of his life and career but is also more accurate in attributing the works themselves to a specific period. It is also worth mentioning here that both scholars seem to have overlooked an important aspect regarding al-Muḥāsibī's writings; in assessing the chronological sequence of his works, they have seemed to lay great emphasis on the role of subject matter, which is a rather arbitrary means of appraisal. For example, al-Quwwatī casually groups together *al-Makāsib*, *Kitāb Masā'il fī 'l-Zuhd wa Ghayrihi* and *Kitāb al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*, as being from one period and, while there can be no doubt that their subject matter is similar, there is little or nothing in fact to suggest that they were written in a similar time frame.

In addition, al-Muḥāsibī himself was a unique author in his style, subject matter and, in particular, the method which he employed in authoring his works, as the incident with al-Junayd illustrates only too well. Al-Muḥāsibī was an author who wrote only when the need arose, whether for his own personal journey of discovery regarding his own soul or whether counselling his students concerning their journey along the path.²⁴⁰ However, even this is not easy to distinguish due to the common 'question and answer' style that al-Muḥāsibī adopts and in either case it provides little information regarding the sequence in which al-Muḥāsibī's works were written.²⁴¹ As has been mentioned previously, it would also seem that al-Muḥāsibī wrote various concise works, which were expounded in later, more expansive ventures and, as such, it further proves his ability as a teacher and a spiritual guide, as each of these treatises was written with a specific goal or specific students' needs in mind. Thus, more appropriate questions to pose than that of when al-Muḥāsibī's works were written are, due to their methodological significance, why they were written and for whom.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter it stated that the works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī were reported to have numbered approximately 200. Having surveyed the available literature and collated this information, it would appear that there are 36 works that can be confirmed as being al-Muḥāsibī's.²⁴² This is by no means the 200 mentioned by al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) but it is, nevertheless, a significant percentage of them.

What is also apparent from this discussion is the significance of al-Muḥāsibī as a writer; not only was he the first to write in depth on spiritual matters but he was also the first to treat the human soul in so much detail. What is also clear is that this was not the only field with which al-Muḥāsibī was familiar but, indeed, he was well acquainted with a variety of Islamic fields of learning, including the views of those before him and those of his own contemporaries. In addition, al-Muḥāsibī clearly reflected the society in which he lived as he not only discussed the issues that were of concern to the scholarly elite but also debated the opinions of the various sects present at the time and paid great attention to the spiritual welfare of his community.

Having discussed al-Muḥāsibī's works in detail it is appropriate that attention

is now given to his thought and teaching but, before we can do so, we need to ask: what is this concept of purification of the soul to which he contributed? This therefore is the objective of the next chapter, where the spiritual cleansing of the human condition within the Islamic paradigm will be explicated.

Notes

- 1 Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 276.
- 2 For example, Smith mentions 24 works, whereas both Maḥmūd and Abū Ghudda mention 23. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshadīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 31–2; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, pp. 76–88; and Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, pp. 44–59.
- 3 The role of 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā cannot be underestimated here as he was instrumental in bringing many of al-Muḥāsibī's works to light.
- 4 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 37–40; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 31; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 39–40; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 74–5; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 24; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, pp. 76–9; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 115; 'Uwayḍa, *al-Hārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*, pp. 32–9; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 44–7; and van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt*, pp. 12–13.
- 5 Both Smith and Maḥmūd make the addition of 'wa 'l-Qiyām bihā'. Smith also notes that Ḥājjī Khalīfa (d. 1067/1657) terms this work 'Ri'āya fī Taṣawwuf' and that a work attributed to al-Muḥāsibī entitled 'al-Ri'āya fī Taḥṣīl al-Maqāmāt al-Sālikīn' is apparently by a later author, though much of it is in accordance with al-Muḥāsibī's teaching. See Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 44–5; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 76.
- 6 For example, 'Uwayḍa says, 'This book contains a number of issues which were [subsequently] approved and reached a state of consensus amongst the Sufis of *ahl al-sunna*.' 'Uwayḍa, *al-Hārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*, pp. 32–3; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 37.
- 7 That this is al-Muḥāsibī's greatest work is testified to by the great deal of attention it has received by various scholars throughout history. The book itself has had various publications, these include:
 - 1 Smith's own edited version of *al-Ri'āya*. This is possibly the first published version of this work being printed in 1940, as part of the E. J. W. Gibb memorial series by Luzac & Co. (London). Smith includes a concise but useful introduction to both the author and his works. However, the most valuable addition found in this section is the discussion regarding the manuscripts used by the editor to produce the final published version. Smith mentions the following manuscripts:
 - (a) Hunt. 611 of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, containing 147 folios (4b–151b), which is preceded by a title page verifying the author and title. The copy was made at Ḥamāt (N. Syria) and is written in neat, clear hand, with 28 lines to the page. The copy was completed on the 5th of Dhu al-Qa'da 539/25 April 1145.
 - (b) Jāmi' al-Kabīr, Broussa 1534, containing 175 folios, which is written in a good, well-formed hand and has additional titles not included in (a). There is no title and the manuscript is undated. This copy is incomplete, defaced in parts and has some displacement.
 - (c) Diyānat Islāri riyāsēti, Angora 403, which contains 142 folios, numbered as 284 pages. The manuscript is written in a small, clear hand, with 25 lines to the page and is almost fully vocalised. The copy was made by 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Hibat Allāh al-Āmidī and was completed on the 1st of Dhu al-Ḥijja, 739/9th June, 1339. Despite this detail there is some displacement of the text.

- (d) No. G 702 of the Chester Beatty collection, Damascus, which is in a good *naskh* style and is entitled *Kitāb al-Ri'āya fi Sulūk*.
- (e) In addition there is a copy of manuscript (d) in the Manuscript Library of Kuwait University under number 2096 *mīm kāf*.

See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. Margaret Smith (London: Luzac and Co., 1940), pp. xvii–xix; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, ed. Mazālī, p. 24; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 115; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 115; Aḥmad Sa'īd Khāzandār, *Fihras al-Makḥṭūāt al-'Arabiyya al-Muṣawwara al-Mawjūda bi Maktabat al-Makḥṭūāt bi Jāmi'at al-Kuwayt* (Kuwait: Kuwait University, 1989), vol. 2 [*jīm-sīm*], p. 337; al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, *Fihras al-Kutub al-Mawjūda bi 'l-Maktaba al-Azhariyya ilā 1366* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 571; al-Maktaba al-Zahiriyya, *Fihras al-Kutub bi Dār al-Kutub al-Zahiriyya* (Damascus: al-Maktaba al-Zahiriyya, n.d.), vol. 1 [*taṣawwuf*], p. 834; Arthur J. Arberry, *A Handlist of the Arabic Manuscripts – The Chester Beatty Library*, 7 vols. (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co. Ltd., 1958), vol. 3 (MSS. 3501–3750), p. 40; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 162.

- 2 A version edited by 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Mahmūd and Ṭaha 'Abd al-Bāqī Sarūr, published by Dār al-Ma'ārif, in 1960. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, ed. Mazālī, pp. 24–5; and Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 115.
- 3 A version edited by 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, published by Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya (Beirut), in 1985. The copy the researcher has is the 4th edition which is termed, 'increased (*mazīda*), revised (*munaqqaha*) and includes referencing of the prophetic narrations (*mukharrajāt aḥādīthihā*).' This is due to its being an updated version of the work, which was published by Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha in 1970 and which used the manuscripts located in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya and al-Azhar Library. In addition, the 'referencing of the prophetic narrations (*mukharrajāt aḥādīthihā*)' was also misleading because this part of the research was littered with errors, as the editor has seemed to rely upon '*al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfāz al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawiyya*', quoting from it extensively without verifying the *ḥadīth* from their original sources. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 4–5; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 25.
- 4 A version edited by 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Barr, published by Dār al-Yaqīn (al-Manṣūra, Egypt), in 1999. The editor states that his reasons for working on *al-Ri'āya* are to produce an academic version of the text, including referencing of the narrations (*takhrīj*) whether they be from the Prophet, the Companions (*al-ṣaḥāba*) or the Successors (*al-tābi'ūn*) from their original sources and, consequently, state the authenticity of such narrations (*darajat al-aḥādīth*). In addition, he provides explanation of the peculiar words and ambiguous phrases in the text. Despite these useful additions there is no mention of which manuscripts (if any) were used by the editor to verify the original.
- 5 A version edited by 'Iṣām Fāris al-Ḥarastānī and Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Zaghālī, published by Dār al-Jīl (Beirut), 2001. The editors of this particular version claim that the existing publications still require verification of the text. In addition, they include referencing of the prophetic narrations (*takhrīj al-aḥādīth*) and state the authenticity of such narrations (*darajat al-aḥādīth*). Despite these useful additions, once again there is no mention of which manuscripts (if any), were used by the editors to verify the text.

In addition to the original work there is also an abridged version of *al-Ri'āya* by 'Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī [*Sulṭān al-'Ulamā'*] (d. 660/1262) entitled '*Maqāṣid al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh 'Azza wa Jall*'. This abridgement is approximately a quarter of the original text and has five existing manuscripts:

- (a) 'Āṭif Afandī, 1417, folios (114a–138b), written in 853/1449 and copied from a version read to its author and corrected by him.

- (b) Number 3183:2 of the Chester Beatty collection, Damascus.
- (c) Berlin, no. 2812.
- (d) *Al-Khizāna al-Āmma*, al-Ribāt, no. 2279d.
- (e) The Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Frankfurt, written by the author himself.

This work has been edited by Iyād Khālid al-Ṭabbā‘ and published by Dār al-Fikr al-Mu‘āšir, Beirut, 1995. See ‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī, *Maqāṣid al-Ri‘āya li Huqūq Allāh ‘Azza wa Jall*’, ed. Iyād Khālid al-Ṭabbā‘ (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu‘āšir, 1995), pp. 5–9; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 115.

It is also worthy of note that there is an edited extract of al-Muḥāsibī’s *al-Ri‘āya*, namely the author’s introduction and ‘*Kitāb al-Ḥasad*’ entitled, *al-Ḥasad al-Dā‘ wa ‘l-Dawā‘*. To term this work ‘an edited extract’ may also be misleading, however, as the ‘editor’ has not edited the work as such, having relied upon the version of *al-Ri‘āya* published by Dār al-Ma‘ārif and with an introduction by ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd. The ‘editor’s’ contribution therefore, is mainly in the field of *ḥadīth* literature and verification. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ḥasad al-Dā‘ wa ‘l-Dawā‘*, ed. Muḥammad Shākīr al-Sharīf (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṭayba, 1995), pp. 18–23.

- 8 Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 76.
- 9 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur‘ān*, p. 74; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 37 and 39.
- 10 Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 77.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 The role and influence of his society on him cannot be underestimated here as he was clearly affected by the milieu surrounding him, with its varying morality, obsession with material wealth and preoccupation with the worldly life and its enjoyment.
- 13 Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 77.
- 14 Ibid., p. 76. ‘Uwayḍa gives plenty examples of this. See ‘Uwayḍa, *al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*, pp. 34, 38–9.
- 15 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 41–195; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. Smith, pp. xvii; ‘Uwayḍa, *al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*, p. 33; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 44.
- 16 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 37–8 and 41–59; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. Smith, pp. xvii; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 77; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 44–5; and Schoonover, ‘al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri‘āya*’, p. 32.
- 17 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 38 and 58–9; and Schoonover, ‘al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri‘āya*’, p. 33.
- 18 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 38 and 60; and Schoonover, ‘al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri‘āya*’, p. 33.
- 19 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 78–88; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 78; and Schoonover, ‘al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri‘āya*’, p. 34.
- 20 This, of course, is where the process of ‘taking the soul to account’ (*muḥāsabat al-naḥs*) takes precedence to which al-Muḥāsibī also devotes a substantial discussion of *al-Ri‘āya*. He considers the basis of *taqwā* to be founded on *muḥāsabat al-naḥs*, which in turn is rooted in fear (*khawf*) [of God’s punishment] and hope (*raḥā*) [in His mercy]. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 38 and 65–77; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. Smith, p. xvii; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 45; and Schoonover, ‘al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri‘āya*’, p. 34.
- 21 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 252–7.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 381–97; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. Smith, pp. xvii; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 78; and Schoonover, ‘al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri‘āya*’, p. 34.
- 23 He devotes a whole book (*kitāb*) of *al-Ri‘āya* to this topic. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 198–374.
- 24 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. al-Barr, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri‘āya*, ed. Smith, p. xvii; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 78; ‘Uwayḍa, *al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*,

- pp. 38–9; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 45; and Schoonover, ‘al-Muḥāsibī and his *al-Ri’āya*’, *The Muslim World*, pp. 34–5.
- 25 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri’āya*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 39 and 645–67; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri’āya*, ed. Smith, pp. xvii; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, pp. 78–9; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 45.
- 26 To this effect [Aḥmad b. Muḥammad] Ibn ‘Aṭā Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 707/1307) said, ‘I read al-Muḥāsibī’s *al-Ri’āya* to Abū ‘l-‘Abbās [Aḥmad b. ‘Umar al-Mursī] (d. 686/1287) and he said, “Two words will suffice you concerning everything which is in this book: worship God with knowledge and don’t ever be satisfied with your soul.” He never let me read that book again and I don’t know why!?’ See ‘Uwayḍa, *al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*, p. 32; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, p. 79.
- 27 Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 45.
- 28 This particular work is related with both these names, for example Massignon, Smith, Quwwatī and Aḥmad quote both titles, whereas Maḥmūd terms it *Kitāb al-Waṣāyā*, Abū Ghudda terms it *Risālat al-Waṣāyā* and ‘Aṭā terms it simply *al-Waṣāyā*. This book, with either name, has the following extant manuscripts:

1 British Museum, Oriental 7900.

2 Istanbul, Baghdādī Wehbī, 614.

3 Three copies in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya:

- (a) No. 3 *shīn*, *taṣawwuf*, is written in a North African hand and is from the legacy of the famous scholar Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shanqīṭī (d. 1392/1972) (*min mukhallafāt al-‘allāma al-Shanqīṭī*).
- (b) No. 30 *mīm*, *taṣawwuf*, of which the last part is missing and chapters 3 to 20 are perforated in various places. In addition the handwriting is particularly poor.
- (c) No. 1416 *taṣawwuf*. This is the best of the manuscripts, being written in a clear, beautiful *naskh* style and has few mistakes.

4 A copy located in The Chester Beatty Library under catalogue number 4918 and entitled *al-Naṣā’ih*. The copyist is recorded as being Ismā’īl b. Muhaymin al-Ṭaḥḥaz and the manuscript is dated Monday, 7th Ṣafār 734 /18th October 1333.

As a result three edited copies of this work have been produced:

- (i) A version edited by ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā and published by Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya (Beirut), in 1986. Aṭā relied on the manuscript mentioned above in 3.(c) while producing his edited version of this work and selected the title *al-Waṣāyā* as this conforms to the general nature of the book. In addition, he also included various other works by al-Muḥāsibī within this version; these included *al-Qaṣd wa ‘l-Rujū‘ ilā Allāh*, *Bad’ Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, *Fahm al-Ṣalāt* and *al-Tawahhum*. As with his version of *al-Ri’āya* this version is said to be, ‘Edited (*taḥqīq*), annotated (*ta’līq*) and have an introduction (*taqdīm*)’. However, similar to his version of *al-Ri’āya*, this research was also littered with errors, in terms of being distorted (*al-tahrīf*) and misread (*al-taṣḥīf*), as well as mistakes regarding the referencing of the narrations (*takhrīj al-aḥādīth*).
- (ii) A version published by Mu’assasat Qurṭuba, and entitled simply *al-Naṣā’ih*, which has very little detail included other than that, as there is no place of publication, no date of publication and no mention of who exactly edited the work. The only information we can glean from this book is the manuscripts that were used in editing it; these were manuscripts 1 and 2 above, being copied versions found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya. Having examined the descriptions of these two manuscripts, the author’s opinion is that the two of the three copies found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya mentioned above may well be copies of manuscripts 1 and 2. However, it is impossible to say without examining the manuscripts themselves directly.

- (iii) A version edited by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Aḥmad and published by Maktabat al-Qur’ān (Cairo), in 1992. In this version the editor terms the work *al-Naṣā’ih* based on the *ḥadīth* in the collection of Muslim (no. 196/95) and strives to correct the mistakes found in Aṭā’s copy mentioned above. In addition, he includes the referencing of the Prophetic narrations (*takhrīj al-aḥādīth*), as well as providing explanations for the peculiar words and ambiguous phrases in the text. Despite these useful additions there is no mention of which manuscripts (if any) were used by the editor to verify the text (it is assumed he used those mentioned 3.(c) above).

- See al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 31; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 41–50; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 63–5; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā’ih*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Aḥmad (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qur’ān, 1992), pp. 3–10; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, pp. 26–7; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Naṣā’ih* (n. p.: Mu’assasat Qurṭuba, n.d.); Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, pp. 79–81; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1998), pp. 44–5; ‘Uwayḍa, *al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*, pp. 28–32; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 115; Ma’had al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *al-Makhtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 159 and 186; Ma’had Ihyā’ al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi ‘l-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 197; Arberry, *A Handlist of the Arabic Manuscripts (The Chester Beatty Library)*, vol. 6 (MSS. 4501–5000), p. 141; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 46–7; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 162; and van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt*, p. 13.
- 29 Despite this, Maḥmūd does not consider it one of his better works from a stylistic perspective but Aṭā holds an opposing view. On this point I would have to agree with Aṭā, as the introductory paragraphs of *al-Naṣā’ih* bear witness. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā’ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 11–13; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 42; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, p. 79.
- 30 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 41.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 A Prophetic narration related in a number of collections. See Sulaymān b. al-Ash’ath [Abū Dāwūd] al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1999), p. 650; Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī* (Riyadh Dār al-Salām, 1999), p. 600; and Muḥammad b. Yazīd [Ibn Mājah] al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1999), p. 574.
- 33 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā’ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 11; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 64; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, p. 79; ‘Uwayḍa, *al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*, p. 28; Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad al-Shāmī (ed.), *Mawā’iz al-Imām al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, M’ālim fī ‘l-Tarbiyya wa ‘l-Da’wa* series (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1999), p. 27; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 46.
- 34 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā’ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 11–13; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 64; ‘Uwayḍa, *al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī*, pp. 28–30; and al-Shāmī (ed.), *Mawā’iz al-Imām al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī*, pp. 28–35.
- 35 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā’ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 8 and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 47–9.
- 36 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā’ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 14–31.
- 37 Ibid., p. 8; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 49; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 64; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, pp. 79–80; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 46.
- 38 We sense here that al-Muḥāsibī may well have been refuting scholars of his period who supported this idea, so as to satisfy the caliphs of the day, which once again is an indication of the effect the social milieu had on him.
- 39 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā’ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 33–6; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 49; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, pp. 79–80; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 46.
- 40 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā’ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 36–41; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, p. 80.

- 41 This is most likely due to the fact that he himself suffered as a consequence of this issue, as we have seen. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-ʿAql wa Fahm al-Qurʿān*, p. 64; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sāʿirīn*, p. 80.
- 42 For example, he talks about *riʿāyat al-jawāriḥ wa ʿl-qulūb, muṣṭibat taḍyīʿ ḥuqūq Allāh*, and *irādat adāʿ al-ḥuqūq*, which suggests this is why he wrote a separate work on this subject on this topic as we have already seen. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣāʾih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 8–9, 44–6 and 65–7; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sāʿirīn*, p. 80; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 47.
- 43 In *al-Waṣāyā* al-Muḥāsibī affords a great deal of discussion to both the subjects of wealth and knowledge, as he considers them to be a great source of good but at the same time they can be the most corrupting elements of human character if they are not subject to accountability. It is interesting that al-Muḥāsibī discusses knowledge in this regard, as for the majority of people wealth can be a source of corruption but knowledge, which is usually regarded by the majority as a source of benefit, at the same time can be equally as deadly to the human soul. This once again shows the subtlety of his investigation as a whole. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣāʾih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 8, 48–51, 67–70 and 89–92; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-ʿAql wa Fahm al-Qurʿān*, p. 64; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sāʿirīn*, p. 80.
- 44 This is an interesting concept proposed by al-Muḥāsibī here, as many people consider the performance of extra acts of worship to be a source of additional reward or an increase in their position with God. On the contrary, however, al-Muḥāsibī clarifies his own position, which is that such acts are actually only used to fulfil and complete the compulsory duties, in the sense of fulfilling the deficiencies found in such acts.
- 45 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣāʾih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 8, 53–63; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 49; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sāʿirīn*, p. 80; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 47.
- 46 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣāʾih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 8, 72–89 and 92–4; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 49; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sāʿirīn*, pp. 80–1.
- 47 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 50; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣāʾih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 9.
- 48 This work appears to have three extant manuscripts, they are:
- 1 A manuscript entitled *Kitāb al-Tawahhum*, which is located in the Chester Beatty library, Dublin, under number 611, fols. 152a–172a, being copied in 539/1145.
 - 2 A manuscript entitled *Kitāb al-Tawahhum*, which is located in the Bodleian library, Oxford, Hunt, under number 611, fols. 152a–172a, being copied in 539/1145.
 - 3 A manuscript entitled *ʿKitāb al-Tawahhum bi Kashf al-Aḥwāl wa Sharḥ al-Akhilāqʿ*, which is located in Maṭjānā, under number 3/774, consisting of 42 pages and being copied in the eleventh/seventeenth centuries.
- See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 55; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum – Riḥlat al-Insān ilā ʿĀlim al-Ākhira*, ed. Muḥammad ʿUthmān al-Khusht, 2nd edn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qurʿān, 1999); al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-ʿIlm*, p. 24; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-ʿArabī*, vol. 1, p. 116; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sāʿirīn*, p. 82; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 47; van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt*, p. 14; and Massignon, *Essay* p. 162.
- 49 These published works include:
- 1 It would seem that the first version of this work to be published was edited by Arthur J. Arberry in 1937 (Cairo). Arberry relied on the manuscript ‘1’ above and provided an introduction in English, written by himself and a preface in Arabic by the highly respected Egyptian scholar Aḥmad Amīn. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Tawahhum*, ed. Arthur J. Arberry (Cairo: Lajnat al-Taʿlīf wa ʿl-Tarjama wa ʿl-Nashr, 1937); al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-ʿIlm*, p. 24; and Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-ʿArabī*, vol. 1, p. 116.
 - 2 A second version by the French scholar André Roman entitled *Une Vision Humaine des Fins Dernières – Le Kitāb al-Tawahhum dʿal Muḥāsibī* and published as part of the *Études Arabes et Islamiques* series in 1978. This version is fully edited, contains an extensive index, an extremely useful introduction and is also translated into

- French. Similarly, this work has also been published without the Arabic text and subsequently, the extensive index. See André Roman, *Une Vision Humaine des Fins Dernières – Le Kitāb al-Tawahhum d'al Muḥāsibī, Études Arabes et Islamiques* series (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1978).
- 3 A third version of this work was published in 1979 by Dār al-Wa'ī (Aleppo), entitled '*Kitāb al-Tawahhum*' but no mention of who edited the work or the manuscripts used in the editing, if any, has been made. The only other addition to the original text is a brief introduction regarding the author, al-Muḥāsibī and even briefer footnotes regarding the variations in the manuscripts. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Tawahhum* (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa'ī, 1979).
 - 4 A fourth version has been edited Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Khusht and published originally in 1984 and then again in 1999, by Maktabat al-Qur'ān (Cairo), being entitled *al-Tawahhum Riḥlat al-Insān ilā 'Ālim al-Ākhira*. Al-Khusht has relied on manuscripts '2' and '3' above in editing this work and clarified the reason why he chose to edit this treatise as being the apparent mistakes in Arberry's version, for which he gives various examples. Consequently, al-Khusht has provided a useful introduction regarding the concept of the Hereafter (*al-ākhirah*), as well as the usual biography of al-Muḥāsibī. In addition, the editor states that he wished to produce an academic version of the text and as result includes referencing of the Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic narrations, as well as providing biographical details regarding the personalities mentioned. In addition, he provides explanation of the peculiar words and ambiguous phrases in the text and removes any distortion (*al-tahrīf*) and misreading (*al-taṣhīf*) that occurs. Due to the quality of this version, if the researcher quotes from *al-Tawahhum* then it will this version which is intended. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 5–27.
 - 5 A version edited by 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā and published by Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya (Beirut), in 1986, as part of al-Muḥāsibī's other works and entitled *al-Waṣāyā – Al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū ilā Allāh – Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh – Fahm al-Ṣalāt – al-Tawahhum*. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 55.
 - 6 A version edited by Khālīd 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Ak and published by Dār al-Bashā'ir (Damascus), in 1991. Al-'Ak, in editing this work has provided a useful introduction regarding the Hereafter (*al-ākhirah*), as well as the usual biography of al-Muḥāsibī but has made no mention of the manuscripts used, if any, in editing this text. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Tawahhum fī waṣf Aḥwāl al-Ākhira*, ed. Khālīd 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Ak (Damascus: Dār al-Bashā'ir, 1991), pp. 2–17.
 - 7 A version published by Dār Ibn Ḥazm (Beirut), in 1994 and entitled *al-Tawahhum Riḥlat al-Insān ilā 'Ālim al-Ākhira*. This version contains only the text and therefore no other information can be gleaned from it. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum Riḥlat al-Insān ilā 'Ālim al-Ākhira*, 2nd edn (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1994).
 - 8 A version edited by Abū al-Yazīd al-'Ajāmī and published by Dār al-Arḩam, with no mention of place or date of publication. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. Abū al-Yazīd al-'Ajāmī (n.p.: Dār al-Arḩam, n.d.).
 - 9 A version published by Dār al-Furqān, with no mention of place or date of publication. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum* (n.p.: Dār al-Furqān, n.d.).

The final two versions (8 and 9) were mentioned in the catalogue of Al-Rushd bookstore in Riyadh but unfortunately the researcher was unable to acquire a copy as they were out of stock. Consequently, it is suggested that there may be more versions of this work than those mentioned here.

In addition to the work itself, there is also an academic appraisal of it and its author, entitled *Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī wa Kitābuhu al-Tawahhum*, by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Yāfī and published in *al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, which is a cultural magazine produced by Ittihād al-Kitāb al-'Arab in Damascus. The article itself is extremely useful in describing both the life and one of the works of al-Muḥāsibī, being

written in an academic style, provides useful footnotes and has also used Western sources. See al-Yāfī, 'Abd al-Karīm, 'Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Hārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī wa Kitābuhu al-Tawahhum', *al-Turāth al-'Arabī* (Damascus: Itiḥād al-Kitāb al-'Arab, no. 41, October 1990), pp. 7–34.

- 50 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 31–4.
- 51 Ibid., pp. 34–5; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 47–8.
- 52 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 34–40; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 48.
- 53 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 40–55; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 48.
- 54 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 56–63; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 48.
- 55 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 63–82; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 48.
- 56 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 83–92; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 48.
- 57 Smith has already discussed the possible influence of al-Muḥāsibī on Dante in his *Divine Comedy* but it is also interesting to note that, within the Islamic context, al-Khusht mentions the influence of al-Muḥāsibī's *al-Tawahhum* on another eschatological work, the *Risālat al-Ghufrān* of Abū 'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 18; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 290–1.
- 58 Both Mazālī and Smith term this work *Risāla* as this seems to the name recorded in the manuscripts. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 27; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 50.
- 59 There would appear to be three existing manuscripts for this work, they are:

- 1 A manuscript located in the Carullah section of the Süleymaniye library in Istanbul under number 1101, fols. 29a–51b.
- 2 A copy of '1.' above located in Cairo University under number 9678 and entitled *al-Makāsib wa 'l-Wara' wa 'l-Shubha wa Bayān Mubāḥihā wa 'l-Maḥzūrihā wa Ikhtilāf al-Nās fī Ṭalabihā wa 'l-Radd 'alā 'l-Ghāliṭina fīhi*. The manuscript consists of 43 pages, with 20 lines to a page and an average of 12 words to a line. In addition the manuscript is extremely difficult to read in places.
- 3 A version of this work included as part of compilation of al-Muḥāsibī's works found in Cairo University from the original, which is part of the personal library of Aḥmad al-Jazzār Ba'kā, being stored in al-Azhar under number 1367 *taṣawwuf*.
- 4 A manuscript located in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, under 4064 *taṣawwuf*.
- 5 A manuscript found in Jāmi'at Fu'ād, under number 26048.

See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Atā (Cairo: 'Ālam al-Kutub, n.d.), pp. 38–40; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib wa 'l-Wara' wa 'l-Shubha wa Bayān Mubāḥihā wa 'l-Maḥzūrihā wa Ikhtilāf al-Nās fī Ṭalabihā wa 'l-Radd 'alā 'l-Ghāliṭina fīhi*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Atā (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thiqāfiyya, 1987), p. 34; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib wa 'l-Rizq al-Ḥalāl wa Ḥaqīqat al-Tawakkul 'alā Allāh*, ed. Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Khusht (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qur'ān, 1984) pp. 25–7; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 27; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 116; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, pp. 81–2; Ma'had al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *al-Makhtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi'at al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 146 and 157; Ma'had Ihyā' al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi 'l-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 193; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 50–2; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 162.

As a result there are several published versions of this work:

- 1 A version edited by 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Atā, published by 'Ālam al-Kutub, Cairo, with no date and entitled *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, this being part of compilation of al-Muḥāsibī's works, as mentioned

above. In editing the work 'Aṭā has relied on manuscript '2.' above and followed the usual manner of editing including referencing of the Qur'ānic verses, Prophetic narrations, as well as providing biographical details regarding the personalities mentioned. In addition, he provides explanation of the peculiar words and ambiguous phrases in the text as well as titles for each section in the work. It would seem that the same edited version was published as a separate and independent work by Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thiqāfiyya, Beirut, in 1987.

- 2 A version edited by Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Khusht, Maktabat al-Qur'ān, Cairo, in 1984. In editing the work al-Khusht has also relied on manuscript '2.' above and followed the usual manner of editing including referencing of the Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic narrations, as well as providing biographical details regarding the personalities mentioned. In addition, he provides explanation of the peculiar words and ambiguous phrases in the text, as well as titles for each section in the work. However, he has surprisingly changed the original title of the work, i.e. *al-Makāsib wa 'l-Wara' wa 'l-Shubha wa Bayān Mubāḥihā wa 'l-Maḥzūrihā wa Ikhtilāf al-Nās fī Ṭalabihā wa 'l-Radd 'alā 'l-Ghālīṭna fīhi*, to *al-Makāsib wa 'l-Rizq al-Ḥalāl wa Ḥaqīqat al-Tawakkul 'alā Allāh* as he considers this more appropriate to the content of the treatise.
- 3 A version annotated by Nūr Sa'īd and published by Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī (Beirut) in 1992. It is unclear if Sa'īd actually edited the original or not and if not, it is also unclear which edited version he relied on whilst commenting on the work.

See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Mas'ūl*, pp. 38–40; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. 'Aṭā, p. 34; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 25–7; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib wa 'l-Wara' wa 'l-Shubha wa Bayān Mubāḥihā wa 'l-Maḥzūrihā wa Ikhtilāf al-Nās fī Ṭalabihā wa 'l-Radd 'alā 'l-Ghālīṭna fīhi*, ed. Nūr Sa'īd (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, 1992).

- 60 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 35–70; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 50.
- 61 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 71–93; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 50.
- 62 'Pure' in the sense of being from a permissible source and being free of doubt regarding its nature.
- 63 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 94–120.
- 64 Ibid., pp. 121–34; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 50–2.
- 65 This work has several extant manuscripts they are:

- 1 A manuscript located in Carullah, Istanbul, under number 1101, fols. 59 *alif*–103 *bā*, being copied in 523/1129.
- 2 A manuscript located in Cairo University, under number 26048 and is a copy of '1.' above.
- 3 A manuscript located in Azhar University, this being a copy the Walī al-Dīn version.
- 4 A manuscript located in the Paris National Library, this being a copy of '1.' above.
- 5 A manuscript located in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, under 4064 *taṣawwuf* and this is a copy of '1.' above.
- 6 A manuscript found in Keuprülü, İstāna, under number 725, fol. 42 onwards and was copied in the eleventh/seventeenth centuries.
- 7 A manuscript found in Jāmi'at Fu'ād, under number 26048.

In addition, there are three published versions of this work that have been produced, they are:

- (a) A version edited by 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā, being published by Dār al-Jīl, Beirut, in 1987. In editing this work 'Aṭā has relied on using manuscript '2.' above, using this as the source work and then comparing to manuscript '4.' above.

- (b) A version edited by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Aḥmad, being published Maktabat al-Qur’ān (Cairo) and with no date of publication. Aḥmad has relied on manuscript ‘2.’ above in editing this work.
- (c) A version edited by Majdī Fathī al-Sayyid, being published by Dār al-Salām (Cairo), in 1991. Al-Sayyid has relied on manuscripts ‘2.’ and ‘5.’ above in editing this work.

All the editors have adopted the usual manner of verifying the text in that they have provided footnotes explaining ambiguous terms, references for the verses of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* quoted and included a brief introduction to the life and works of al-Muḥāsibī.

See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā, 2nd edn (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1987), pp. 28 and 32–3; al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Aḥmad (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qur’ān, n.d), p. 13; al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. Majdī Fathī al-Sayyid (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1991), p. 49; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, pp. 28–9; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 116; Ma‘had al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 1210 and 150; Ma‘had Ihyā’ al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makḥṭūṭāt bi ‘l-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 143; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 52–3; van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt*, p. 13; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 162.

- 66 These include the correct etiquette to have with God and the Companions of the Prophet. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. ‘Aṭā, pp. 35–9; al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 17–20; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 55–60.
- 67 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. ‘Aṭā, p. 32; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 11–12.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Ibid and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 81.
- 71 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 48.
- 72 It is worth mentioning that in the hagiographic Sufi sources that al-Muḥāsibī himself makes reference to a work concerning *al-ma‘rifā* as we find the following narration: ‘I authored a work on intuitive knowledge of God (*al-ma‘rifā*) and was well pleased with it. One day while I was looking through it, thinking how good it was, when a young man wearing shabby clothing came in, greeted me and said, “O Abū ‘Abd Allāh, is intuitive knowledge of God (*al-ma‘rifā*) the right (*ḥaqq*) of the True One (*al-ḥaqq*) upon His creation (*al-khalq*) or the right of the creation the upon the True One?” So I replied, “It is a right of the True One upon His creation.” So he said, “It is more appropriate that He unveil it to those who deserve it.” So I said, “Then indeed it is the right of the creation upon the True One.” To which he said, “He is more just than to treat them unfairly.” Then he bade me farewell and left, so I tore it [the book] up and said, “I will never discuss intuitive knowledge of God again.”’
- It is unclear if the book referred to in this narration is the work in question here, in which case there may have been versions of this work that had already been copied and thus, it remained extant. Alternatively, al-Muḥāsibī may have written a later work after he felt that he had gained a greater understanding of the subject matter, or one may simply view this narration as a later embellishment.
- See ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. Aḥmad al-Sha‘rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, ed. Sulaymān al-Ṣāliḥ (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifā, 2005), pp. 113–14; al-Bundanjī, *Jāmi‘ al-Anwār*, p. 293; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 11–12.
- 73 This work more than any other has proven extremely difficult in drawing a conclusion regarding its actual status. This has been for a variety of reasons; the first difficulty is the title of the work itself. Abū Ghudda, for example, simply terms it *Sharḥ al-Ma‘rifā* and does not refer to any of the titles which will be mentioned below. On the contrary,

Smith mentions three different titles for the one work, namely, *Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīha*, *Risāla fī ʿl-Muraqaba wa Inqisāmihā* and *Kitāb Muḥāsabat al-Nafs*. It is clear from this that Smith saw all three titles on differing manuscripts and after comparing them concluded that they were the same work. Maḥmūd on the other hand confuses issues further by terming the work, *Kitāb fī ʿl-Murāqaba* and then states that there is another, separate work by al-Muḥāsibī entitled, *al-Maʿrifa*. However, having examined the published versions of this work and comparing them to the quotes taken from what Maḥmūd terms *al-Maʿrifa* the present author finds it clear that in fact these quotes are from *Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīha*, or what he terms *Kitāb fī ʿl-Murāqaba* and therefore there is no separate work entitled *al-Maʿrifa* as he claims. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīha*, ed. Šāliḥ Aḥmad al-Shāmī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1993), p. 23; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 31; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-ʿArabī*, vol. 1, p. 117; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sāʿirīn*, pp. 85–7; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 53.

In addition, there are two published versions of this work:

- 1 A version edited by Šāliḥ Aḥmad al-Shāmī, entitled *Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīha* and published by Dār al-Qalam (Damascus), in 1993. In editing the book al-Shāmī has relied on the following manuscripts:
 - (a) a manuscript found in the library at the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh, under number 3/73 *fā*. The original manuscript can be found in al-Azhar under no. 1208 *taṣawwuf*, consists of 10 fols. and was written in a clear *naskh* style in the ninth/fifteenth century.
 - (b) A manuscript found in the al-Azhar library in Cairo under no. 615 *wāw taṣawwuf*. It consists of 12 fols. and at first glance appears complete but on examination there is gap in the copy equivalent to one page.
 - (c) A manuscript found in al-Imam Muḥammad b. Saʿūd Islamic University, Riyadh, under number 4979 *fā*. The manuscript was written in Dhu ʿl-Ḥijja 911/April 1506 and there are two places where it is incomplete.
 - (d) A manuscript found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo, under number 4084 *taṣawwuf*. The manuscript consists of 8 fols., six of which are the work itself ending at the section entitled ‘the soul prone to evil (*al-naḥs al-amāra bi ʿl-sū*)’, whereas fols. 7–8 contain a text copied from ‘*al-Riʿāya*’ by al-Muḥāsibī.

As for al-Shāmī’s contribution regarding this text he has carried out a comparison of the manuscripts and edited them accordingly. In addition, he has attempted to produce a version with a minimum of annotation, so that the reader would not be lost within the footnotes at the expense of benefiting from the main text. To this effect the editor does, however, provide footnotes explaining ambiguous terms, as well as having split the work into two sections according to the title, i.e. *Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa* and *Badhl al-Naṣīha*. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 17–20.

- 2 A version edited by Majdī Fathī al-Sayyid, entitled, *Sharḥ al-Maʿrifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīha* and published by Dār al-Šaḥāba li ʿl-Turāth (Ṭantā, Egypt), in 1993. In editing this work al-Sayyid has relied on the manuscript found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo, under *taṣawwuf al-Shanqīṭī* no. 3 (microfilm 3889). This manuscript consists of 12 fols., i.e. 24 pages with 22 lines to a page of good-quality handwriting. In addition there is another copy of this manuscript in the al-Azhar library under (3/634) *taṣawwuf*, no. 1207. Although al-Sayyid has only relied on the manuscript described above he does however mention other copies of it and they are as follows:

- (a) A manuscript found in Berlin under number 2815, fols. 208–10, copied in 1200/1786.
- (b) A manuscript found in the British Museum, appendix 1242, Oriental 3/4026, fols. 66bff.

- (c) A manuscript found in Shahīd 'Alī, Istanbul, under number 3/1345, fols. 37 *alif*–47 *alif*, copied in the eighth/fourteenth century.
- (d) A manuscript found in Şā'ib, Ankara, under number 1/3319, fols. 1 *alif*–11 *bā*, being copied in 731/1331.
- (e) A manuscript found in Chester Beatty, Damascus, under catalogue number 4969, consisting of 17 fols., being copied in 911/1505.

As for al-Sayyid's contribution regarding this text, he has added a great deal of annotation, in a similar manner to that of Abū Ghudda in his edited version of *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn* but not in such a profuse manner. To this effect the editor provides footnotes explaining ambiguous terms and various quotes from the pious predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), as well as dividing the work into sections and adding headings for each one.

Despite this, however, there are major discrepancies between the two published versions of the work. On examining the introduction alone, the reader feels at times that he is reading two different books as al-Sayyid's version lacks much of what al-Shāmī provides. This is clearly due to the fact that al-Shāmī has carried out a comparison of the manuscripts available to him and therefore his version is more complete, whereas al-Sayyid has relied on only one manuscript. What is not clear, however, is how such discrepancies occurred in the original manuscripts. There is no simple answer to this but it may go so far in explaining why one work had so many titles. Bearing this in mind, if the researcher quotes from *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīḥa* it will be al-Shāmī's edition which will be meant, as it contains a broader view of al-Muḥāsibī's teaching in this particular work.

In addition to the manuscripts mentioned above, there is a further copy in Umm al-Qurā University in Mecca, under number 4/258, being entitled *Risāla fī 'l-Murāqaba* and being copied in 979/1571.

See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badhl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. Majdī Fathī al-Sayyid (Ṭantā: Dār al-Şahāba li 'l-Turāth, 1993), pp. 11–13 and 17–19; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 23–5; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 31; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 117; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 85–7; Jāmi' at Umm al-Qurā, *Fihras Makḥṭūṭāt Jāmi' at Umm al-Qurā* (Mecca: Jāmi' at Umm al-Qurā, 1983), vol. 1, p. 219; Ma'had al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 137 and 155; Ma'had Ihyā' al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makḥṭūṭāt bi 'l-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 170; Arberry, *A Handlist of the Arabic Manuscripts (The Chester Beatty Library)*, vol. 6 (MSS. 4501–5000), p. 158; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 53; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163.

- 74 It is almost as if al-Muḥāsibī separated the book into two sections the first dealing with *al-Ma'rifa* and the second with *al-Naṣīḥa*, which is probably why al-Shāmī choose to do exactly that.
- 75 This is why I have not termed it 'gnosis' here as Smith has done. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 12–13; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 53.
- 76 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 13 and 23–4.
- 77 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 78 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–32; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, pp. 85–6; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 53.
- 79 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 32–5; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, pp. 85–6; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 53.
- 80 Qur'an (12: 53).
- 81 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 38.
- 82 *Ibid.*, pp. 38–41; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, pp. 85–6; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 53.
- 83 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 42–9.

84 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Maʿrifā*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 57–66 Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sāʾirīn*, p. 86.

85 There are two edited versions of this text:

- 1 A version by ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, which as has mentioned previously, he included within his edited version of *al-Waṣāyā*. The manuscript used by Aṭā is included within a collection of al-Muḥāsibī’s works entitled, *al-Masāʾil*, which also contains *al-ʿAql* and *al-Makāsib*, which made it particularly difficult to locate. This copy of this collection can be found in the Cairo University library and it was taken from an original in the Aḥmad al-Jazzār Ba kā library, which was deposited in the al-Azhar library under *taṣawwuf*, no. 1367. This copy was made at the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century and is extremely difficult to read in places. In addition the copier switches the feminine and masculine pronouns and some displacement has also occurred. As for Aṭā’s contribution, he placed section headings for each subject, correcting the mistakes and displacement and added annotated footnotes where appropriate, as well as adding some words as to as to make the meaning more comprehensible.
- 2 A version by Majdī Fathī al-Sayyid published by Dār al-Salām, Cairo, in 1991. Al-Sayyid has used a manuscript found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo, under *taṣawwuf*, no. 4064 and of which there is microfilm copy under 5998. The manuscript consists of seven pages (14 sides) and has 20 lines to a page, averaging seven words a line. In addition, al-Sayyid also mentions another copy in Berlin under no. 3/66. As for al-Sayyid’s contribution, he has divided the work into paragraphs, placed section headings for each subject, correcting the mistakes and added annotated footnotes where appropriate.

In addition to the manuscripts mentioned above, others also exist, they are:

- (i) A manuscript found in Carullah, under no. 1101/2 (*fol.* 18a–24b) being copied in 523/1129.
- (ii) A second manuscript in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo, under *taṣawwuf*, no. 4664.
- (iii) A further manuscript found in Jāmiʿat Fuʾād, (under no. 26048).

See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā, pp. 45 and 329–53; al-Muḥāsibī, *Badʾ Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. Majdī Fathī al-Sayyid (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1991), pp. 5–19 and 21–41; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 31; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-ʿIlm*, ed. Mazālī, p. 23; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sāʾirīn*, p. 84; Sezgin, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-ʿArabī*, vol. 1, p. 116; Maʿhad Iḥyāʾ al-Makḥḥūtāt al-ʿArabiyya, *Fihras al-Makḥḥūtāt bi ʿl-Jāmiʿa al-ʿArabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 148; Maʿhad al-Makḥḥūtāt al-ʿArabiyya, *al-Makḥḥūtāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmiʿa al-ʿArabiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 124 and 151; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 54; van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt*, p. 13; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 162.

86 The addition of *taʿālā* is Abū Ghudda’s and he is alone in doing so. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 31.

87 Smith suggests that this is an autobiographical account and it is clear that al-Muḥāsibī’s drew on his own personal experience as the account given is extremely subtle and precise. Despite this, some doubts surround the nature of the book as the customary *qāla/qultu* question and answer style is employed. This is not unusual but it begs the question: is this a conversation between al-Muḥāsibī and his teacher as we’ve seen previously in *al-Qaṣd wa ʿl-Rujūʾ ilā Allāh*? Or is it, as al-Sayyid suggests, a conversation between al-Muḥāsibī and one of his students, or simply an imaginary conversation, which took place in the author’s own mind and he recorded? The answer is not at all clear. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Badʾ Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 23; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 331; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 54.

88 Smith describes this path and its goal when she says:

But when God has stirred the conscience, then it is for man to examine and discipline himself, and to keep continually before the remembrance of death and the

hereafter, and so, by attaining mastery of his lower soul, and keeping his eyes fixed on higher things, he will make continual progress in the path of God, and having relinquished the pleasures and temptations of all that would hinder him from the service of his Lord, will attain fellowship to Him.

See Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 54 and cf. Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 84.

89 See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 84.

90 There are two manuscripts mentioned in the literature:

- 1 A manuscript located in Carullah, Istanbul, under number 1101, fols. 114a–145b, being copied in 523/1129.
- 2 A manuscript located in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya under number 4064 *taṣawwuf*.
- 3 A manuscript located in Jāmi'at Fu'ād, under number 26048.
- 4 A copy found in Cairo University from the original, which is part of the personal library of Aḥmad al-Jazzār Ba'kā, being stored in al-Azhar under number 1367 *taṣawwuf*. This particular manuscript is of extreme importance as it also includes a series of al-Muḥāsibī's other works, namely *Kitāb Masā'il fi 'l-Zuhd wa Ghayrihi*, *al-Makāsib* and *al-'Aql*. Consequently, 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā edited the entire manuscript, producing all four works under one title of *al-Masā'il fi A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, which was published by 'Ālam al-Kutub (Cairo) with no date. As for Aṭā's contribution, he placed section headings for each subject, correcting the mistakes and displacement and added annotated footnotes where appropriate, as well as adding some words so as to make the meaning more comprehensible.

See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fi A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā (Cairo: 'Ālam al-Kutub, n.d.), pp. 38–40; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 27; Sezgin, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 116; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 82; Ma'had Ihyā' al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi 'l-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 191; Ma'had al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *al-Makhtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 145 and 157; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 54–5; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163; and van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt*, p. 14.

91 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il*, pp. 91–126; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 82; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 54.

92 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il*, pp. 127–47; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 82; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 55.

93 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il*, pp. 148–70; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 82.

94 Both Maḥmūd and Abū Ghudda include the term *mukhtaṣar* as a prefix to *Kitāb Fahm al-Ṣalāt*, as is recorded in the original manuscript. This usually indicates that this is an abridgement of a longer work but since there is no indication of the fact that al-Muḥāsibī wrote a separate work and as this work is already extremely short, the researcher suggests that the term *mukhtaṣar* has been used to indicate the concise nature of the work in question.

95 There are only two published versions of this work:

- 1 A copy edited by 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā which is included within his edited version of *al-Waṣāyā*, as has been mentioned previously. In producing this version Aṭā has relied upon a copy of this manuscript found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya (Cairo), number 4064 *taṣawwuf*, which was copied from the original in Carullah, Istanbul, no. 1101, fols. 1a–17b. In addition, Aṭā states that there is another copy from this original in the University of Cairo's library. As for Aṭā's contribution, he placed section headings for each subject, correcting the mistakes and displacement and added annotated footnotes where appropriate, as well as adding some words so as to make the meaning more comprehensible.
- 2 A version edited by Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Khusht with the title *Fahm al-Ṣalāt – Ta'lim al-Ṣalāt – al-Kuṣhū' fi 'l-Ṣalāt – 'Uqūbat Tārīk al-Ṣalāt*, being published by

Maktabat al-Qur'ān (Cairo) in 1984. In producing this version al-Khusht has relied upon a copy of this manuscript found in the University of Cairo's library, which was copied from the original in Carullah onto microfilm (no. 9678) and is entitled *Mukhtaṣar Fahm al-Ṣalāt*. This manuscript begins from page 52 and carries on to page 59, each page containing around 20 lines and each line approximately 14 words. As for al-Khusht's contribution, he has placed section headings for each subject, correcting the mistakes and displacement, and added annotated footnotes where appropriate, as well as adding some words so as to make the meaning more comprehensible. In addition he has included a brief introduction about al-Muḥāsibī, brief biographical notes for each personality mentioned and added an introductory chapter entitled *al-'Ibāda min Manzūr Khārījī*, where he discusses various aspects of the relationship between the human being and acts of worship.

In addition to the manuscripts mentioned above there would appear to be another manuscript in Jāmi'at Fu'ād, under no. 26048.

See al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Ṣalāt – Ta'lim al-Ṣalāt – al-Kushū' fī 'l-Ṣalāt – 'Uqūbat Tārik al-Ṣalāt*, ed. Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Khusht (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qur'ān, Cairo, 1984), pp. 5–34; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 54 and 355–83; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustashidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; Sezgin, *Tārikh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 118; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 85; Ma'had Ihyā' al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi 'l-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 190; Ma'had al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *al-Makhtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 118 and 157; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 56.

96 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Ṣalāt*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 40–74.

97 This term as opposed to that of *Mā'iyya* is recorded by both Maḥmūd and Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir Aṭā. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharaf al-'Aql wa Māhiyyatuhu*, ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1986), p. 15; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 82.

98 Both Smith and al-Quwwatī record this addition as part of the title due to its presence in the manuscript. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, ed. al-Quwwatī, p. 193; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 56.

99 There appear to be several available manuscripts of this work:

1 A manuscript found in Carullah, under number 1101, fols. 51b–53b.

2 A manuscript found in Cairo University from the original, which is part of the personal library of Aḥmad al-Jazzār Ba'kā, being stored in al-Azhar under number 1367 *taṣawwuf*. This is part of the manuscript entitled *al-Masā'il fī 'l-māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ* ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā.

3 A manuscript found in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya (Cairo), under number 4064 *taṣawwuf*.

4 A manuscript found in Jāmi'at Fu'ād, under number 26048.

Based on these manuscripts three published versions have been produced, they are:

(a) A work edited by Ḥusayn al-Quwwatī entitled *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, published originally by Dār al-Fikr in Beirut and then subsequently by Dār al-Kindī, also in Beirut. This edited version is an indispensable addition to the literature concerning al-Muḥāsibī, as al-Quwwatī has not only edited two of al-Muḥāsibī's works in this book but also proved a variety of introductory chapters, dealing with his life, work, thought and era. In addition, he has provided a wealth of information regarding the concept of the intellect up until and including the period of al-Muḥāsibī, as well as assessing al-Muḥāsibī's own theories regarding this subject.

(b) A work edited by 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā.

- (c) A work edited by Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā and published by Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya (Beirut), in 1986 and entitled *Sharaf al-‘Aql wa Māhiyyatuhu*. In this version ‘Aṭā has simply annotated the version edited by ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā in ‘(b).’ above but has also added a work entitled *Sharaf al-‘Aql wa Māhiyyatuhu* by al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111).

- See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharaf al-‘Aql wa Māhiyyatuhu*, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā, pp. 5–14; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā’il*, pp. 38–40; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 5–199 and 241–60; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 27; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 116; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, p. 82; Ma’had Ihyā’ al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi ‘l-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1 (*falsafa wa mantiq*), p. 231 and vol. 1, p. 188; Ma’had al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *al-Makhtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 2, pp. 453 and 463; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 56; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 162; and van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt*, p. 12.
- 100 It is noticeable that this work is substantiated with quotations from the Qur’ān in particular. However, he is not satisfied with only this and also qualifies his opinions with Prophetic narrations (*aḥādīth*) and statements recorded from his predecessors (*al-salaf*). See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 137–9.
- 101 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 201–19; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharaf al-‘Aql*, pp. 17–31; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 56.
- 102 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 219–31 and al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharaf al-‘Aql*, pp. 32–42.
- 103 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 232–7 and al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharaf al-‘Aql*, pp. 43–7.
- 104 The great irony of this being that in trying to defend the position of the *al-muḥaddithūn* by using a rationalist approach, so as to counter the stance of the al-Mu’ tazila, he was then accused of being ‘unorthodox’ by the very people he was trying to defend.
- 105 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 133–7.
- 106 This is the full title as given by Smith, whereas Maḥmūd gives only *Iḥkām al-Tawba* as the name of this work. Both researchers quote only one manuscript for this treatise, this being the one located in Cairo under *taṣawwuf shīn 3*, being copied in 1173/1759, and it also appears to have been edited. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā states that he is in the process of publishing this work but the researcher was unable to source this published version.
- In addition, this work should not be confused with another work entitled *al-Tawba*, attributed to al-Muḥāsibī and edited by ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā. This work is in fact a compilation of works on the subject of repentance containing a work entitled *Aḥkām al-Tawba* by ‘Abd al-Qādir b. Ismā’īl al-Nābulusī, an appendix on the topic by the editor and al-Muḥāsibī’s *Bad’ Man Anāba ilā Allāh*. It would seem that the nature of this work of al-Muḥāsibī’s and in particular the term *anāba*, having a similar contextual meaning to *tawba* caused it to be included with the rest of these works. However, this seems to have been a rather crass decision bearing in mind the fact that al-Muḥāsibī has another work with a very similar title. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu’ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Aṭā (Cairo, Dār al-I’tisām, 1986), p. 23; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawba*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā (Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīla, 1977); al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 29; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, pp. 117–18; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, p. 86; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 56–7; and van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt*, p. 12.
- 107 See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, p. 86; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 56–7.
- 108 This is the name cited by Smith and Maḥmūd. In addition the book has two published versions:

- 1 An edited and annotated version by ‘Abd al-Fattāh Abū Ghudda. This copy has proven very popular, as it is in its fifth edition, and has done a great deal to publicise

the life and works of al-Muḥāsibī. It was first published in the late 1960s and was consequently translated into Turkish by ‘Alī Arslān in Istanbul. Abū Ghudda’s work on this book is indeed very useful as he has provided considerable information regarding the life of al-Muḥāsibī in the biographical section of the introduction and in particular regarding the dispute with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. In addition to this he has provided profuse footnotes explaining ambiguous terms, referencing the *ḥadīth* and general narrations from the *salaf* according to the appropriateness of the subject matter in the text.

In producing the edited work Abū Ghudda used a personal copy of the manuscript whose handwriting is clear and has very few mistakes; it consists of 33 small pages, was probably written after the tenth/sixteenth century by his own estimation and has no name attributed to it except that on page three the following was written in small dots, ‘Written by Aḥmad b. al-Ḥājj Ismā’īl’.

In addition to this personal copy of the text, Abū Ghudda also mentions another copy in the Ma’had al-Makḥūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya (Cairo). This version was copied from an original in the Municipal Library in Alexandria, no. 13/3023 *jīm*: it consists of 14 small pages and is in a North African hand but, similar to the first, it has neither the copyist’s name nor a date. Thus, Abū Ghudda compared both of these manuscripts in producing this version of al-Muḥāsibī’s work and entitled it *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*.

- 2 An edited and annotated version by Amīn Nu’mān Nār, published by Dār wa Maktabat al-Hilāl, Beirut, in 1983 and entitled *Risālat al-Mustarshadīn wa Kayfa Yataqarrub al-Insān ilā Rabbihi*. This version was produced after that of Abū Ghudda’s and the editor clarifies that he was well aware of this copy but wished to produce a version with a minimum of annotation, so that the reader would not lose himself within the footnotes at the expense of benefiting from the main text. To this effect the editor also provided footnotes explaining ambiguous terms, referenced the *ḥadīth* mentioned and included a brief introduction to the life and works of al-Muḥāsibī. It is not clear, however, which (if any) manuscripts he relied upon while completing this publication.

It should also be noted here that, in addition to what has been quoted above, there are other manuscripts mentioned in the literature; they are:

- (i) Another manuscript in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo, no. 3 *shīn*, *taṣawwuf* as alluded to by Smith.
- (ii) A copy of this manuscript in The Chester Beatty Library under catalogue number 4985.
- (iii) A copy of this manuscript in al-Khizāna al-‘Ilmiyya al-Ṣubayḥiyya under number 5/202 (cat. no. 556).
- (iv) A copy of this manuscript in the Manuscript Library of Kuwait University under number 3482 *mīm kāf*.

In addition to the books produced regarding *Risālat al-Mustarshadīn*, there is also a set of 12 tapes (11 hours approx.) produced by Deen Productions, in 2000, entitled ‘Purification of the Soul: *al-Muḥāsibī’s Risalat al-Mustarshideen*’ by the American scholar Zaid Shakir who reads the original text in Arabic, translates it into English and provides a commentary by himself and additional notes from Abū Ghudda’s edited version. The commentary is particularly useful in the modern context and the translation is indispensable. Indeed, Shakir has published a hard copy of this text separately, presumably as a companion to the audio version.

See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 3–32; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshadīn wa Kayfa Yataqarrub al-Insān ilā Rabbihi*, ed. Amīn Nu’mān Nār (Beirut: Dār wa Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1983), pp. 5–12; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, ed. Mazālī, p. 26; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 117; Muḥammad Ḥajjī, *Fihras al-Khizāna al-‘Ilmiyya al-Ṣubayḥiyya bi*

Salā (Kuwait: Ma'had al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, 1985), p. 267; Aḥmad Sa'īd al-Khāzandār, *Fihras al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyya al-Muṣawwara al-Mawjūda bi Maktabat al-Makḥṭūṭāt bi Jāmi'at al-Kuwayt*, vol. 2 (*jīm-sīn*), p. 326; Ma'had al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 134; Ma'had Iḥyā' al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makḥṭūṭāt bi 'l-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 163; Arberry, *A Handlist of the Arabic Manuscripts (The Chester Beatty Library)*, vol. 6 (MSS. 4501–5000), p. 162; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 86; Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, p. 57; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163; Zaid Shakir, 'Purification of the Soul: *al-Muḥāsibī's Risalat al-Mustarshideen*', 12 tapes [11 hours approx.] (Newhaven: Deen Productions, 2000); and Shakir, *Treatise for the Seekers of Guidance* (Antioch, CA: New Islamic Directions, 2008).

109 They would be subsequently termed 'didactic poem' (*manzūma*, pl. *manzūmāt*).

110 See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 87; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 57.

111 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Risalat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 12.

112 It is interesting that both Smith and Maḥmūd consider this work to be lost; in fact Ahmed Ateş described a manuscript of this work as being in the Selimiye library in Edirne, under number 951, fols. –131b and being copied in the eighth/fourteenth to ninth/fifteenth centuries. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, ed. Mazālī, p. 28; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 119; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, pp. 86–7; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 59; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163; van Ess, *Gedankenwelt*, p. 12; and Ateş, Ahmed, 'Two Works of al-Muḥāsibī', in *Festschrift Werner Castel: zum siebzigsten Geburtstag 5 März 1966 gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern*, ed. von Erwin Gräf (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 37–9.

There is only one published version of this work, having been edited by Ḥusayn al-Quwwatī, entitled *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, published originally by Dār al-Fikr in Beirut and then subsequently by Dār al-Kindī, also in Beirut. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 239–505.

113 *Ibid.*, pp. 246–7.

114 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

115 It is clear that he does this to clarify and refute various misconceptions regarding the Qur'ān proposed by the numerous sects present at that time. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 248–53.

116 *Ibid.*

117 In fact they differed to such an extent that al-Muḥāsibī considers them to be *ahl al-bid'a* (lit. the people of innovation). See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 253.

118 The discussion in this case centring on the issue of God's promise of paradise for the righteous and promise of hellfire for the sinful (*al-wa'd wa 'l-wa'id*). Al-Mu'tazila argued that those who committed major sins (*al-kabā'ir*) would definitely be punished in hellfire, whereas those who had committed only minor sins (*al-ṣaghā'ir*) would be forgiven and enter paradise. The position of the nascent Muslim community (*Ahl al-Sunna wa 'l-Jamā'a*) on this issue was that those who committed major sins may also be forgiven if God so willed, based on the Qur'ānic verse, 'Indeed God does not forgive those who associate partners with Him (*al-shirk*) but He forgives that which is lesser than this for whomever He wills' (4: 48). Al-Muḥāsibī also provides several other arguments as to why the position of al-Mu'tazila is untenable. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 253–5.

119 *Ibid.*, pp. 255–8.

120 *Ibid.*, pp. 259–60.

121 There is only one published copy of this work edited by Muḥammad al-'Ābid Mazālī and published by Dār al-Tūnisiyya in 1975. In editing this work Mazālī used the following manuscripts:

- 1 A manuscript located in the Ambrosiana library (Milan), which consists of six pages in a beautiful *naskh* hand. Each page of the manuscript contains 23 lines of multicoloured calligraphy and was copied in 1066/1656.
- 2 A manuscript located in the Shahīd ‘Alī library, Istāna, which consists of fols. 32 *bā*–34 *alif*, in an equally elegant hand. Each page of the manuscript contains 25 lines but there is no mention of the copier, the owner or the date of the manuscript.

This edited work is a particularly valuable addition to the literature, as the editor provides an invaluable survey of the works of al-Muḥāsibī, an account of his personality, his affect on later writers and a discussion of al-Muḥāsibī’s concept of *al-‘Ilm* in this and his other works. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, pp. 13–78; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 117; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 117; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, pp. 86–7; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 57; and Oscar Löfgren and Renato Traini, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Amrosiana*, vol. 1 [Antico Fondo and Medio Fondo] (Milan: Neri Pozza Editore, 1958).

- 122 Al-Muḥāsibī, however, does not criticise this knowledge for its own sake; in fact he considers it to be an exalted knowledge (*‘ilm jalīl*), which is required by everyone according to their need and in respect of which it is a compulsory duty of the community as a whole (*farḍ ‘alā ‘l-kifāya*) to learn and teach. His contention, therefore, is not with this knowledge as such but with the sole study of it to the exclusion of the other two types. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, pp. 82–3.
- 123 Al-Muḥāsibī stresses the importance of this form of knowledge to the extent that he considers it to be compulsory for every individual no matter what their state. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 86.
- 124 Ibid., p. 81; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, p. 86; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 57.
- 125 This once again is indicative of the effect al-Muḥāsibī’s environment had upon him, as he was clearly affected by the juristic and theological debates which surrounded him and were prevalent at the time. Ever the guide, al-Muḥāsibī was clearly trying to define the path of the aspiring student by advising him to avoid secondary matters and concentrate on the true goal.
- 126 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, pp. 82–92; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā’irīn*, pp. 86–7; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 57.
- 127 There are two published versions of this treatise, they are:
 - 1 A version edited by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Aṭā and published by Dār al-‘Iṭṣām (Cairo), in 1986. In editing the text Aṭā has relied on the manuscript found in al-Azhar University, no. 1039, pp. 1–19. This manuscript is of very poor quality both in terms of the script and the mistakes of the copier, as well as being affected by dampness. The manuscript itself consists of 20 pages, with 17 lines to a page and 10 words to a line. In addition, Aṭā mentions a second manuscript in the private library of his father (‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā) but this copy is incomplete and therefore was only used for reference purposes. As for Aṭā’s work on the manuscript, he has followed the traditional route of producing a version with a minimum of annotation, provided footnotes explaining ambiguous terms, references the verses of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* and includes a brief introduction to the life and works of al-Muḥāsibī. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu‘ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Aṭā (Cairo: Dār al-‘Iṭṣām, 1986), pp. 24–6; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 34; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 118; and al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, *Fihras al-Kutub al-Mawjūda bi ‘l-Maktaba al-Azhariyya ilā 1366* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 632.
 - 2 A version edited by Muḥammad ‘Isā Ridwān being published by Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya (Beirut), in 1986. This copy is included with the editor’s version of *Kitāb al-Ba‘th wa ‘l-Nushūr* mentioned above. Although Ridwān makes no mention of which manuscripts he used, it can be assumed that he used the same sources, as the literature makes no mention of a second manuscript. See al-Muḥāsibī,

- Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Muḥammad 'Īsā Riḍwān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1986), pp. 39–72; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 34.
- 128 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 29–41; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Riḍwān, pp. 41–8.
- 129 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 42–63; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Riḍwān, pp. 48–62.
- 130 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 63–82; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Riḍwān, pp. 62–72.
- 131 For example, regarding the soul he uses terms such as 'woe unto you O soul' (*wayhaki yā nafs*) and when invoking God he says 'grant me aid O Provider of Succour and grant me mercy O Compassionate One' (*fa aghithnī yā Mughūth warḥamanī yā Raḥīm*). See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 43 and 65; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Riḍwān, pp. 49 and 63.
- 132 There are two published copies of this work:
- 1 The first version has been edited by 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā. During the course of editing the text Aṭā has relied on what he terms, 'The only surviving manuscript of this work', which is in the Shahīd 'Alī library (Turkey) and which has been copied to microfilm by Ma'had Iḥyā' al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyya (Cairo). Thus, Aṭā made his own copy of the original and edited the text from its 'only source'. In addition, he includes references for the Quranic verses and Prophetic narrations, a comparison of this book to al-Muḥāsibī's other works, includes the statements of other Muslim scholars and begins by giving an introduction on the importance of understanding the actions of the heart and its effect on the development of the Muslim individual. This particular edited version was also included within the editor's version of *al-Waṣāyā* but without the introduction regarding 'the actions of the heart'.
 - 2 The second edited version is by Husayn al-Quwwatī and published in the Lebanese journal *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*. The work was published over a series of months beginning with an introductory article in December 1983 and continuing until February 1985. In the editing of this work al-Quwwatī mentions the following three manuscripts:
 - (a) A manuscript found in the Carullah section of the Süleymaniye library in Istanbul under number 1728.
 - (b) A copy of (a) found in the Erdine library.
 - (c) A manuscript found in the Rabat library, in which al-Muḥāsibī's work is interpolated with statements from al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258) and consequently is unsuitable to be used in editing the final work.

It is interesting to note here that this edited version is far longer than that of Aṭā; in fact the point at which Aṭā's version ends al-Quwwatī continues with another two pages of text, this being in the November 1984 edition of *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*. Not only this but al-Quwwatī continues for another three issues, i.e. December 1984, January 1985 and February 1985. In addition, it is clear from the February 1985 issue that al-Quwwatī had not finished with *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in this issue either. Therefore, it is absolutely certain that the version edited by Aṭā is incomplete and that al-Quwwatī had found additions in the manuscripts that he used to edit his version of the work. Having examined subsequent editions of *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, al-Quwwatī did not provide any further excerpts from *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* and the reason for this is unknown.

Similarly, Ateş mentions a further manuscript in the Orhan library in Bursa under number 637, being copied by Yahyā b. 'Umar al-Hamadhānī on Saturday 12th Ramaḍān 740/12 March 1340.

See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1980), pp. 26–7; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 51–3; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*,

- p. 33; idem, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh*, ed. Husayn al-Quwwatī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī* (Lebanon: December 1983), pp. 53–9; (January 1984), pp. 43–7; (February 1984), pp. 57–62; (March 1984), pp. 49–54; (April 1984), pp. 39–43; (July 1984), pp. 47–52; (August 1984), pp. 43–6; (September 1984), pp. 31–4; (October 1984), pp. 71–5; (November 1984), pp. 65–70; (December 1984), pp. 49–53; (January 1985), pp. 31–5; (February 1985), pp. 37–43; Sezgin, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 118; Ma'had Ihyā' al-Makhfūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhfūṭāt bi 'l-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 176; and Ateş, 'Two Works of al-Muḥāsibī', pp. 39–42.
- 133 It could also be for this reason that neither Smith, Maḥmūd nor al-Quwwatī mention this during their discussions regarding the works of al-Muḥāsibī. There seems to be little doubt, however, that this work is al-Muḥāsibī's as it begins with the statement: 'The *shaykh* Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, may God be satisfied with him, said . . .'. After a customary introduction praising God and sending peace and salutations upon His Messenger, he continues by saying, 'These are questions regarding intimate knowledge (*al-ma'rifa*), knowledge of the path of the hereafter and the aim and the return to God the Exalted, as He wishes and from God comes [all] success, if He wills' (see al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 219–21 and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 31–3). In addition there seems little purpose in attributing a book to yourself, when in fact it contains the teachings of your instructor and therefore, this would also suggest that al-Muḥāsibī wrote this work. This does raise an important question, which is: why did al-Muḥāsibī include this work at all when it is not even his own work? What is clear is that al-Muḥāsibī was in complete agreement with what is being said, as otherwise he would have recorded this dialogue for posterity. In addition, this work, as Aṭā mentions above, contains a discussion of topics that are not included in his other works and therefore has a uniqueness of its own, which he would have wanted to preserve. Finally, this work, in addition to containing a number of important teachings, serves as a model for both the student and the teacher, in terms of behaviour and etiquette, as well as representing a 'manual' of spiritual aspiration.
- 134 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 52; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh*, ed. Aṭā, p. 27.
- 135 Ibid.
- 136 It is interesting to note here the effect that this teaching had on al-Muḥāsibī, how it was manifested in his later works and how he himself developed it until it became his own unique methodology.
- 137 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 52; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh*, ed. Aṭā, p. 27.
- 138 This work was unknown in the academic community's bibliographical works until the Turkish scholar Ahmed Ateş discovered it in a large collection of Sufi works in one of the libraries in İstāna and consequently published the details in the journal *Oriens*. As a result, the priest Aghnāṭiyūs 'Abda Khalīfat al-Yasū'ī, edited this work and published it in Christian journal *al-Mashriq*. In addition, the researcher located a copy of this manuscript in microfilm form in the King Fahd National Library in Riyadh but on consulting the library staff they were unsure as to its origin and tentatively suggested it may have been copied from Leiden. This would seem to make sense as behind the manuscript a section of Latin script was apparent. However, without further verification it is impossible to say if this is another manuscript of al-Muḥāsibī's *al-Khalwa* or simply a copy of the Turkish manuscript. Consequently, up until this point, as al-Yasū'ī states, this is the only known copy of this work (*al-muskha al-yatīma*). See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa wa 'l-Tanaqqul fī 'l-'Ibāda wa Darajāt al-'Ābidīn*, ed. Aghnāṭiyūs 'Abda Khalīfat al-Yasū'ī, *al-Mashriq* (Beirut: Ādhār/Nīsān, 1954), pp. 182–91; (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), pp. 43–54, and (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 451–90; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, pp. 24–5; Sezgin, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 118; van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt*, p. 13; and

- Ahmed Ateş, 'Kastamonu Genel Kitaplığında Bulunan Bazı Mühim Arapça ve Farsça Yazmalar' in *Oreins*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1952), pp. 28–9.
- 139 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, ed. al-Yasū'ī, *al-Mashriq* (Ādhār/Nīsān, 1954), pp. 188–91.
- 140 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, ed. al-Yasū'ī, *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), pp. 43–9.
- 141 Al-Muḥāsibī comments, 'And know that you are in a time when desires have overcome the "red" and the "black", the knowledgeable and the ignorant, with regard to the affairs of this world and the next'. This once again shows how critical al-Muḥāsibī was of his society. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, ed. al-Yasū'ī, *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), pp. 50–1.
- 142 *Ibid.*, pp. 51–4.
- 143 *Ibid.* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 451–6.
- 144 *Ibid.*, pp. 451–62.
- 145 *Ibid.*, pp. 462–86.
- 146 Al-Yasū'ī is so convinced of this that he has even included a section at the end of the published version, which includes quotes from *al-Ri'āya* and compares them to *al-Khalwa*. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, ed. al-Yasū'ī, *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 487–90.
- 147 Al-Quwwatī on the other hand, regards *al-Khalwa* to be similar to *al-Naṣā'ih*, as it reflects the same air of despondency, which is apparent in this latter work. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 65.
- 148 Maḥmūd excludes this addition and Smith mistakenly terms it *ghayrihā*. See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 83; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 56.
- 149 There are three manuscripts for this work mentioned in the literature, they are:
- 1 A manuscript located in Carullah, Istanbul, under number 1101, fols. 1a–17b.
 - 2 A copy found in Cairo University from the original, which is part of the personal library of Aḥmad al-Jazzār Ba'kā, being stored in al-Azhar under number 1367 *taṣawwuf*. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā edited this manuscript, as was mentioned earlier.
 - 3 A manuscript located in Jāmi'at Fu'ād, under number 26048.
- See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*, pp. 38–40; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, ed. Mazālī, p. 27; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 117; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 83; Ma'had al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *al-Makhtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 145 and 157; Ma'had Ihyā' al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi 'l-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 191; al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, *Fihras al-Kutub al-Mawjūda bi 'l-Maktabat al-Azhariyya ilā 1366*, vol. 3, p. 630; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 56; and Massignon, *Essay*, pp. 12 and 15.
- 150 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā, pp. 43–54; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 83; and Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, p. 56.
- 151 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā, pp. 58–72; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 83; and Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, p. 56.
- 152 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā, pp. 73–80; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 83; and Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, p. 56.
- 153 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā, pp. 81–8; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 83; and Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, p. 56.
- 154 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; idem, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 37; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 117; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh*

al-Sā'irīn, pp. 71–2; Ma'had al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *al-Makhtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 151; Ma'had Ihyā' al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi 'l-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 149; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 48–50; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163.

In addition there is a copy of this manuscript in the Islamic University of Medina, under catalogue number 455, this being a copy of the original found in al-Maktaba al-Zāhiriyya in Damascus. See al-Faqīhī (ed.), 'Alī Muḥammad Nāṣir, *al-Nashrat al-Bibliyūjarāfiyya li Makhtūṭāt al-Maktaba al-Markaziyya bi 'l-Jāmi'a al-Islāmiyya* (Medina: Islamic University, 1983), p. 222.

Consequently, there is only one published version of this work, being edited by Muḥammad 'Isā Riḍwān and published by Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya in 1986.

155 See Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 48–50.

156 Maḥmūd is the most ardent supporter of this view and quotes the following reasons as to why he is certain that book is not the work of al-Muḥāsibī:

- 1 Al-Muḥāsibī has already authored a brilliant work on the same subject, namely *al-Tawahhum*, and therefore it makes no sense that he would have written another work of a much poorer quality on the same topic.
- 2 In his work *al-Tawahhum* al-Muḥāsibī deals with the events of the resurrection in an organised and sequential manner: first, he deals with those who were disobedient to God, describing the manner of their account, recompense and ultimate punishment in hellfire. He then turns his attention to describing the pleasure of those who preserved the rights of God and their joy at being entered into paradise. Finally, he takes the reader slowly to the final scene of the hereafter, the divine vision of God, reserved exclusively for His beloved elite, which is the ultimate reward and pleasure of paradise. As for the book *al-Ba'th wa 'l-Nushūr*, the sequence of events differ entirely and in fact take place in an 'unorganised' and 'illogical' manner. The divine vision of God, for example, comes in the middle passages, taking the emphasis away entirely from the greatness of this ultimate reward.
- 3 Finally, Maḥmūd considers this work 'laughable' due to the many superstitious stories quoted within it, thus making it impossible to be from the hand of al-Muḥāsibī. See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, pp. 71–2.

In addition to what has been mentioned by Maḥmūd, on reading *al-Ba'th wa 'l-Nushūr* one is struck by the complete lack of scholarly ability exhibited in this work. There are few facts based on classical Islamic theology in which, as has already been noted, al-Muḥāsibī was somewhat of an expert, having even written refutations on various theological points. Similarly, al-Muḥāsibī's works, in particular works such as *al-Tawahhum*, display the penmanship of an accomplished author able to create and express ideas fluently but once again the style of *al-Ba'th wa 'l-Nushūr* is particularly poor, so much so that one does not feel as though one is reading the work of such an accomplished scholar. In summary, this work can be excluded from the list of works written by al-Muḥāsibī, as it seems unlikely that it he wrote it.

157 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 38; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 119; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163; and van Ess, *Gedankenwelt*, pp. 16–18.

158 The term '*Risāla*' is Smith's whereas both Aṭā and Maḥmūd term this work *Faṣl min Kitāb al-'Azama*. In addition Abū Ghudda terms it *Kitāb al-'Azama*. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 32; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 85; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 55.

159 This manuscript can be found in Istanbul, Carullah, İstāna, 1101, fols. 24b–27b and there is also a copy of the same manuscript in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, no. 4064, *taṣawwuf*. In addition to the manuscripts mentioned above there would appear to be another manuscript in Jāmi'at Fu'ād, under no. 26048. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 32; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 116; Ma'had Ihyā'

- al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi ‘l-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 182; Ma‘had al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *al-Makhtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 156 and vol. 2, p. 413; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 55; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 162; and van Ess, *Gedankenwelt*, p. 12.
- 160 A form of Manichaeism (the doctrines of Manes), which believed in a dualistic, elaborate cosmology related to the struggle between a ‘god of good’ and a ‘god of evil’, which they would express in terms of light and darkness respectively. See Muṣṭafā *et al.* (eds.), *al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīf*, p. 102 and Wehr, Hans, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (New York: Spoken Languages Services, 1976), p. 889.
- 161 The origin of this word lies in the belief that the world is eternal but was used to describe Manicheans and other groups from *al-Thanaḥīyya* (see previous note). It was later expanded to include any misguided person (*dāll*), or sceptic (*shākk*), or atheist (*mulḥid*). See Muṣṭafā *et al.* (eds.), *al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīf*, p. 403; and Wehr, *Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, p. 383.
- 162 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur‘ān*, p. 69.
- 163 See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 85; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 55.
- 164 This is Maḥmūd’s version whereas Aṭā excludes *fī*. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 38; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 87.
- 165 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu‘ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 23; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 38; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 29; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 118; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 87; Ma‘had Iḥyā’ al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi ‘l-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 161; Ma‘had al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *al-Makhtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi‘at al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 132; and al-Khaṭīb, *Fikr al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī al-Ṣūfī*, pp. 50–1.
- 166 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 38; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 30; and Ma‘had Iḥyā’ al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi ‘l-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 158.
- 167 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 33; and Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 117.
- 168 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 34; and Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 119.
- 169 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu‘ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 23; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 34; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 118; Ma‘had al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *al-Makhtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 157; Ma‘had Iḥyā’ al-Makhtūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, *Fihras al-Makhtūṭāt bi ‘l-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 163; Arberry, *A Handlist of the Arabic Manuscripts (The Chester Beatty Library)*, 1963, vol. 6 (MSS. 4501–5000), p. 131; and al-Khaṭīb, *Fikr al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī al-Ṣūfī*, p. 51.
- 170 Both Mazālī and Sezgīn include this addition. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, pp. 34–5; and Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 118.
- 171 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, pp. 34–5; and Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 118.
- 172 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 38; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 30; and Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, pp. 118–19.
- 173 The fragment is located in Carullah, Istanbul, number 1101, folios. 24a–27b. See Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, p. 55; and Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, p. 162.
- 174 See Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, pp. 55–6. In addition, Maḥmūd mentions another work entitled *Kitāb al-Tanbīh*, which may well be the same manuscript, as he describes it as being in Carullah and that only quarter of a page remains. See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 87.

- 175 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā, p. 38; idem, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, ed. Mazālī, pp. 29–30; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 116; Ma’had Iḥyā’ al-Makḥtūṭāt al-‘Arabīyya, *Fihras al-Makḥtūṭāt bi ‘l-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabīyya*, vol. 1, p. 153; and Ma’had al-Makḥtūṭāt al-‘Arabīyya, *al-Makḥtūṭāt al-Muṣawwara ḥattā 1948 – al-Jāmi‘a al-‘Arabīyya*, vol. 1, p. 155.
- 176 Maḥmūd states that these few pages not only exist but have been published by Otto Spies, this being produced from a manuscript found in the Public Library at Bankipore. However, Spies himself states that, after examination of the available sources, he was unable to find a work by al-Muḥāsibī entitled *Kitāb al-Ṣabr wa ‘l-Riḍā*. As a result Maḥmūd believes that the work in question did not originally have this title and was in fact called only *Kitāb al-Riḍā*. He concludes this on the basis that since the topic of *riḍā* would automatically concern the subject of *ṣabr*, then it makes sense that the title was changed as it is inconceivable that al-Muḥāsibī would author two such works with similar titles. In addition, since so little of the original remains I have included them in the current section. See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, pp. 75–6 and 87; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, ed. Mazālī, p. 23; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 117; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 162; Otto Spies, ‘Ein Fragment aus dem Kitāb aṣ-Ṣabr war-Riḍā’ des al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī’, *Islamica*, vol. vi (3), (Leipzig, 1934), pp. 283–9; and The Public Library at Bankipore, *Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Public Library at Bankipore*, Calcutta, 1928, vol. XIII, no. 820.
- 177 It is also worth mentioning here that Abū Ghudda refers to a further work entitled *Kitāb al-Riḍā* which may be the same work discussed here, or may have been another work from which al-Hujwūrī may have extracted al-Muḥāsibī’s thought. Al-Muḥāsibī himself mentions this work in *al-Masā‘il fī A‘māl al-Qulūb wa ‘l-Jawāriḥ* but ‘Aṭā states that he has not come across this work as yet. See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā‘il fī A‘māl al-Qulūb wa ‘l-Jawāriḥ*, p. 147; and cf. al-Hujwūrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, pp. 177–80.
- 178 See Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 58; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 87.
- 179 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 35; and Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 118.
- 180 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 35; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163.
- 181 Maḥmūd adds the term *Kitāb* whereas Aṭā excludes it. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 87.
- 182 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā‘il fī A‘māl al-Qulūb wa ‘l-Jawāriḥ*, p. 157; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 35; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 87.
- 183 See Ibn Nadīm, Muḥammad b. Abū Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ramaḍān, 2nd edn (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifā, 1997), p. 230; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 35; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 88; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 58–9; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163.
- 184 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 36; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 59; and cf. Khayr, Abū Bakr, *Bibliotheca Arabico-Hispana*, ed. F. Codera and J. Ribera (n. pl.: n.p., 1894), p. 272; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 59.
- 185 See al-Zarkashī, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh [Badr al-Dīn], *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur‘ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 238; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 36; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; and Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 119.
- 186 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur‘ān*, vol. 1, p. 238; al-Suyūṭī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur‘ān*, ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamarī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī,

- 1999), vol. 1., pp. 210–1 and cf. von Denffer, Ahmad, *‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān – An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur’ān* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1989), p. 43.
- 187 See al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-‘Itidāl*, vol. 3, pp. 274–5; and Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 224–8.
- 188 See al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, vol. 1, pp. 39–64 and 88–9; al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 60–1; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa ‘l-Niḥal*, pp. 130–3; and Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 157–62.
- 189 Maḥmūd, for example, suggests that they attributed blame to the Companions. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 70–2; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 74.
- 190 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 32; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 39; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 70–1; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 36; al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 327; Sezgīn, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 119; Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, pp. 74–5 and 87–8; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 58; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163.
- 191 See, for example, al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 19–20.
- 192 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 70–2; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 74.
- 193 Ambiguous in the sense that they may possess more than one shade of meaning. For a more complete discussion of the *mutashābih* and *muḥkam* verses, see al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, pp. 592–622 and Muhammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-‘Urfān fī Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, ed. Amīn Sulaymān al-Kurdī, 2nd edn, 2 vols. in one (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā‘ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1997), pp. 528–45.
- 194 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā‘ih*, pp. 41–2 and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 71.
- 195 See Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 82–118; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 25–30; and Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd, 1948), pp. 49–57.
- 196 See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 115–18; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa ‘l-Niḥal*, pp. 40–3; al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at al-Fikr al-Falsafī*, vol. 1, pp. 381–406; Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 209–15; and Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 47–8.
- 197 See al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, vol. 1, pp. 213–34; al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 187–91; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa ‘l-Niḥal*, pp. 111–16; Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, p. 23; and Watt, *Free Will and Predestination*, pp. 40–8.
- 198 See al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, vol. 1, pp. 66–136; al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 46–78; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa ‘l-Niḥal*, pp. 130–40; and Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 157–62.
- 199 See al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, vol. 1, p. 338; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa ‘l-Niḥal*, pp. 67–9; and Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 143–8.
- 200 See al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, vol. 1, pp. 167–8 and 203–12; al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 78–86; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa ‘l-Niḥal*, pp. 91–5; Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 12–19; and Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 7–13.
- 201 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā‘ih*, pp. 41–2 and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 71.
- 202 Ibid.
- 203 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā‘ih*, pp. 42–3; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 71.
- 204 Regarding ‘Uthmān in particular, he relates from Abū Qulāba that those who murdered ‘Uthmān did so out of jealousy (*ghayra*). He goes on to relate another narration from an unknown source that, ‘I didn’t wish for evil to befall ‘Uthmān except that some evil befell me and if I had wished for his death then I would surely have been killed’. See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 75.



- 205 For example al-Muḥāsibī himself states in *al-Makāsib*, ‘This community (*umma*) was preceded at its beginning by tribulations (*fitan*), disputes (*ikhtilāfāt*), division (*tafarruq*), as well as the tribulations of al-Jamal, Šiffīn, Ibn Zubayr, al-‘Irāq, al-Jamājum in Baṣrah, Kūfa and in other places. Indeed, the Commander of the Faithful (*Amīr al-Mu‘minīn*) ‘Uthmān was killed unjustly and out of aggression.’ See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 92–3 and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur‘ān*, p. 72.
- 206 For example, regarding Mother of the Faithful (*Umm al-Mu‘minīn*) ‘Ā‘isha and those who attacked her, he says, ‘They are indeed a people who are misguided.’ See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 75.
- 207 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur‘ān*, pp. 71–2.
- 208 Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 74.
- 209 Al-Sam‘ānī, ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad b. Maṣṣūr al-Tamīmī, *al-Ansāb* (Hyderabad: Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1966), p. 539; al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 327; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 74.
- 210 Maḥmūd suggests that the correct title of the work should read ‘*Shajara*’ not ‘*Shuḥira*’ so that the meaning makes more sense. See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 74.
- 211 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 36; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 58.
- 212 See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 74; and Smith, *An Early Mystic*, p. 58.
- 213 Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 74.
- 214 It is interesting to note here that there is a certain amount of doubt surrounding the authorship of this particular work as it is not at all in keeping with the general style and teachings of al-Muḥāsibī. This is compounded by the fact that this treatise is related by al-Junayd whose own thought tended to the mystical more than that of al-Muḥāsibī. In addition, al-Junayd also narrated from another major Sufi figure of the period, namely Abū ‘Alī Aḥmad b. ‘Āṣim al-Antākī (d. 220/835), who had a long relationship with al-Junayd and many researchers consider this work to belong him for the following reasons: first, he was from al-Muḥāsibī’s peers and became well known, similar to al-Muḥāsibī, for his discussion of the heart, to such a degree that al-Dārānī (d. 215/830) termed him ‘the spy of the hearts’ (*ǧāsūs al-qulūb*) because of his sharp perception. Secondly, these extracts regarding the topic of divine love are tainted with strong philosophical overtone uncharacteristic of al-Muḥāsibī’s method, teaching and style, as he was staunchly against this form of ‘intoxicated’ mysticism, indicated by the quote from al-Hujwīrī in the previous chapter.
- The contention of those who support the idea that al-Muḥāsibī did write this work defend their opinion by saying that if al-Muḥāsibī’s name had not been associated with his book *al-Tawāḥhum* then no one would have attributed this work to him, as it is also uncharacteristic of his general style. Therefore, it remains uncertain whether al-Muḥāsibī wrote this work especially since its content is beyond the regular scope of his teachings.
- See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur‘ān*, p. 76; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 36; al-Kalābādhī, *al-Ta‘arruf*, pp. 17 and 29; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 394–5; al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Šūfiyya*, pp. 137–40; al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā‘*, ed. al-Iskandarī, vol. 9, pp. 239–52; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 57–8; and Massignon, *Essay*, p. 163.
- 215 See al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā‘*, ed. al-Iskandarī, vol. 10, pp. 66–9; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilm*, p. 36; Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 57–8; and van Ess, *Gedankenwelt*, p. 15.
- 216 Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 57–8.
- 217 Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 88.
- 218 *Ibid.*, pp. 88–9.
- 219 *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.
- 220 *Ibid.*, pp. 90–1.
- 221 Maḥmūd concludes that this period begins with al-Muḥāsibī’s first efforts as a writer, which is difficult to define, until the age of 38. Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, p. 91.
- 222 *Ibid.*, pp. 88–94.

- 223 Maḥmūd concludes that this period begins with the end of the first period until the age of 65. See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 92.
- 224 Maḥmūd also concludes that al-Muḥāsibī's *al-Makāsib* is also from this period not only because of the depth of knowledge and insight displayed therein but also due to the fact that al-Muḥāsibī mentions the death of al-Ma'mūn, which occurred in 218/833, making al-Muḥāsibī at least 53 at the time. See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, p. 95.
- 225 In addition, a second conclusive proof confirms this as al-Muḥāsibī mentions the death of Bābak, which occurred in 221/836, meaning that al-Muḥāsibī wrote this work having reached the age of at least 56. Al-Quwwatī confers with Maḥmūd on this point and consequently they agree that the work is of a later phase in al-Muḥāsibī's life. Quite surprisingly Mazālī refutes this view with various rather unconvincing arguments. See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, pp. 89–91, 93–4 and 95–6; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 75; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, pp. 67–72.
- 226 See Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā'irīn*, pp. 90–1, 92–3 and 96.
- 227 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 63.
- 228 This being the period in which the control of the state came to rest in the hands of al-Ma'mūn. How al-Quwwatī defines this so precisely, however, is not at all clear. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 63.
- 229 Al-Quwwatī justifies this by quoting the fact that al-Muḥāsibī warns of the schisms which affect the Muslim community, this being directly representative of the events of the dispute between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn, as well as the theological sectarianism, which was also apparent at the time. Despite this, this author feels that Maḥmūd's is closer to the truth, i. e. that *al-Waṣāyā* is from the latter stages of al-Muḥāsibī's writing. This is for a number of reasons; first, the fact that al-Muḥāsibī mentions the schisms that affected the Muslim community is not sufficient proof that the work itself is from this period as the whole work has a retrospective feel, as if al-Muḥāsibī is looking back on a period which he had experienced first hand. In addition, the nature of this work, i. e. that it is a set of counsels, indicates that this was wise advice from a person who had experienced the hardship of such times and that he was only too eager to guide those at the beginning of their path to discovery.
- Secondly, *al-Waṣāyā* is written in an eloquent style, indicating that it is the product of an accomplished author who was not at the beginning of his career nor in a 'transition period'. Similarly, al-Quwwatī himself mentions that al-Muḥāsibī includes a large section discussing taking the soul to account (*al-muḥāsaba*) and the dispraisal of ostentation (*al-riyā'*), these being pillars of his spiritual teaching and consequently it is unlikely that al-Muḥāsibī would include such a detailed account of this aspect of his thought while he was still in a preliminary stage of his career.
- Thirdly, al-Quwwatī also mentions that much of the writing produced by al-Muḥāsibī was the familiar 'question and answer' format whereas *al-Waṣāyā* does not manifest this method. Thus, even the style employed by the author is different in this work, further suggesting that it is not from this period. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 63–5 and 68.
- 230 Al-Quwwatī justifies this by stating that the subject matter of *al-Waṣāyā* and *Kitāb al-Khalwa wa 'l-Tanaqqul fī 'l-'Ibāda wa Darajāt al-'Ābidīn* are similar and therefore from a similar period. However, this is hardly a convincing argument as the style of both works differs considerably. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 65.
- 231 Once again al-Quwwatī justifies this by stating that the 'spirit' of *Ādāb al-Nufūs* is similar to that *al-Waṣāyā* and *Kitāb al-Khalwa wa 'l-Tanaqqul fī 'l-'Ibāda wa Darajāt al-'Ābidīn* and therefore they are from a similar period. However, this is also not a convincing argument, as the depth shown in *Ādāb al-Nufūs* regarding the treatment of the soul is far greater generally than in either of the other two works. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 65–6.

- 232 Again al-Quwwatī justifies this by stating that the ‘spirit’ of *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn* is similar to that of *Ādāb al-Nufūs* and therefore they are from a similar period. It is true that the subject matter of each work is similar in content but the manner and style of each work is completely different. As mentioned previously, *Ādāb al-Nufūs* is an in-depth discussion of human psychology, whereas *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn* is more of a brief manual on behavioural conduct and ethical character traits. In addition the *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn* is written in a concise, often poetic style. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 66.
- 233 Al-Quwwatī suggests that *al-Tawahhum* is also from this period as it demonstrates al-Muḥāsibī’s tendency to the intellect (*al-naz‘at al-‘aqliyya*), as do the other books in this period. However, this author differs with both al-Quwwatī and Maḥmūd – who consider this to be from what he terms his ‘second period’. This is due to the fact this particular work is characterised by its eloquent and powerful style, which through its vivid imagery has a profound effect on the reader. This is obviously not the product of a writer at the beginning of his career but is indeed the result of many years of accomplished penmanship. In addition, it has already been mentioned that this work has a very personal style and is without doubt the product of his own reflection on the journey through the hereafter. Consequently, it is also highly likely that al-Muḥāsibī produced this work near the end of his life, while himself preparing for death. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 66–8 and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, pp. 95–6.
- 234 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 65–8.
- 235 It seems somewhat paradoxical here that al-Quwwatī chooses to begin this section where al-Muḥāsibī is supposed to move away from his tendency to the intellect (*al-naz‘at al-‘aqliyya*) by including a work that is concerned entirely with the intellect (*al-‘aql*). See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 69.
- 236 Al-Quwwatī considers both of these works to be of the same period that *Fahm al-Qur’ān* was written as they have a similar subject matter in the sense that they discuss various aspects of faith which were points of dispute at the time. However, as Maḥmūd asserted previously, these works are typical of the subject matter and style of al-Muḥāsibī’s contemporaries in the same period and as such are not likely to have been written at this later, more advanced stage. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 69.
- 237 It is even stranger that al-Quwwatī would attribute this work to any period so precisely since it has been lost and therefore is impossible to verify. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 70–2.
- 238 Al-Quwwatī suggests that these three works are also from a similar period due to the comparable nature of their subject matter. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 72–4.
- 239 Both al-Quwwatī and Maḥmūd agree on the fact that al-Muḥāsibī wrote this work at a relatively late stage of his career, which is apparent both from the style of the presentation and the treatment of the subject matter. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, pp. 74–5; and Maḥmūd, *Ustādh al-Sā‘irīn*, pp. 89–90 and 95.
- 240 Even al-Quwwatī himself recognises this concerning al-Muḥāsibī but seems not to take this into account when discussing the chronological sequence of al-Muḥāsibī’s works. See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān*, p. 62.
- 241 In fact this information only benefits us if the student is mentioned, as in this case we can therefore assume such a work was written in a ‘teaching period’ and not in an initial phase of al-Muḥāsibī’s life.
- 242 This is not taking into account the possibility of some of the manuscripts being multiple copies.

4 Purification of the soul

The concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* in Islam

As the title suggests, this book aims to explore the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* in Islam so as to draw a comparison between it and the teachings of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī. To achieve this aim the chapter will be divided into the following sections: first, an examination of the meaning of the words *tazkiya* and *nafs* etymologically, within the Arabic language, by referring to classical and contemporary lexical sources to arrive at a basic linguistic understanding for these terms. Secondly, an in-depth study of these two terms as found in the Qur'ān, being the primary source of Islamic thought and Law, by locating these words within their various Qur'ānic contexts and examining them in the light of the exegetical literature (*tafāsīr*). Having derived a meaning for these two terms in the Qur'ānic context, the author will then turn the reader's attention to the second source of Islamic thought and Law, i.e. the *ḥadīth*, by consulting the foremost collections of *ḥadīth* and their explanatory companion texts (*shurūḥ*) to arrive at an understanding of how these words were used by the Prophet, his Companions and the early generations who followed them. The final section will deal with the statements of the scholars of Islam (*al-'ulamā'*) throughout history, by consulting them in their various source works to examine their understanding of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, in the light of what was discussed in the previous sections.

The concept of the terms *tazkiya* and *nafs* within the Arabic language

Although we wish to examine the concept of the compound phrase *tazkiyat al-nafs* as a whole, it suits our purpose here to treat each term separately and then attempt to derive an overall understanding of the phrase. Consequently, the term *tazkiya* will be dealt with first and the term *nafs* will be dealt with thereafter.

The term *tazkiya* is a verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) of the form II verbal conjugation *zakkā*, the root of this verb being *Zay Kāf Yā*. On examining the lexical sources it is not surprising that this form of the verb is intrinsically linked to form I of the verb *zakā* and, as such, the discussion of the connotations of *tazkiya* will begin here. The essential meanings of this form of the verb are to grow and flourish (*namā*), or increase and augment (*zād*), or enjoy the blessing and abundance of God (*tan'ama*) but can also mean to reform (*ṣalaha*) if used in conjunction with a person. In addition,

it is also worth noting that the adjective derived from the verb *zakiyyun* (pl. *azkiyā'*) means righteous or pious and is synonymous with *taqīyyun* (pl. *atqiyā'*).¹

As for the form II of the verb *zakkā*, it possesses the meanings alluded to above but the emphasis of the action is different, in the sense that the form II verb indicates a causal effect; for example *zakkā* does not just mean to grow, increase and reform but means to cause to grow, increase and be reformed. In addition, another of the essential meanings of the form of the verb is to be purified (*tahhara* – [hu]) and is used in conjunction with himself (*zakkā nafsahu*) to indicate self-praise.² This concept of 'praise' is also extended to other contexts where the term *tazkiya* is used, for example in the legal context, when *tazkiya* is used in conjunction with witnesses (*shuhūd*); it would indicate their suitability to perform this task in a court of law. Similarly, this concept of suitability is also seen when the term *tazkiya* is used in connection with a candidate for a particular post, as *tazkiya* here would mean 'recommendation'.³ Perhaps the most familiar derivative, however, from the root *Zay Kāf Yā* in the Islamic context, is the term *zakāt*, this being the third 'pillar' of the Islamic faith and, indeed, when the form II verb is used in conjunction with a person's wealth (*mālahu*) it means to pay the appropriate amount of *zakāt* which is due.⁴

As for the term *nafs*, it is a noun derived from the root *Nūn Fā Shīn* and is distinguished by the second letter, i.e. *Fā*, having the *sukūn* vowel marking. The word *nafs* (pl. *anfūs/nufūs*) is unusual in the sense that it has a variety of connotations. In this sense a survey of all the meanings of this noun will be made so as to provide the reader with a glimpse of the variety that this term provides. Thus, on examining the lexical sources regarding the word *nafs*, we find the following usages.

1. The soul (*al-rūḥ*)

There seems to be a consensus in the sources consulted regarding this usage of *nafs*, as all of them allude to this meaning: the Arabs are known to say, 'His soul left [his body]' (*kharajat nafsuhu*). In fact, there seems to be an implicit understanding that the terms *nafs* and '*rūḥ*' are synonyms for the English equivalent of 'the soul'. Despite this, however, as will become clear from the discussion below, some authors indicate that they are not synonymous with one another. In addition, it is worth mentioning that *rūḥ* is viewed as a masculine noun whereas *nafs* is regarded as being feminine.⁵

2. Blood (*al-damm*)

Similarly, there seems to be a consensus in the sources regarding this usage of *nafs*, as all of them allude to this meaning, as the Arabs are known to say, 'His blood ran' (*sālat nafsuhu*).⁶ The implication of this, however, is far deeper than one might expect, because the 'blood' here signifies the 'life-blood' of a living being, since it is blood that facilitates life through its passage along the arteries and veins. The link between this usage and the previous one is also not difficult to establish, since if one's blood flowed to such an extent that one's life were threatened, then the soul would also follow it upon death.⁷

3. Life (*al-ḥayāt*) and 4. The intellect (*al-‘aql*)

This is based on the statement which was related from the Prophetic Companion ‘Abd Allāh b. al-‘Abbās (d. c. 67–8/686–8), who is reported to have said, ‘Every human being has two *nafs*; the first of them is the *nafs* of the intellect (*al-‘aql*), with which he discriminates and the other is the *nafs* of the soul (*al-rūḥ*) through which life exists’. The rationale behind this comment can be understood in the following way: when a person sleeps, the first type of *nafs*, i.e. the intellect, is said to be taken by God and, as such, a person loses consciousness during sleep. Such a person may be unconscious but is still alive as the soul (*al-rūḥ*), which imbues him with life, is still intact and this person will not die until the soul is actually taken at death.⁸ Once again the link between the concepts expressed here and those proposed in the first two meanings are not incredibly dissimilar and they accommodate each other quite easily.⁹

5. The self

This is used as a reflexive pronoun in the same way that it is used in English to mean ‘myself’, ‘yourself’, ‘ourselves’, etc., as the Arabs use it in much the same way. For example, they would say, ‘He talked to himself’ (*ḥaddatha nafsahu*), or ‘He killed himself’ (*qatala nafsahu*) and ‘He caused himself to fall into destruction’ (*ahlaka nafsahu*).¹⁰

6. The essence (*al-dhāt*) and 7. The body (*al-jasad*)

These two meanings are supported by examples in the Arabic language but do not transfer very well into English; for example, if we examine the concept of ‘essence’ (*al-dhāt*), the Arabs would say, *Nafs al-jabal muqābilī* (lit. ‘the essence of the mountain is in front of me’) and with regard to a person they would say, *Ra’aytu fulānan nafsahu* (lit. ‘I saw so and so [himself]’). As for the term *nafs* meaning the body (*al-jasad*), many sources quote this term but give no examples as to how it is used linguistically.¹¹

8. The human being (*al-insān*)

The word *nafs* may also be used to mean a human being as a whole (*al-shakhs*) as the Arabs would say, ‘I have three people with me’ (*‘indī thalātha anfus*). It is also worth mentioning that when it is used this way many scholars consider it to take a masculine form.¹²

9. Manners/endurance/generosity (*khuluq/jalāda/sakhā’*)¹³

In this instance the term *nafs* is used as an adjective to describe a person positively as the Arabs would describe a man as being *rajulun dhū nafs*, i.e. as having manners (*khuluq*), endurance (*jalāda*) and generosity (*sakhā’*).¹⁴

10. An evil eye (*al-‘ayn*)

This usage of the word indicates that *nafs* is a synonym for the term ‘*ayn*’ meaning an evil or envious eye, as the Arabs are known to say, *aṣābat-hu nafsun*, meaning ‘he has been affected by an evil eye’. In fact the source of the evil eye (*al-‘ā’in*) is also termed *al-nāfis*, the person affected by the evil eye (*al-ma‘yūn*) is termed *al-manfūs* and the evil eyes themselves (*al-‘uyūn*), which affect the wealth and possessions of people and so on, are known as *al-nufūs*, all of which are derived from the same root.¹⁵

11. Punishment (*al-‘uqūba*)

This particular meaning of *nafs* is arrived from the discussion of two particular Qur’ānic verses, namely (3: 28) and (3: 30), where the phrase, *Wa yuḥadhdhirukum Allāh nafsahu* (‘And God warns you concerning His *nafs*’), is repeated and since this usage does not fit with the usual usages discussed in this section, scholars allude to the concept of *nafs* here to mean punishment (*al-‘uqūba*) and thus, the verse would read, ‘And God warns you concerning His punishment’.¹⁶

12. Brother (*al-akh*)

Similarly, this usage is narrated in the lexical sources to describe another Qur’ānic verse, namely (24: 61), where the phrase, *Fa idhā dakhaltum buyūtan fa sallimū ‘alā anfusikum* (‘And if you enter houses then greet *anfusikum*’), the literal meaning of which is ‘yourselves’ and in which case the verse would read, ‘And if you enter houses then greet yourselves’. Consequently, the verse seems to make little sense and therefore scholars have mentioned that the meaning is not literal here; thus, the suggested meaning of *anfusikum* here is ‘your brothers’, in which case the verse would read, ‘And if you enter houses then greet your brothers’.¹⁷

13. Meaning ‘with’ (*inda*) and 14. The unseen (*al-ghayb*)

These meanings of the term *nafs* are also derived from a Qur’ānic verse, namely (5: 116), where the story of Jesus (‘Īsā) is related, and the phrase, *Ta ‘lamu mā fī nafsī wa lā a‘lamu mā fī nafsik* (‘You know what is in my *nafs* but I do not know what is in Your *nafs*’), is found. As a result the interpretations regarding the meaning of *nafs* here have attempted to accommodate a usage consistent with the divine attributes of God and at the same time render an appropriate meaning. One of the suggestions made is that the meaning of *nafs* in the verse is ‘with’ (*inda*) and thus, the rendering of the verse would be, ‘You know what is with me (*indī*) but I do not know what is with You (*indak*)’. Similarly, another proposed meaning is that the term *nafs* here means the unseen, the hidden or that which is concealed (*al-ghayb*) and thus the understanding of the verse would be, ‘You know what I have concealed (*ghaybī*) but I do not know what You have concealed (*al-ghayb*)’.¹⁸ Another option was supplied by al-Fayrūzābādī (d. 817/1414), who suggests that

nafs also implies the meaning of reality (*al-haqīqa*) and thus he considers the meaning of the verse to be, ‘You know what the reality of me is (*haqīqatī*) but I do not know what the reality of You is (*haqīqatak*)’.¹⁹

15. Majesty/might/zeal/pride (*al-‘azama/al-‘izza/al-himma/al-anafa*)²⁰

Al-Fayrūzābādī, Ibn Manzūr and Lane all allude to these meanings of *al-nafs* but give little further qualification, making it difficult to assess the usage of such terms in the Arabic language.²¹

16. An amount of tanning material (*qadr dabgha*)

This is perhaps the most surprising usage of the term but nevertheless the lexical sources regularly mention that the word *nafs* was used by the Arabs to denote a quantity of tanning material used for the tanning of hides and that the measure would be approximately a handful (*mil’ al-kaff*).²²

Since the classical works of Islam are presented in the Arabic language, the goal here was to survey the lexical sources dealing with this language to arrive at an understanding that will provide the groundwork for subsequent discussions. This being the case, both the terms *tazkiya* and *nafs* were dealt with separately so as to survey the various meaning, usages and connotations that these words have within the Arabic language. The discussion has no doubt produced a variety of information, which in some cases may have been somewhat surprising.

On examining the term *tazkiya*, it is clear that the usages of this word related to the payment of *zakāt* and self-praise/recommendation are of little worth to the current discussion, as their relevance is limited. Similarly, the form I verb construction gives little more than an indication of the meanings, which are appropriate to the subject matter as a whole. Not surprisingly it was the form II verb construction – of which *tazkiya* is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) – that provided the most useful results. The meaning of purification (*tahhara*) was very much expected as this is the most common phrase used by authors when discussing this topic. However, other, less expected meanings were also observed; these included to grow and flourish (*namā*), or increase and augment (*zād*), or enjoy the blessing and abundance of God (*tan’ama*) but can also mean to reform (*ṣalaha*), all of which indicate an overall process of development, which could be termed ‘purification’ in the broad sense.

As for the term *nafs*, the task has proved far more complex, as the usage of this word in the Arabic language seems to have a variety of meanings, many of which are not consistent with the topic of discussion here. Examples of this include: blood (*al-damm*), life (*al-ḥayāt*), manners/endurance/generosity (*khuluq/ jalāda/ sakhā*), an evil eye (*al-‘ayn*), punishment (*al-‘uqūba*), brother (*al-akh*), ‘with’ (*inda*), the unseen (*al-ghayb*), majesty/might/zeal/pride (*al-‘azama/al-‘izza/ al-himma/al-anafa*) and an amount of tanning material (*qadr dabgha*). In contrast, however, the remaining usages may all have some significance regarding the subject matter and as a result the terms ‘the soul’ (*al-rūh*), ‘the intellect’ (*al-aql*),

‘the self’, ‘the essence’ (*al-dhāt*), ‘the body’ (*al-jasad*) and ‘the human being’ (*al-insān*) all require further qualification.

Thus, although at a very superficial level, the above discussion would suggest that the term *tazkiyat al-nafs*, from the perspective of the Arabic language at least, would indicate the growth, augmentation, reform and development of a human being’s soul, intellect, body and self. This, however, is the result of consulting the lexical sources of only the Arabic language and therefore it remains vital to examine this term in the light of Islam, which is the task of the next section, by referring to Islam’s primary source – the Qur’ān.

The concept of the terms *tazkiya* and *nafs* within the Qur’ān

There can be no doubt that the above-mentioned discussion has been enlightening but it is not sufficient, however, as the goal of the current work is to examine such terms in the context of Islam as a whole. Thus, the next logical step is to examine these terms within the Qur’ān, as this is regarded by Muslims throughout the ages to be the direct, revealed word of God, in both word and meaning and, as such, is Islam’s primary source of thought and Law.²³ Consequently, each of these terms will be examined individually to come to an understanding of the meanings within the Qur’ān, so as to shed light on their implications within a religious context.²⁴

From the Qur’ānic perspective it is God who created the human being and his *nafs*, as the following Qur’ānic verse states: ‘O Mankind, fear your Lord Who created you from a single *nafs* . . .’²⁵ (4: 1).²⁶ Consequently, it may be argued that it stands to reason that the Creator of such a *nafs* would not only allude to its nature but also to the way in which *tazkiya* of it may be carried out.

Thus, on examining the Qur’ān for the verb forms of the root *z-k-y* we find numerous usages and derivatives. However, since the term *tazkiya* is a verbal noun of the form II verb, the emphasis in this section will focus on this usage.²⁷ Perusal of the Qur’ānic text results in 12 instances of the form II verb being found in both its past and present tenses. The connotation of self-praise, when the verb is used in conjunction with the term *nafs* or its plurals alluded to in the previous section, can be located in two of these verses, namely (4: 49) and (53: 32), both being used in the present tense and indicating a blameworthy character trait.²⁸

Another four verses containing the verb can be seen where God is the subject of the verb; in other words it is God who directly takes on the role of *tazkiya* of the human being. Two of these verses (4: 49) and (24: 21) indicate that it is God who decides who is worthy of *tazkiya* as in both verses the phrase ‘God purifies (*yuzakkī*) whomever He wills’ is found, which is extremely significant from a Qur’ānic perspective, as it indicates that not only is it God Who decides who will be purified but it is He Who is the source of the *tazkiya*. In addition, this process of *tazkiya* is not arbitrarily decided but due to the need that the divine attribute of justice (*al-‘adl*) be fulfilled; the verses end, ‘. . . and God is not unjust in the slightest’²⁹ (4: 49) and, ‘. . . and God is the All Hearing, the All Knowing’ (24: 21). In the second two verses (2: 174) and (3: 77) where God is the subject, the context is the Day of Judgement and describes the state of the disbelievers. These verses

indicate that God will neither address them (*yukallimuhum*) nor ‘purify’ them (*yuzakkīhim*) by forgiving them their transgressions and thus admitting them into Paradise. Once again the emphasis here is on the fact that in any eventuality it is God alone who is the source of *tazkiya*.³⁰

In addition, another four verses can be observed where the subject of the verb is a divinely chosen emissary (*rasūl*). The sequence of verses begins in *sūrat* al-Baqara (second chapter of the Qur’an) with the supplication of the Prophet Ibrāhīm (2: 129) where he says, ‘O my Lord send them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your signs (*āyātika*), who will teach them the book (*al-kitāb*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikma*) and who will purify them (*wa yuzakkīhim*)’. From the Islamic perspective this supplication was fulfilled with the sanctioning of the mission of the prophet Muḥammad, as in the very same *sūra* (2: 151) we read, ‘Similarly, We sent among you a messenger from yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, purifies you, teaches you the Book and wisdom and teaches you what you did not know’. In latter parts of the Qur’ānic text (3: 164) and (62: 2) we see that this concept is further reinforced as almost identical verses are found.³¹

In addition, there is also an indication as to how exactly the Prophet should ‘purify’ those around him in verse (9: 103), where we find God addressing the Prophet saying, ‘Take a charity from their wealth to cleanse them (*tutahhiruhum*) and purify them (*yuzakkīhim*) . . .’. Thus, in this series of verses containing the verb *yuzakkī* we see that from a Qur’ānic perspective, although the source of *tazkiya* is God, He facilitates the process of *tazkiya* by the sending of Prophets, whose role is to instruct humanity as to how to perform the task of *tazkiya*, by various means, one of which is the giving of one’s wealth for God’s sake.³²

The final instance of the verb occurs in (91: 9) and is the only occurrence of this verb being used in conjunction with the term *nafs*; thus it is the most significant verse with regard to the current research and, as such, will be discussed in the next section, after the appraisal of the term *nafs* in the Qur’an has been concluded.

As was mentioned previously, from the Islamic perspective the *nafs* of the human being is believed to have been created by God and since the Qur’an is also believed to be the final revelation to humanity from Him, one might expect to find various references to the nature and origin of the *nafs* in it. In fact, the term *nafs* and its derivatives occur in the Qur’an 398 times,³³ which provides the researcher with a vast wealth of material but it is also worth mentioning that most of these occurrences are usage of the reflexive pronoun and therefore are of little actual use in the current context. Despite this, there are numerous verses that are of significance when discussing the *nafs* from the Qur’ānic perspective. The following usages may be observed.

a. The *nafs* meaning the soul (*al-rūḥ*)

This is evidenced via the description of the souls being extracted from the body at death by the angels, who rip the souls of disbelievers from their bodies, ultimately causing their demise. The verse in question is (6: 93) where the angels are said to

stretch forth their hands to grip the souls and drag them outwards, the souls themselves being termed, *anfusikum*.³⁴

b. The *nafs* meaning the human being (*al-insān*)

Once again the Qur'ān, as one might expect, makes reference to the *nafs* with the meaning of the human being as a whole, including both the body and the soul. One of the verses which identifies this usage is (31: 27) in which the creation and resurrection of human beings is discussed and is described as being easy for God, as if it were only the creation/resurrection of a single person (*nafsun wāhida*).³⁵

c. The *nafs* meaning the human being's power of understanding (*al-quwā al-mufakkira*)

By this it is meant that the human being has the ability to comprehend and reason using his intellect to arrive at and perceive certain ideas and concepts. Not only this, but the Qur'ān has also clarified that the human being may comprehend an idea until it becomes fixed in his mind to the extent that he reaches a level of certainty regarding the reality of this concept and it appears as fact, as far as he is concerned. The verse in question is (27: 14), where this level of certainty is described as having been reached and, in addition, is attributed to the *nafs* (*wa istayqanat-hā anfusuhum*).³⁶

d. The *nafs* meaning the heart (*al-qalb*)

In addition to the intellectual implication of the term *nafs* in the Qur'ān, there is also an implication that an emotional aspect also exists. Verses that imply such a meaning include (7: 205) and (10: 77), where both the attributes of remembrance (*al-dhikr*) and concealing a secret (*al-sirr*) are described as being actions of the *nafs*. It is also worth noting that both these qualities are considered actions of the heart (*al-qalb*) and therefore such verses indicate an intrinsic and fundamental link between the heart and the *nafs*.³⁷

e. The *nafs* meaning the inclination to good and evil (*quwā al-khayr wa 'l-sharr*)

The duality of the *nafs* to incline towards good and evil as described in the Qur'ān and its tendency to change between the two is one of its outstanding characteristics. Various verses indicate this including (50: 16), (75: 2) and (79: 40–1)³⁸ and, due to the importance of such qualities, they will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

From this discussion it is clear, as one might expect, that the Qur'ān uses the term *nafs* in a number of usages which, despite being identical or similar to the meanings alluded to in the section regarding the Arabic language, also have their own implication within the Qur'ānic context.³⁹ In addition to the general description of the *nafs*

in the Qur'ān, there are also two main areas that become apparent on examining the Qur'ānic text: first, qualities that the *nafs* itself manifests to which various verses allude and secondly, verses which describe the various states that the *nafs* experiences. This being the case, the following sections will attempt to shed light upon these phenomena in the Qur'ān.

Qualities of the *nafs* within the Qur'ān

The basis for this discussion lies in the information alluded to in verse (91: 7–8), which reads, 'And [by] the soul (*nafs*) and the One Who proportioned it; then He inspired it [to discern between] its iniquity and its righteousness'. From this verse several issues become clear; first, that once again we find an inclination to the fact that, from a Qur'ānic perspective, it is God Who not only created the soul but also fashioned it as He willed. Secondly, part of this fashioning was to inspire the soul to know, put very simply, that which is 'right' and that which is 'wrong'. As such, this ability to comprehend the difference between virtue and sin also implies the faculty of 'free will' to choose between the two and consequently, makes the *nafs* accountable for its actions in both this life and the next. In addition, this may also indicate that the *nafs* inclines to certain characteristic behaviours, which manifest themselves and are not only an indication of the soul's inner state but also a manifestation of an individual's humanity as a whole. As a result the following qualities of the *nafs* can be identified and observed in the Qur'ān.

a. It is the *nafs* that experiences death

As has been mentioned, from the Islamic perspective, it is God Who created the human soul or *nafs* and consequently it is He who gives life to it also. Life is first given to the human being when it comes into existence, where it undergoes a phase of trial to test which of them is best in action.⁴⁰ Then death will be brought to the human being and the soul enters another sphere of existence (*al-barzakh*) where it remains for a considerable period, until it is resurrected and where it will return to its Lord, to be recompensed for its actions.

Therefore, every soul will experience death to which a number of Qur'ānic verses make reference, namely (3: 185), (21: 35) and (29: 57) where the phrase, 'Every soul will "taste" [lit.] death (*kullu nafsin dhā'iqat al-mawt*)' is reiterated.⁴¹ Also, in the same way that bringing life to the *nafs* is as a result of divine will, then similarly the causing of death is also by divine will (3: 145). In addition, the lifespan of the *nafs* (*al-ajal*) is also predetermined by God, Who will neither delay its term nor bring it forward (63: 11).

b. The *nafs* has perceptive faculties

In addition, the Qur'ān also indicates a number of sensations, feelings and emotions that the *nafs* perceives, is conscious of and which can be discerned. A survey of these is given below:

i. Desires (*al-hawā*); ii. Appetites (*al-shahwa*); iii. Needs (*al-ḥājāt/al-maṭālib*)

The Quran confirms for us that the *nafs* can be described as having desires (*al-hawā*) which are denoted in verses (79: 40–1). The *hawā* in turn act as emotions that drive it to fulfil its needs (*al-ḥājāt/al-maṭālib*), which are indicated in (12:68). Moreover, such *ḥājāt* cause the human being to seek the fulfilment of the soul's pleasures and appetites (*al-shahwa*) which, in most cases, are harmful and destructive for it in this world, but are part of the pleasures of paradise as in verse (21: 102).⁴²

iv. Difficulty and hardship (*al-mashaqqa*)

In addition the *nafs* is given to preferring ease over hardship and, as such, it dislikes to be burdened with what it considers difficult tasks. Indeed, the soul can be burdened with hardship, which it finds difficult and which requires a great deal of effort from it, as implied by verse (16: 7).

v. Endurance (*al-ṣabr*) and impatience⁴³

The *nafs* has the ability to endure hardship and be patient, persevering in adversity but its more common reaction is to be impatient with the events that befall it. The Prophet, despite his elevated status, is also encouraged to be patient, as the following verse (18: 28) suggests.

vi. Generosity (*al-jūd*) and miserliness (*al-shuḥḥ*)

Again the Qur'ānic text indicates the presence of the quality of miserliness (*al-shuḥḥ*) within the human *nafs*, suggesting that this is one of its overwhelming qualities, as it is commonly found in many souls. However, on the contrary, the Qur'ān also not only criticises this unenviable characteristic but also encourages its eradication and, in fact, extols the virtue of generosity (*al-jūd*), which is its direct opposite, suggesting that one replace the other entirely.⁴⁴

vii. Envy and jealousy (*al-ḥasad*)

Another of the most blameworthy characteristics in the Qur'ānic context is that of envy and jealousy (*al-ḥasad*) and therefore it is not surprising that the Qur'ān would be critical of such a quality. In addition, however, this is not only regarded as being reprehensible but is also described as emanating from the *nafs* and, as such, it also has the potentiality of not being characterised by this negative description but by positive counter qualities.⁴⁵

viii. Fear (*al-khawf*)

Fear or apprehension (*al-khawf*) is a common psychological state which may be induced by a variety of stimuli and as such it is hardly surprising that the Qur'ān describes it as being a potential characteristic of the *nafs*. Similarly, the *nafs* has an equal potential to display directly opposing qualities such as bravery and self-confidence.⁴⁶

ix. Conceit (*al-kibr*)

Pride, arrogance and conceit (*al-kibr*) are all qualities that the Qur'ān states are present in the *nafs* and, similarly, the potential to attain modesty, humility and humbleness is also possible, if the negative characteristics are eradicated. However, as with many qualities of the *nafs*, arrogance and conceit (*al-kibr*) are commonly manifest in the majority of souls.⁴⁷

x. Anxiety (*al-dīq*) and distress (*al-haraj*)

Other psychological states, which result from personal discomfort, are anxiety (*al-dīq*) and distress (*al-haraj*). Once again the Qur'ān counts these from being among the qualities with which the *nafs* is characterised and in the same way it can also be nurtured to adopt the contrary qualities of being relaxed (*al-ittisā'*) and tranquillity (*al-inshirāh*).⁴⁸

xi. Affected by eloquent speech (*al-ta'aththur bi 'l-qawl al-balīgh*)

The Qur'ān also confirms that the *nafs* may be affected by eloquent speech to the extent that the behaviour of a human being may be reformed due to it. As such, through being addressed with an eloquent, oratory or written style, the *nafs* may receive admonition and thus return to the truth.⁴⁹

xii. Regret (*al-nadm*) and grief (*al-taḥassur*)

As well as psychological states, the *nafs* also experiences emotions and the Qur'ān implies this in a number of verses. Of these, the feeling of regret and grief over matters which may appear to be lost are mentioned in the Qur'ān. For example, in verse (35: 8) God informs His Prophet not to grieve over or feel regretful regarding the actions of his people in Mecca. Similarly, such feelings are also expressed in verse (39: 56), where the situation on the Day of Judgement is described and the *nafs* will regret and grieve over its deficiencies regarding its duty to its Lord.

xiii. The ability to comprehend (*al-idrāk*)

As mentioned earlier, the Qur'ān, in verse (27: 14), has also clarified that the human being may comprehend an idea until it becomes fixed in his mind to the

extent that he reaches a level of certainty regarding the reality of this concept. Similarly, the ability of the *nafs* to completely comprehend may be impaired due to its consideration of baseless conjecture (*al-zann*), causing doubts and worries to flourish, as is found in verse (3: 154). As such, it could be argued that all other levels of understanding with regard to the *nafs* would fall between these two extremes. In addition, from the Islamic perspective, God as the Creator of all mankind has endowed every one of them with the ability to perceive and comprehend righteousness (*al-taqwā*) and immorality (*al-fujūr*), or put very simply – the difference between good and evil. As such, every *nafs* is aware of its actions and is conversant with the nature of such actions, as a number of verses indicate.⁵⁰ In the same way that the *nafs* can come to ‘know’ certain information, it may also be heedless or ignorant of other matters. Indeed, from a Qur’ānic perspective, the *nafs* is completely unaware of the unseen (*al-ghayb*), including the true nature of the hereafter, how it will act in the future and where its demise will be, as verses (31: 34) and (32: 15–17) indicate.

xiv. The ability to conceal feelings

As was mentioned earlier, the *nafs* manifests certain emotions but at the same time it also has the ability to conceal and hide its true feelings. Despite this, however, one of the major concepts progressed in the Qur’ān is that God is fully acquainted with even these concealed thoughts, emotions, ideas and feelings.⁵¹

xv. Responsibility

Bearing in mind the various abilities described above that the *nafs* has been granted, including emotional, perceptive and intellectual faculties, as well as the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, the *nafs* is consequently responsible for its actions within the realms of its capabilities. As such every *nafs* has the ability to act and earn or acquire good deeds and bad deeds, based on its intentions, personal efforts, determination and free will. This responsibility is unique to each individual and, as such, every human being is personally responsible for their actions. Consequently, each person will be recompensed accordingly on the Day of Judgement, their ultimate abode being determined by their actions in this life.⁵²

States of the *nafs* within the Qur’ān

In addition to the above-mentioned qualities of the *nafs* as expounded in the Qur’ān, there are a number of categories or states that the *nafs* experiences, which the Qur’ān has also elucidated. Each individual experiences these states as a result of their intentions, thoughts, motives, deeds and will, and consequently it is appropriate at this juncture to shed light on these states of the *nafs*. On examining the Qur’ānic text the reader finds three types of *nafs* described.

a. The soul inclined to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*)⁵³

This state of the *nafs* occurs when the human being is overcome by his desires, to the extent that he pursues the appetites of his soul, to the exclusion of everything else. As such the limits set by God are made secondary in comparison to the fulfilment of his own needs and desires. Thus, the performance of forbidden acts is common and the ultimate result of this state is sin and transgression. The essence of this notion is evidenced in the following verse: 'I do not absolve own self [of blame], as indeed, the [human] soul is prone to evil (*inna 'l-nafs la ammāra bi 'l-sū'*), except when my Lord bestows mercy, as indeed my Lord is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful' (12: 53).⁵⁴

This verse alludes to the lowest level of the human soul, which not only encourages the performance of evil but also exerts effort to make such actions acceptable and appealing. Thus, the *nafs* is described as enticing (*sawwalat*), subjecting (*tawwa'at*) and tempting (*tuwaswis*) in verses (20: 96), (12: 18), (5: 30) and (50: 16) respectively. Therefore, it is not surprising that the exaggerative form *ammāra* is used to describe the *nafs*, as it literally means 'constantly urging, always demanding, inciting and instigating',⁵⁵ as if this type of *nafs* is always commanding the evil and the base. As such, al-Jurjāni (d. 816/1413) defined the *al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'* as follows: 'It is the one [*nafs*] that inclines to the bodily nature, ordering [the pursuit of] physical pleasures and appetites, attracting the heart to base levels; as such, it is the abode of every evil and the source of blame-worthy characteristics'.⁵⁶

In addition, this verse also implies that from the Islamic perspective it is from God's mercy alone that this state of the *nafs* does not exist permanently, as this is its natural and regular state if left to its own devices and is not refined. As such, it is only from God's beneficence that the other states of the *nafs*, via repentance and turning away from the soul's desires, become manifest in the human being. Also, on examining and contrasting these qualities of the *nafs* as described in the Qur'ān, one finds a direct comparison between such attributes and those used to describe Satan (*al-shayṭān*). In fact the Devil (Iblīs) has been characterised as enticing (*sawwala*), tempting (*waswās*) and misguiding (*yudill*) in verses (47: 25), (114: 3–4), (5: 30) and (4: 60) respectively. Thus, there is a clear and intrinsic link and relationship between the behaviour of the *nafs* and the role of Satan in influencing this behaviour. It would seem that the Devil entices and suggests actions and thoughts to the *nafs*, whereas the *nafs* itself, due to its self-serving outlook, pursues such deeds satisfying the conscience by making them seemingly acceptable and appealing. To this effect, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) comments:

As for the soul inclined to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*), Satan is its associate and companion; he makes promises to it and awakens its desires, casting falsehood into it, commanding it to evil and making it appear appealing in a form that it will find acceptable and condone, with a variety of provisions and falsehood, false hopes and destructive appetites. He seeks aid against it with its desires and wishes and through him every evil enters it.⁵⁷

b. The self-reproaching soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*)

This is the next level of the *nafs*, where it is elevated from the previous base state, so that the veil of disobedience is lifted and the soul begins to blame itself for the transgression it has committed, inclining towards repentance, regret, self-recrimination and reproach. These implications are gleaned from the following Qur'ānic verse (75: 1–2): 'Do not swear [an oath] by the Day of Judgement nor by the self-reproaching soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*)'. This verse is clear evidence of a second state of the soul, i.e. the soul being described as being self-reproaching or *lawwāma*. However, this particular adjective describing the soul has been the focus of discussion for numerous Muslim scholars, leading them to a variety of opinions.

The first of these views suggests that this term is derived from the Arabic verbal noun *al-talawwum* meaning 'shifting repeatedly' and being synonymous with *al-taraddud*. This state of the soul is characterised by its changeability, fickleness, capriciousness and inconsistency, never truly remaining steadfast upon one state. Consequently, in this state, the soul is mindful then heedless, loves then hates, is happy then sad, is obedient then disobedient, righteous then immoral, as well as many other qualities and a variety of levels of each characteristic in between, changing from one state to another, never truly reaching equilibrium.⁵⁸

The second view considers this to be derived from the term *lawm* meaning 'blame', the implication being that the soul blames itself or alternatively is blameworthy. Consequently, the opinions regarding this derivation of *lawwāma* also vary. The first of these is that the above-mentioned verse refers to the description of the soul of a believer (*al-mu'min*). This opinion was common among the early Muslim scholars, as it is reported that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) said regarding this verse, 'By God, we do not see the believer except that he blames himself; [asking himself] "What did I intend by my speech? What did I intend by my eating? What did I intend by my thoughts?"', whereas the shameless reprobate (*al-fājir*) continues step by step, not sanctioning his soul'. Similarly, when Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722), the famous exegete (*al-mufassir*), was asked regarding the same verse he replied, 'This is the soul that blames itself for what has passed and feels regret; it blames itself for the evil it has committed, as to why it did it and with regard to doing good, as to why it did not do more'.⁵⁹

In a different view, *al-nafs al-lawwāma* is considered to refer to both the sinner and the righteous person in the sense that the righteous person blames his soul for the committing of a sin or the neglect of an act of obedience. As such, al-Jurjāni (d. 816/1413) defined *al-nafs al-lawwāma* as follows: 'It is the one [*al-nafs*] that is illuminated with the light of the heart according to the amount that it has become awakened from habitual heedlessness; as soon as it commits a transgression due to its naturally oppressive disposition it takes to blaming itself'.⁶⁰ In contrast, the degenerate person blames itself for losing out on some form of carnal satisfaction.

In a variation of this theme, this form of blaming is said to take place on the Day of Judgement, where every soul will blame itself for its deeds in the worldly life. Thus, there will be the sinful who will blame themselves for the sins they

have committed, whereas the righteous will blame themselves for their deficiencies with regard to God's rights over them.⁶¹ In this regard, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is reported to have said, 'There is no one who exists in the heaven or on the earth except that he will blame himself on the Day of Judgement'.⁶²

Commenting on these various views Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya states:

All these statements are true and do not contradict one another, as the soul (*nafs*) may be described as such, in the sense that it has been termed 'self-reproaching (*lawwāma*)'. However, self-reproach (*lawwāma*) is of two types: self-reproach that is blameworthy (*malūma*), by which is meant the soul that is ignorant (*jāhila*) and tyrannical (*zālīma*) and which has been censured by God and His angels. [The second type is] self-reproach that is not blameworthy (*ghayr malūma*), which is the soul that continues to reproach its owner regarding his deficiencies in God's obedience despite his best efforts; [in this sense] this is self-reproach that is not blameworthy (*lawwāma ghayr malūma*).⁶³

c. The tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*)

This is the highest state of the *nafs*, having gained tranquillity from establishing God's obedience, accepting His promise of threat of punishment and promise of reward in Paradise, being satisfied with His decree. Such a soul has put its trust in Him alone, tasted the sweetness of faith and felt the pleasure of communicating with its Lord, to the extent that it seeks no other substitute. Consequently, it has not deviated from God's devotion or been affected by the changes in circumstances that normally cause a change in the psychological state of the human being, and it is not attracted to the ornamentation of the worldly life. This state of the *nafs* and its 'serenity' and 'stability' is alluded to in the following verses (89: 27–30), '[It will be said to the righteous] O tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*), return to your Lord content [with Him] (*rāḍiya*) and pleasing [to Him] (*marḍiyya*), so enter into [the ranks of] My devotees and enter My paradise'.⁶⁴

Commenting on this verse, early Muslim scholars provide a variety of views. For example, regarding the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*) Mujāhid said, 'It is the soul that is satisfied with the decree of God; it knows that what does not befall it was not destined to do so and what does befall it was destined to do so'. Similarly, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī clarifies, 'If God, the Mighty and Exalted, wishes to seize it [the *nafs*], it is contented with God and God is satisfied with it. As such, He commands its soul (*rūḥahā*) to be seized, enters it into paradise and makes it of His righteous devotees.' In addition, Qatāda (d. 118/736) comments saying, 'It is the believer (*al-mu'min*) whose soul became assured regarding what God has promised'. Moreover, Ibn Zayd states, 'It [the *nafs*] was termed tranquil (*muṭma'inna*) due to it being given glad tidings of paradise upon death, at resurrection and on the Day of Judgment'. In a similar quote the famous Qur'ānic exegete Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372) commented regarding the last part of the verse (89: 30), 'Enter My paradise', that this will be said to the believer during the throes of death and on the Day of Resurrection.⁶⁵

From the verse itself and the explanatory notes from Muslim commentators we can glean a reasonable amount of information; first, that this particular state of the *nafs* has been described as *muṭma`inna* meaning ‘tranquil’ or ‘serene’ but one may well ask what is the source of this ‘tranquillity’ and ‘serenity’? Similarly, the *nafs* in this state of ‘serenity’ is commanded to return to its Lord being in a state of absolute contentment (*rāḍiyya*) with Him. One may well query once again: in what way is satisfaction (*riḍā`*) a quality of the serene soul and what is the relation between them? In these verses the *nafs* is also described as being pleasing to God (*marḍiyya*) and we must also enquire as to what has brought about God’s approval of such a soul.

As for the first and paramount quality, i.e. that of ‘tranquillity’ and ‘serenity’, this is said to be brought about by this soul’s constant remembrance of God, relying on the following Qur’ānic verse (13: 38), ‘Those who have believed and whose hearts become tranquil through the remembrance of God; isn’t it through the remembrance of God that the hearts become tranquil[?]’ As such, one of the methods through which this state of the *nafs* may be attained is through being engaged in the remembrance of God as much as possible.⁶⁶ This serenity of the soul is further augmented by the acquisition of the quality of satisfaction and acceptance (*riḍā`*). This can be understood in the very broad sense of satisfaction and acceptance of the religion of Islam, as is indicated by the following narration transmitted on the authority of the Prophet’s uncle al-Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 33/654 or 34/655), where the Prophet is reported to have said, ‘The one who is contented with God as his Lord, Islam as his religion and Muḥammad as his prophet has truly “tasted the flavour of faith”’.⁶⁷ On a more specific note, however, this form of *riḍā`* is usually related to the devotee’s faith in the sixth pillar of Islamic belief, commonly referred to as faith in divine predestination (*al-qadā` wa`l-qadr*), where the practitioner of Islam is required to believe in God’s preordainment of all matters. This final article of Islamic faith is arguably the most difficult to actualise since it requires firm conviction (*yaqīn*) in God’s overall wisdom and plan; as such this conviction is alluded to and hence nurtured in a number of Qur’ānic verses including (57: 23–4) and (64: 11). This being the case, there is an indication then that the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma`inna*) has not only reached this level but perfected it, in the sense that no matter what befalls it in terms of human or personal tragedy, its faith in the Almighty remains firm, as it knows that this has been preordained before it even existed. Similarly, it is not overjoyed by bounties it enjoys but on the contrary recognises God’s favour upon it and fulfils the divine right of gratitude. It is thus this elevated level of perfection in faith that brings about God’s pleasure and satisfaction regarding it, as no matter what such a soul endures it remains content with its Lord and, as a result, its Lord is satisfied with it.⁶⁸

In this regard Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyy comments:

If the *nafs* became at ease from doubt to certainty; from ignorance to knowledge; from heedlessness to remembrance; from deception to repentance; from ostentation to sincerity; from deceit to truthfulness; from being incapable to being competent; from the tyranny of conceit to the submissiveness of

humility; from arrogance to modesty and from laxity to action, then the soul has achieved tranquillity.⁶⁹

In addition to the perfection of faith alluded to in the above discussion, the quality of permanency also graces this state, in the sense that this type of soul is so well accustomed to this form of faith and practice that it becomes a resident feature of its nature and character.⁷⁰ In this regard al-Jurjāni has defined the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*) as follows: 'It is the one [*al-nafs*] whose illumination with the light of the heart has been completed to the extent that it has been divested of every blameworthy attribute and has been adorned with every praiseworthy characteristic'.⁷¹

The single Qur'ānic verse mentioning both the terms *tazkiya* and *al-nafs*

Finally, we turn our attention to the single, most important Qur'ānic verses regarding our area of enquiry, verses (91: 7–10). The significance of these verses cannot be overemphasised due to their mention of not only the nature of the soul and the potentiality and duality created in it but also the matter of its purification or defilement. As such this is the only series of Qur'ānic verses that make mention of both the *nafs* and its *tazkiya* in one place and therefore is deserving of particular mention and merits specific attention. The verse itself reads, 'And [by] the soul (*nafs*) and the One Who proportioned it; then He inspired it [to discern between] its iniquity and its righteousness; indeed, he who purifies it has succeeded; and indeed, he who defiles it has failed.'

These particular verses are interesting in a variety of ways and, as such, merit some reflection and discussion. The first characteristic is that the series of verses begins with the swearing of an oath using *waw al-qasm*, which according to the Islamic exegetical tradition implies emphasis to draw the attention of the reader/listener to the importance of the discourse being presented. Not only this but this particular verse comes at the end of six previous oaths at the beginning of each verse, the objects of the oath being the sun (*al-shams*), the moon (*al-qamar*), the day (*al-nahār*), the night (*al-layl*), the heaven (*al-samā'*), the earth (*al-arḍ*) and finally, the seventh oath concerns the soul (*al-nafs*). Commentators allude to the fact that this style in the Qur'ān is utilised to draw attention to the greatness and perfection of such creations, these ultimately being indications of the Creator Himself. Perhaps more subtly, however, it can be further noticed that the first six items are manifest, i.e. 'seen' in the simplest sense, whereas the final object of the oath is 'unseen', causing some exegetes to conclude that this is in fact the greatest of the 'unseen' creations.⁷²

Similarly, there is a direct reference to the Creator of this soul; the word used in the verse is *mā* in this instance *mā al-mawṣūla* or the relative pronoun, carrying the meaning of *alladhī* and in this specific example meaning *man* or 'the one who'.⁷³ Thus, the verse speaks not only of the soul itself but also of the One, meaning God, Who *sawwāhā* carrying the meaning of 'proportioned, made equal,

made even and balanced’, suggesting not only that the soul created was thus in the body but also that the soul has been given ‘free will’ to choose at a moral level between good and evil, to which the following verse adds further credence.⁷⁴

The next verse begins by making an important statement, i.e. that the soul is capable of receiving inspiration and insight, indicated to by the use of the verb *alhamahā*, once again the active participle being God, stating clearly that He is the source of inspiration. The subject of the inspiration is equally significant, however, as it is stated as being the soul’s iniquity (*fujūr*) and its righteousness (*taqwā*), i.e. the soul has been inspired and given insight to be able to discern between and choose either right action or sin. In this regard Ibn al-‘Abbās (d. c. 67–8/686–8) said that the verse means, ‘Clarified for it [the soul] the good and the evil’ and this was also the opinion of Qatāda (d. 118/736), al-Ḍaḥḥak (d. 102/721) and Sufyān al-Thawri (d. 162/778).⁷⁵ In addition, this is another indication of the soul’s ‘free will’ and as such some commentators as a result consider this to be an indication of the human being’s rational faculty or intellect (*al-‘aql*), this being the highest form of human capacity. However, it should be noticed that the subject of this inspiration is to choose between iniquity (*fujūr*) and righteousness (*taqwā*), which is essentially a moral dilemma, in which there can be no doubt that the intellect plays a role, but the influence here of the heart (*al-qalb*) and/or of the conscience (*al-damīr*) cannot be underestimated. As such, this verse is also an indication of the dual potentiality within the soul, mentioned previously, and also alludes to its responsibility and accountability, in both this life and the next, as it has been endowed with the capacity to discern and the ability to choose the right course of action or alternatively its opposite.⁷⁶

The results and consequences of such ‘informed’ choices are the subject of the next two verses, which is also the only time in the Qur’ān where the *nafs* is used in conjunction with a derivative of the term *tazkiya*. In the very next verse we are informed that true success, prosperity and salvation (*falāḥ*), meaning the acquisition of God’s good grace and entry into His paradise, will be attained by a person who ‘purifies it (*zakkāhā*)’. This is the usual form II usage of the verb alluded to previously and therefore gives the meanings of ‘bringing about or causing growth, augmentation, reform and development’ or ‘purification’ in the broad sense. However, it is the subject of ‘it’ which concerns us here, as the attached pronoun being used is feminine, i.e. *hā*, and which, as such, refers directly to the term *nafs* mentioned previously. Thus, the verse in its broadest sense would mean, ‘He who has caused his soul to grow, be augmented, be reformed, developed and purified has indeed attained true success, prosperity and salvation’. In this sense Qatāda (d. 118/736) said that the meaning of the verse is, ‘He who has purified his soul through obedience to God and cleansed it from base characteristics and vices has indeed attained true success’.⁷⁷

It is also worth mentioning that the subject of the verb ‘*zakkā*’ is not immediately obvious and thus Muslim exegetes have differed regarding exactly ‘who’ it is that is doing the purifying; the first of these views suggests that it is God which is the subject, in which case the verse would mean, ‘He whom God has caused his soul to grow, be augmented, be reformed, developed and purified has indeed

attained true success, prosperity and salvation'.⁷⁸ In this regard it is related that it was the opinion of both al-Farrā' (d. 207/822) and al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923) that the meaning of the verse is, 'Indeed, a soul which God has purified is successful and indeed, a soul which God has defiled has failed'.⁷⁹ The second view posits that it is the human being who brings about this process at a personal level, in which case the verse would mean, 'He who has caused his soul to be purified has indeed attained true success'.⁸⁰ In this sense, Sufyān b. 'Uyayna (d. 198/813), Qatāda (d. 118/736) and others said regarding this verse that the meaning is, 'Indeed, he who has purified his soul with God's obedience and righteous actions has succeeded', and similarly, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), commented that the meaning of *zakkāhā* is, 'Purified it from sin and reformed it with righteous deeds'.⁸¹ It is not wholly implausible, however, that the process is indeed a combination of the two in harmony with one another.

The alternative consequence of these 'informed' choices is clarified in the very next verses, which alludes to the idea that whoever selects a path of iniquity will indeed have failed (*khāba*). The verse used in diametric opposition to *zakkāhā* is equally worthy of mention here; the conjugation used is *dassāhā* from the root *dassasa*, the final radical of this verb being substituted for an *alif* to ease and facilitate pronunciation (*takhfif*). The meaning of this verb is to 'hide' or 'conceal', which at first glance may seem obscure but the implication is that the person would commit sins, disbelieve and be disobedient, so much so that his soul would be 'submerged' in such reprehensible acts to the extent that his soul would be 'buried' in them.⁸² In this sense Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) said the meaning of *dassāhā* is, 'Concealed it with iniquity and disobedience, as the reprobate hides his soul (*dassa nafsahu*) i.e. suppresses it through his committing of obscenities'.⁸³ Similarly, al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923) commented by saying that such a person makes his soul lowly, despicable, vile and wretched.⁸⁴ This emotive metaphor elucidates the state of such a soul and clarifies exactly how its 'failure' is constituted.

Our original conclusion at the end of the discussion of the linguistic implications of these terms, i.e. 'the growth, augmentation, reform and development of a human being's soul, intellect, body and self', has changed little having surveyed the Qur'ānic text for the same purpose. All this increases our understanding of the process and goal of *tazkiyat al-nafs* considerably. The subtle interplay between the divine (God), the human elect (Prophets/Messengers) and the humble worshipper (the human being) all have their parts to play; from divine guidance and inspiration, to human moral and spiritual excellence and example, to firm will, certitude and extreme effort. Similarly, that very essence of humanity – the human soul – has been seen to be multifaceted, multilayered and highly complex. Despite this, the Qur'ān has alluded to the goal of the above-mentioned process of *tazkiya*, i.e. the attainment of the state of the *nafs* known as the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*), which is its final and ultimate product. Thus, we may conclude that our understanding of *tazkiyat al-nafs* has now developed to mean: the growth, augmentation, reform, development and purification of the human soul, via divine guidance, Prophetic example and individual effort, to attain its most elevated form, that of the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*).

This discussion has shed a great deal of light upon the understanding of the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* in Islam but no such discussion would be complete without reference to Islam's secondary source of law and thought, namely the *ḥadīth*.

The concept of the terms *tazkiya* and *nafs* within *ḥadīth* literature

From the Islamic perspective the Qur'ān is not the only form of divinely inspired revelation. Indeed, the very life of the Prophet is considered to be a source of guidance, where his customary practice known as the *sunna* is constituted by his statements, actions and tacit approval and is contained in a vast corpus of narrations transmitted by Muslims throughout history, known as *ḥadīth*.⁸⁵ This literature is viewed as complementary to the Qur'ān and it is seen to fulfil an explanatory or interpretative role regarding Islam's primary sacred text.⁸⁶ Thus, it is imperative that any 'Islamic' term or concept be examined in the light of this literature and, as such, *tazkiyat al-nafs* is no exception. This said, the vast nature of the material means that only a representative survey will be made here and, indeed, only those texts that have a direct link with the subject matter will be considered. Following a similar methodology to the previous sections, each of these terms will be dealt with separately to shed light on their meanings and concepts.

When surveying the usage of words with the *z-k-y* root within the *ḥadīth* literature, perhaps the most familiar derivative in the Islamic context is the term *zakāt*, this being the third 'pillar' of the Islamic faith. Despite the vast wealth of narrations regarding this topic, as was mentioned earlier, this usage is of little use to us here and therefore will not be considered. This leaves rather a limited choice of *ḥadīth* to consider but fortunately the remaining narrations that contain the form II version of the verb *zakkā* also make mention of the term *nafs*. The first of these is of particular significance, as indeed it makes specific mention of *tazkiyat al-nafs*. The Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have said:

There are three acts [whereby] whoever performed them has tasted the sweetness of faith; he who worships God, the Mighty and Exalted, alone as none is worthy of worship except Him; he who gives his *zakāt* willingly, not giving a weak, old animal, a mangy animal or a sick animal but, indeed, he gives from the median range of his wealth, as God, the Mighty and Exalted, does not ask you [to give] the finest of it and did not order you [to give] the least of it; and he who purifies his soul (*zakkā nafsaḥu*). So a man asked, 'And what is purification of the soul (*wa mā tazkiyat al-nafs*)?' He [the Prophet] replied, 'That he knows that God, the Mighty and Exalted, is with him wherever he may be'.⁸⁷

This *ḥadīth* seems to have solved the problem of the meaning of *tazkiyat al-nafs* since it is a direct definition and quotation from the mouth of the Prophet of Islam himself. Indeed, some scholars of the discipline of *ḥadīth* consider this narration to be authentic⁸⁸ but under closer scrutiny, however, this seems not to be the

case.⁸⁹ Consequently, it will not be considered here due to its lack of authenticity and hence cannot be viewed as a statement of the Prophet.⁹⁰

In the second of these narrations it is reported by the Prophetic Companion Zayd b. Arqam (d. 66/686 or 68/688) that the Prophet, would teach them the following supplication:

O God, indeed I seek shelter in you from incapacity and laziness, senility and cowardice and miserliness and the punishment of the grave. O God, grant my soul (*nafsī*) its righteousness and purify it (*zakkihā*), as indeed, You are the best of those who purify it (*zakkāhā*), You are its Guardian and Master. O God, I seek shelter in You from a heart that has no fear [of You], a soul that cannot be satisfied (*nafs lā tashba* ^o), knowledge of no benefit and a request that will not be granted.⁹¹

In comparison this second narration was related by the famous *ḥadīth* scholar, Imam Muslim, as well as others and consequently from the traditional Muslim perspective would be considered rigorously authenticated. Moreover, its significance is manifold since first, this supplication (*du'ā*) was actually taught by the Prophet to his Companions, which in itself is enough to show the importance of the content of this particular prayer. The subject matter of this supplication is seeking shelter in God against negative or unbeneficial qualities and as such the *nafs* occurs reiterated within it. We find that granting the *nafs* its righteousness is attributed to God alone and is reminiscent of the Qur'ānic verse (91: 8) regarding the inspiration of the soul. Thus, it is a recognition that the soul has been inspired to the dual potentiality of both good and evil but, in the light of this, there is also a request made of the divine for only the positive facets of such inspiration.

The supplication continues requesting divine assistance regarding the soul's consequent purification (*tazkiya*), which is indicative of the fact that this 'purification' is indeed what will bring about righteousness in the soul and which, in turn, is reminiscent of the qualities of the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*). Despite this, however, although God is regarded to be, 'The best of those who purify it (*zakkāhā*)', which clarifies that there is primarily a divine role in purification that has also been witnessed earlier, this also shows that *tazkiya* is not restricted to God alone but that it is He Who has achieved perfection in this regard. This also opens the possibility that other than God may undertake this process and, as we have also seen, this is the role of the Prophets and Messengers and, indeed, the individual.⁹² In addition, the fact the Prophet himself would make and teach such a supplication is an allusion to the enormity of the task in hand, as it would seem to be an indication that even God's prophetic elect require His assistance in this regard and, as such, the need of the mere mortal is even greater. Indeed, it would seem in the light of this narration that to attain purification of the soul is impossible without divine intervention and the humble request for it.

Moreover, when surveying the vast corpus of the *ḥadīth* literature for the term *nafs* we find a huge number of transmissions that contain this term. However, as was noticed previously, many of these narrations utilise this word as a reflexive

pronoun, and consequently, these usages will not be considered here. On examining the remaining material, however, we find many references to the negative aspects of the *nafs*. For example, in the *ḥadīth* discussed in the last section, in addition to the mention of the concept of *tazkiya*, we also find the phrase, ‘O God, I seek shelter in You from . . . a soul that cannot be satisfied (*nafs lā tashba*)’,⁹³ this being an indication of the *nafs*’s voracious appetite to fulfil its desires alluded to earlier, which is a particular characteristic of the soul prone to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi ’l-sū*). Indeed, al-Nawawī (d. 626/1277) comments that the meaning of this supplication is, ‘Seeking shelter [in God] from greed, avarice, voracity and the soul (*al-nafs*) having high hopes’.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the *nafs* in question in the supplication is non-specific and may be the *nafs* of the person making the *du‘ā* or those of others; in either case this is further evidence of the need of divine assistance in protecting oneself from the evils of one’s soul and the souls of others.⁹⁵

On a similar theme, in a famous public address made by the Prophet, known as *khutbat al-ḥāja*, we find the phrase, ‘. . . We seek shelter in God from the evil of our own souls (*shurūr anfusinā*) and our sinful deeds (*sayyi’āt a’ mālinā*) . . .’.⁹⁶ This once again is a direct reference to the negative qualities of the *nafs*; in fact the narration is explicit in its choice of words, since the word *shurūr* is the plural of *sharr* meaning evil or wickedness, indicating the many types of iniquity found within the soul. Similarly, this seems to allude to the consequences of such evils as the very next phrase used is, ‘. . . We seek shelter in God from . . . our sinful deeds (*sayyi’āt a’ mālinā*) . . .’, seemingly alluding to the fact that these sins that have been committed are no more than a product or a consequence of the evils of the soul. Once again there is the pedagogical aspect of teaching such phrases in a public arena and also the concept that such negative qualities found within the soul prone to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi ’l-sū*) will not be overcome except through seeking the assistance of the Creator of the soul, God, the Mighty and Exalted.

Similarly, within the collections of *ḥadīth* literature the dual potential of the *nafs* for both positive and negative qualities can also be identified. The following narration illustrates this dichotomy; the Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have said:

Satan ties three knots on the nape of the neck of one of you when he sleeps, striking the place of every knot, [saying:] ‘The night is long so sleep’. So if one of you awoke and remembered God, one knot is untied; then if you performed ablution (*wudū*), another knot is untied and if you prayed, another knot is untied. [Thus, such a person] will become energetic and genial (*tayyib al-nafs*) or otherwise he will be lazy and unpleasant (*khabiṭh al-nafs*).⁹⁷

In this narration we find two diametrically opposed notions regarding the *nafs*, i.e. those of goodness (*tīb*) and malevolence (*khubṭh*), which manifest themselves behaviourally in terms of geniality and unpleasantness. These are again examples of the soul’s inspiration to both ‘good’ and ‘bad’, as alluded to in verse (91: 8).

Moreover, the significance of Satanic influence is also mentioned here and seems to fit nicely with the description of the soul prone to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*) and its inclination to devilish insinuation mentioned previously, which seems to interact at the 'metaphysical' level. Furthermore, this particular narration also suggests the role that 'physical' acts of worship can have on the *nafs* in changing its state and presumably, its purification, as this *ḥadīth* mentions specifically remembrance of God (*dhikr*), ritual ablution (*wuḍū'*) and prayer (*ṣalāt*), these being righteous deeds associated with the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*).⁹⁸

The duality of the *nafs* is also indicated in another extended narration which discusses the fate of the soul upon death:

The angels come to the dead person [upon death] and if he was righteous they say, 'Exit O good soul (*nafs ṭayyiba*) that was in a good body; exit nobly and receive glad tidings of repose (*rawḥ*), benevolence (*rayḥān*) and a Lord Who is not wrathful'. This will continue being said to it until it exits [the body]. Then it will be elevated into the heavens and they will be opened for it. It will be said, 'Who is this?' And they [the angels] will say, 'It is so and so'. It will be said, 'Welcome to the good soul that was in a good body; Enter nobly and receive glad tidings of repose, benevolence and a Lord Who is not wrathful', and this will continue being said to it until it reaches the heaven in which God, the Mighty and Exalted, is encountered.

If [however] he was wicked, they say, 'Exit O despicable soul (*nafs khabītha*) that was in a despicable body; Exit in disdain and receive tidings of scalding water and purulence and other forms and types [of punishment]'. This will remain being said to it until it exits [the body]. Then it will be elevated into the heavens and they will not be opened for it. It will be said, 'Who is this?' And they [the angels] will say, 'It is so and so'. It will be said, 'No welcome for a despicable soul that was in a despicable body, go back in disdain as the gates of the heavens will not be opened for you'. Then it will be sent [away] from the heavens and will go back to the grave.'⁹⁹

In this detailed account of the fate of the soul after death we are given two contrasting images of the soul depending on its actions and state before death. On the one hand, the good soul (*nafs ṭayyiba*) will be encouraged to leave the body, being extolled with the good news of its entry into paradise and the pleasure of its Lord. This honorific position is enhanced by its ascension into the heavens, where it is welcomed and ultimately is favoured with being brought into the proximity of its Creator. This no doubt is reminiscent of the description of the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*) and the success (*falāḥ*) awarded to it. In contrast, the despicable soul (*nafs khabītha*) is granted no such luxury; indeed, it exits the body in humiliation, being informed of the torments that await it. Similarly, there is no welcome for it in the heavens and it is commanded to return to its grave in disgrace. Once again this seems to allude to the fate of the soul prone to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*) that has disgraced itself with continuous self-interest in the worldly life.

Therefore, to avoid this form of humiliation there are a number of narrations

praising the combating of the soul and disciplining it. In fact, one of the greatest acts of worship in Islam, that of struggle or jihad – usually associated with physical combat – takes on a new connotation in this context. The religious warrior (*al-mujāhid*) is no longer merely a soldier in God’s path but, as the Prophet stated, ‘The religious warrior (*al-mujāhid*) is the one who struggles against his soul for the sake of God, the Mighty and Exalted’.¹⁰⁰ Thus, from this we can glean that one of the essential qualities of dealing with the soul is to struggle and strive against it so as to purify it and, in doing so, the practitioner of this difficult task gains the privilege of being considered a combatant in the path of God.

In a similar vein, it is reported that Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13/634), the famous Prophetic Companion and the first caliph after the death of the Prophet, said, ‘Whoever loathes his soul for the sake of God [then] God will save him from His wrath’.¹⁰¹ Thus, having disdain for one’s soul, particularly the state referred to as the soul prone to evil (*al-naḥs al-ammāra bi ’l-sū’*) and its contemptible actions, is considered praiseworthy in the process of disciplining it and ultimately purifying it.

In addition to struggling against one’s own soul, commonly referred to as *mujāhadah* and having contempt for the soul, a further course of action is found in the narrations related to the *naḥs* – that of taking the soul to account or *muḥāsaba*, as it is known in Arabic. It is interesting to note that this concept was also found in the formative period, as it is related that ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), another famous Prophetic Companion and the second caliph in Islamic history is reported to have said:

Take your souls to account before they are taken to account; weigh your souls [actions] before they are weighed as, indeed, it will be easier for you in the Reckoning tomorrow that you take your souls to account today; adorn yourselves for the great display! On that day you will be brought forth and not even the most hidden secret will be concealed.¹⁰²

Thus, it can be seen that it is necessary to take the soul to account in this life in order to make the reckoning in front of God easier, since any sins committed would have been obviated via repentance and consequently would be forgiven, making them insignificant on the Day of Judgement. Once again it is easy to see how this, along with other qualities mentioned above, is an intrinsic component in the process of purifying the soul.

Despite the idea of implementing punitive measures on the soul to discipline it, described in the aforementioned narrations, we also find a sense of balance in this process, as is related in the following *ḥadīth* regarding fasting in which the Prophet is reported to have asked ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr al-‘Āṣ (d. between 63/683 – 77/696):

‘Do you fast continuously and pray the night prayer?’ To which he replied, ‘Yes’. The Prophet responded, ‘If you [continue] to do that the eyes will be overwhelmed and the soul will be exhausted (*naḥīhat lahu al-naḥs*). Do not fast continuously; fasting three days [a month is the equivalent of] fasting

continuously'. So he said, 'I am able to do more'. To which the Prophet replied, 'Then fast the fast of Dāwūd, peace be upon him, who would fast one day and break his fast the next . . .'.¹⁰³

Thus, forcing oneself into a state of continuous, physically demanding acts of worship, such as fasting – which is normally considered a highly effective way of disciplining the soul – is not recommended, as ultimately it has a negative effect, as the *ḥadīth* itself suggests: ' . . . the soul will be exhausted (*nafihat lahu al-nafs*) . . .'. By implication also, this cannot be the method of purifying or disciplining the soul as otherwise this narration would have indicated as much; on the contrary this process must be balanced, bearing in mind both the physical and emotional needs of the person, whilst at the same time combating the negative qualities to which all souls are prone.

Perhaps on a more positive note we find that the Prophet is also reported to have said, 'Being rich is not [due to] having a lot of material wealth but being [truly] rich is [having] richness of the soul (*ghinā al-nafs*)'.¹⁰⁴ This is a very significant indication of the importance of purification of the soul, as it alludes to the true meaning of happiness in the worldly life. It may be perceived that having vast amounts of money constitutes being wealthy and similarly that a penniless person is poor. However, this *ḥadīth* clarifies Islam's position regarding being rich; in reality the person who thinks that material wealth is in fact the true source of being rich is fooled, as he is not satisfied with what he has been given. Such a person continues trying to accumulate 'wealth' and consequently all forms of temporal benefit, to the extent that they are indifferent as to the source of this 'wealth' due to their overwhelming greed. In this sense, according to the above narration, such a person is indeed 'poor' and not wealthy at all. Alternatively, if a person satisfies himself with what he has been given, is satisfied and content with it, not desiring an increase in it, then this is the true meaning of 'wealth' since such a person does not feel 'in need' due to his satisfaction with what he has.¹⁰⁵

In this regard al-Qurṭubī comments:

The meaning of the *ḥadīth* is that richness that is beneficial, great and praiseworthy is richness of the soul (*ghinā al-nafs*); this means that if a person's soul is content, it refrains from desires, is enhanced and becomes superior, attaining respectability, prestige, honour and praise, which is more than the wealth that is acquired by someone who has poverty of the soul (*faqīr al-nafs*) due to his greed, as this embroils him in contemptible matters and despicable acts due to his base aspirations and his miserliness. [Such a person is] continuously condemned by people, his position being diminished [in their sight], thus becoming the lowest of the low. As for the person who is described as having richness of the soul (*ghinā al-nafs*), he is content with what God has provided him, he does not seek an increase that is more than his need, nor is he insistent or demanding in his request; indeed he is satisfied with what God has ordained for him.¹⁰⁶

This ‘poverty’ and ‘wealth’ is reminiscent of the characteristics of both the soul prone to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*) and the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*) respectively. As for the first, it remains self-serving, being controlled by its desires to the extent that accumulation – and consequent consumption – is its primary goal, to the extent that it ignores its duties to its Creator. On the contrary, the outstanding quality of those endowed with richness of the soul is their satisfaction with God, this being one of the most outstanding qualities of the tranquil soul, as described above. Similarly, it stands to reason that eradicating the soul of such ‘poverty’ and adorning it with ‘richness’ is a major goal of *tazkiyat al-nafs*.

Having examined Islam’s secondary source of thought and Law, namely the *sunna* as preserved in the *ḥadīth* literature, we have found another source of valuable information regarding the terms *tazkiya* and *nafs*. Concerning the term *tazkiya*, after initial disappointment regarding an inauthentic narration that contained the compound phrase *tazkiyat al-nafs*, another narration shed further light on the process and means of *tazkiya*. This narration, in the form of a Prophetic supplication, provided further clarification on a number of issues; first, that even the Prophet himself sought shelter and assistance in God regarding the process of purifying the soul. Indeed, God was further qualified as the source and agent of this process but it was also found that the phraseology of the supplication did not also rule out the possibility of other agents taking a proactive role in the purification process. At the same time, however, this narration seemed to allude to the idea that ultimately this process would not be completed except by placing one’s trust in the guardianship of God, the Creator of the soul and ‘. . . the best of those who purify it (*zakkāhā*) . . .’.

With regard to the term *nafs* it was also found that many of the concepts discussed in the section concerning the Qur’ān were also reinforced. First, the negative qualities of the *nafs* that are so indicative of the soul prone to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*) were encountered; for example, the *nafs* is clearly characterised by iniquity (*sharr*) and this innate quality leads to sins and misdeeds, which are ultimately so destructive in the Hereafter. Consequently, the importance of seeking divine assistance was also stressed, once again due to the fact that ultimately these negative qualities would not be overcome except once again through the intervention of the Creator of the soul and ‘. . . the best of those who purify it (*zakkāhā*) . . .’.

Similarly, the dual potentiality of the soul was also seen in the *ḥadīth* literature; such phrases as genial (*ṭayyib al-nafs*) and unpleasant (*khābīth al-nafs*), the ‘good’ soul (*nafs ṭayyiba*) and ‘despicable’ soul (*nafs khābītha*) and richness of the soul (*ghinā al-nafs*) and poverty of the soul (*faqīr al-nafs*) were identified, all of which are indications of the soul prone to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*) and the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*). The transformation of such negative aspects of the soul to their positive counterparts was also discussed and certain disciplinary practices such as having contempt for the soul (*maqt al-nafs*), struggling against one’s own soul (*mujāhadat al-nafs*) and taking the soul to account (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*) were also identified. Despite this, it was also seen that there has to be a

degree of balance in this process of purification as the emotional, physical and spiritual needs of the human being need to be considered or, in the words of the Prophet, ‘. . . the soul will be exhausted (*nafihat lahu al-nafs*) . . .’.

Therefore, in many ways, the definition proposed at the end of the section concerning the Qur’ān, i.e. ‘the growth, augmentation, reform, development and purification of the human soul, via divine guidance, Prophetic example and individual effort, to attain its most elevated form, that of the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma’inna*)’, has not changed greatly. However, despite this our understanding of the process has, since this purification to bring about a ‘richness of the soul’ will not occur except by eliminating its ‘iniquity’ by a balanced and integrated process of ‘striving against it’ and ‘taking it to account’.

The concept of the terms *tazkiya* and *nafs* in the view of Muslim scholars

Having surveyed Islam’s revelatory sources and gained an understanding of the presentation of *tazkiyat al-nafs* therein, it is now equally appropriate that we examine the views of its scholarly circles, so as to extend our knowledge of this subject matter further. At the same time, however, this discussion is by no means intended to be exhaustive and comprehensive, as this itself would require a separate work. Instead, a selection of opinions will be presented here, to add to the discussion so far, in the sense that there will be an attempt to represent views that have not already been mentioned or that have their own specific significance, thus adding to the richness of the discussion of this intriguing topic. In addition, the opinions discussed are merely representative of a wide range of similar views that exist and, as such, are not meant to represent a particular stance or school of thought. Similarly, little commentary will be provided due to the lucidity of many of the quotes, to let such opinions ‘speak for themselves’. Finally, in keeping with the methodology of the previous sections each of the terms *tazkiya* and ‘*nafs*’ will be discussed separately before discussing their compound derivative.

The concept of the term *tazkiya* in the view of Muslim scholars

One of the most prolific medieval scholars of Islam was the celebrated *shaykh al-Islām* Ḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and, bearing in mind his extensive writings, it is not surprising that he also discussed the topic of purifying the soul. Concerning the linguistic considerations of the term *tazkiya* he said:

Al-tazkiya is to make something pure (*zakiyyan*), either in its essence or in terms of belief (*al-i’ tiqād*) [in it] or informing (*al-khabar*) [regarding it], in the same way that it is said, ‘I straightened it’ (*‘addaltahu*); if you straightened it in itself or in terms of people’s belief regarding it. He the Exalted says, ‘And do not claim purity for your souls’ (*wa lā tuzakkū anfusakum*) [53: 32], i.e. [do not] inform [others] of their purity.¹⁰⁷

In addition to discussing the linguistic implications of the word *tazkiya*, Ibn Taymiyya also makes an important point; that *tazkiya* is not only a process of purification but indeed, this purification requires that not only ‘good’ qualities are encouraged but also ‘bad’ characteristics are eliminated:

The origin of *al-zakāt* is an increase in good; it is said, ‘The crop increased (*zakā al-zar’*) and the wealth increased (*zakā al-māl*)’ if it grew, and good will not grow except via the relinquishing of evil, in the same way that a crop will not grow (*yazkū*) until the weeds are removed from it. Similarly, the soul (*al-nafs*) and deeds (*al-a‘māl*) will not be purified (*lā tazkū*) until that which contradicts is removed; a man will not be purified (*mutazakkiyan*) until he has relinquished evil and whoever does not relinquish evil will not ever be pure (*zākiyan*), as indeed evil pollutes the soul (*al-nafs*) and defiles it.¹⁰⁸

Regarding the process of purification he recommends a ‘practical’ approach to the problem, beginning with the very essence of faith and moving on to the practical aspects of religious life. For example he says:

As such, monotheism (*tawhīd*) and faith (*īmān*) are the greatest things through which the soul (*al-nafs*) is purified (*tatazakkā*), whereas polytheism (*shirk*) is the greatest thing which defiles it. It is also purified by righteous deeds and acts of charity and all of this is what has been mentioned by the predecessors. They said, ‘He who is purified is indeed successful [87: 14]’, as he who is purified from polytheism and [purified] from disobedience through repentance.¹⁰⁹

Of the contemporary scholars who have discussed the topic of *tazkiya*, Amin Ahsan Islahi’s account of the topic is easily one of the most lucid and comprehensive studies. In the following extended quote he clarifies the effect of *tazkiya* on the individual:

The spirit of purification, growth and development and its final perfection will be visible in its actions everywhere. For instance the action of *tazkiyah* may be performed on a tract of land and also on the inner self of a person. Although due to variations in the fields of action, there will be a difference in the form, yet in reality and in its object there will be no difference between the two. The *tazkiyah* of the tract of land will comprise clearing it of the weeds, brushwood and brambles, levelling it, ploughing it to make it soft and porous, then watering it so that it may become capable of developing the healthy seeds of some sort in keeping with its natural capacity, and take it to the final stage of blossoming and fruition. The *tazkiyah* of the inner self of a person involves eradication of erroneous thought and false assumptions, the correction and levelling of the perversions and angularities created by the corrupt morality and bad habits; removal of the ills produced by the blind emulations and ritualism; treatment and cure of the evil of drooping spirits and cowardice created by craving for ephemeral carnal pleasures so that his

eyes may be opened and his mind may become capable of thinking freely, his drooping spirits may be raised, his habits may be reformed and through development of his mental, moral and spiritual powers according to his natural capabilities, may attain the heights God endowed him with to reach. Technically it conveys the sense of checking ourselves from erroneous tendencies and learnings and turning them to the path of virtue and piety (fear of God's displeasure) and developing it to attain the stage of perfection.¹¹⁰

Regarding the vast scope of the purification process he comments:

On the contrary *tazkiyah* deals with all the apparent and hidden aspects of our selves. It critically judges all the powers and the capabilities of which we are constituted, discusses all our emotions and feelings and corrects and reforms them; it takes stock of all the variegated and multifaceted ties that we are bound with, and creates an order in and regulates them all under a particular principle and regulation. Our thoughts, our apprehensions, our inclinations our movements, our eating and drinking, our engagements, entertainments, and interests, the daily routines of our lives, in short, no department and nothing that touches our lives is outside the pale of *tazkiyah*.¹¹¹

Concerning the object of the purification process he is no doubt:

Tazkiyah does not demand only that our soul may somehow be subordinated to the Commandments of the *Shari'ah*, but its real demand lies in breaking this unruly steed of our soul in such a way that it carries out the orders of God and His apostle in the best possible manner. It does not only demand from us the service where the slave comes to imagine that he is beholding his Lord with his eyes (physical vision). In short, it means that *tazkiyah* places before us the demand of *Iman* or belief, *Islam* or submission and *ihsan* or utmost sincerity, at the same time. It demands that we believe in God with all His attributes, also that we obey His Commandments in every sphere of our lives and above all that this belief and obedience may not be formal and superficial but fully conscious and deeply sincere in which our hearts must coordinate with our physique.¹¹²

Similarly, he considers the process of *tazkiya* to be a continuous one, where the human being continually strives for perfection:

This nature of *tazkiyah* makes it a perpetual striving and a continuous struggle without any break or a period of rest. In this journey there is no turn or stage which may be mistaken for the last lap of the journey the destination where one may sojourn a while or become permanently at ease. At every stage in this striving one goes on looking for greater excellence and higher standards and nowhere his eyes can come to rest on any degree of excellence. With the greater polish of the deeds, the morals and the exterior and the inner self, the

fineness of morals and the exterior and the inner self, the fineness of tastes, the degree of sensibility and keenness of eye-sight also progresses by leaps and bounds, with the result that no sooner has one washed the old stains off his raiment some more stains come in sight to be cleansed.¹¹³

The concept of the term *nafs* in the view of Muslim scholars

One of the oldest discussions that have occupied the minds of men from the earliest time is the question concerning the essence of humanity: what is the soul? Islahi alludes to this when he says:

Evidently enough the theme of *tazkiyah* is the human soul. But what is the soul is an important question stressed in the Islamic philosophy and in that of *Jahiliyah* too, well enough. The arch of the doorway to the temple in ancient Athens bore the inscription of the sayings of Socrates: 'Man know thyself!' This is a pointer to the fact that in Greek philosophy knowledge and cognizance of the soul was considered of fundamental importance.¹¹⁴

Thus, it is hardly surprising that Muslim scholarship has also addressed this fundamental question and, indeed, due to the nature of this enquiry, theologians discussed this issue at an early stage. One of the first and still most popular 'orthodox' sunni creeds of Islam was that set down by Abū Ja'far al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933). In a classical exposition of this creed Ibn Abū 'l-'Izz al-Ḥanafī (d. 792/1390) alludes to the variety of opinions in this debate before clarifying the 'orthodox' position:

There is a difference of opinion regarding the soul (*al-rūh*) as to what it is. Some say it is a body and some say it is an accident (*'araḍ*).¹¹⁵ Others say that they do not know what it is, either a substance or an accident. Some say that the soul is nothing more than a balance of the four natural components [i.e. earth, air, fire and water]. Some others say that it is pure blood free from impurities and putridity. Some say that it is the natural heat that is life itself. Some say that it is a non-composite substance spread throughout the animal world that drives and organizes that world and that it is not divided into essence and structure, being existent in every animal of the world, as one. Others say that it is the breath that enters and exits during breathing and yet others have further opinions

The Qur'ān, *sunna*, consensus of the Companions and rational evidences prove that the soul is a body which differs in essence to that of the tangible body. It is a heavenly body of light that is agile, animate and is motile. It passes through the substance of the limbs in the same way that water spreads through a rose, or the way that oil diffuses through an olive, or the way fire enflames a coal. As long as these limbs remain healthy to accept the effects of this delicate body [the soul], this delicate body remains diffused throughout the limbs and drives effects, such as sensory perception, motion and volition. However, if

these [limbs] become compromised due to an imbalance in the body and it becomes unable to accept the effects [of the soul on it], the soul will separate from the body and leave for the sphere of souls (*'ālam al-arwāḥ*).¹¹⁶

In a similar attempt to define the *nafs* in a terminological manner, seemingly basing his discourse upon verse (39: 42) and the commentary of Ibn al-ʿAbbās (d. c. 67–8/686–8) mentioned previously, we find the following text from al-Jurjāni (d. 816/1413):

It is an ethereal, delicate essence that carries the life force, sensory perception and motion; al-Ḥakīm called this the animal soul (*al-rūḥ al-ḥayawāniyya*). As such it is an illuminating essence within the body, so at death its light is detached from the internal and external parts of the body. As for during sleep it is detached from the external part of the body and not the internal, which confirms that death and sleep are of one category, as death is a complete cessation whereas sleep is a partial one. Thus, it is confirmed that the All Powerful and the All Wise has connected the essence of the soul to the body in three ways: first, if the light of the soul reaches all parts of the body, both the external and the internal, then this is [termed] wakefulness; if its light was from the external part of the body and not the internal, then this is sleep, or [if it is detached] completely, then this is death.¹¹⁷

In addition to the theological attempts to define the *nafs*, there have also been conceptual ideas regarding the soul from other sections of Muslim scholarship and the most obvious of these is Islam's mystics. Bearing in mind the intrinsic nature of the subject matter and its relation to Sufism, it is particularly important to spend some time discussing these ideas. The main concept of the Sufis is that *nafs* is the seat of every blameworthy quality; seemingly equating it entirely with the state of the soul termed 'the soul prone to evil' (*al-nafs la ammāra bi 'l-sū'*) in the Qur'ān. In this regard, we find the following statement from one of the early practitioners of Sufism, who discussed the *nafs* in detail, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 300/910), who states:

It is a 'land' (*ard*) of debauchery, inclined to carnal appetite after carnal appetite and desire after desire; it does not gain calmness nor does it gain stability. Its actions vary, none of them resembling the other; one time it is servitude and another it is divinity, one time it is surrender and another it is domination, one time it is incapacity and another it is capability. So, if the soul is contented and disciplined, it will become obedient.¹¹⁸

Another of the early Sufi masters, Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899), elucidates the importance of seeking divine aid when dealing with this 'internal enemy' and clarifies exactly how the soul should be treated:

From the characteristics of the truthful person (*al-ṣādiq*) in intending God the Exalted, is that he calls his soul (*al-nafs*) to God the Exalted's obedience,

seeking His pleasure and if it responds he praises God the Exalted and treats it [the soul] well. If, however, it does not respond regarding that which pleases God, or he sees it slow [to respond] then he prevents it from its beloved in this life, opposes it regarding what it desires, takes it as an enemy for God's sake and complains to God about it until He reforms it for him . . . Thus, it is related that some scholars said, 'Indeed I know that part of reforming my soul is my knowing its vices'. Thus, it is sufficient evil that a person knows that a fault exists in his own soul and doesn't correct it.¹¹⁹

Commenting on the importance of reforming and purifying this base form of the soul and realising the true potential of one's own humanity, al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) states:

Whoever knows the essence of the soul (*al-nafs*) and its deceptions also knows that he has no power over it except by seeking the assistance of its Lord and Creator. As such, the devotee will not fully realise his humanity until he casts aside his animal instincts with knowledge and uprightness, by being careful to observe his excesses and his negligence. Through this his humanity will be enhanced, he will comprehend the satanic characteristics within him, the blameworthy qualities and the perfection of his humanity.¹²⁰

In dealing with the faults of the soul Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) enlightens us regarding his own personal account:

One day I asked *shaykh al-Islām* Ibn Taymiyya, may God have mercy on him, about this matter and how to eliminate faults and occupy oneself with the cleansing of one's path. The gist of his reply was that the self is like a garbage pile: the more you dig in it, the more of it comes out to the surface; if you can pave a pathway over it and go past it, do so, and do not preoccupy yourself with digging into it for you shall never reach its bottom because the more you dig the more that surfaces. The similitude of the faults of the souls (*āfāt al-nafs*) is like that of snakes and scorpions upon the path of a traveller; if he started to examine the road for them and was preoccupied with killing them he would be halted and never be able to make progress. On the contrary, your aspiration should be to progress on your journey and to avert yourself from them [the faults] and not to pay any attention to them. However, if you are faced with something that prevents your journey then kill it and then continue on your way.¹²¹

Bearing in mind the prolific writings of the celebrated 'Proof of Islam' (*hujjat al-Islām*) Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), it is not surprising to find that he has commented on the concept of the soul and its states:

Nafs: It also has several meanings, two of which concern us here; first, it means the powers of anger and sexual appetite in a person, which will be

explained later, this usage being mostly found among the people of *taṣawwuf* [Sufis], who take ‘*nafs*’ as the comprehensive word for all the blameworthy characteristics in an individual. That is why they say, ‘One must certainly do battle with the ego and break it’, as is referred to in the *ḥadīth*, ‘Your worst enemy is your *nafs* which lies between your flanks’.¹²²

The second meaning of *nafs* is the delicate entity [the soul] we have already mentioned, the human being in reality, his self and his essence. However, it is described differently according to its different states. If it assumes calmness under command and has removed from itself the tumult caused by the onslaught of passion, it is called ‘the tranquil soul’ (*al-nafs al-muṭma’inna*), as the Exalted said regarding it [89: 27–30], ‘O tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma’inna*), return to your Lord content [with Him] (*rāḍiya*) and pleasing [to Him] (*marḍiyya*), so enter into [the ranks of] My devotees and enter My paradise’. In its first meaning of the *nafs* one does not envisage its return to God, as it is far removed from Him and is from ‘the party of Satan’. However, when it does not achieve calmness, yet resists the base soul (*al-nafs al-shahwāniyya*), objecting to it, it is called ‘the self-reproaching soul’ (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*), because it rebukes its owner for his deficiencies in worshipping its Master, as the Exalted said regarding it [75:12], ‘Do not swear [an oath] by the self-reproaching soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*)’. If it gives up all protest and surrenders itself in total obedience to the call of passions and enticement of Satan, it is named ‘the soul prone to evil’ (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi ’l-sū’*) as the Exalted said regarding it, by way of informing regarding Yūsuf and the vizier’s wife [12: 53], ‘And I do not absolve my own self [of blame], as indeed, the [human] soul is prone to evil (*inna ’l-nafs la ammāra bi ’l-sū’*), except when my Lord bestows mercy, as indeed my Lord is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful’, which could be taken to refer to the soul in its first meaning. Consequently, the *nafs* in the first meaning is absolutely blameworthy, whereas in the second meaning it is praiseworthy, being the essence and reality of the human being that has cognisance of God and all other particulars.¹²³

Finally, a contemporary scholar Anas Karzūn, attempts to combine the various elements of the above discussion when he summarises, ‘*Al-nafs*: is something internal within the human being, whose essence cannot be comprehended; it is susceptible to being directed to good and bad, and encompasses many of the human characteristics and qualities that have a manifest effect on human behaviour’.¹²⁴

The concept of the term *tazkiyat al-nafs* in the view of Muslim scholars

Some Muslim scholars would argue that not only is *tazkiyat al-nafs* an intrinsic part of the Islamic teaching but, indeed, it is the ultimate objective of this religion as Sa‘īd Murād comments, ‘The goal that Islam strives to fulfil regarding mankind, in terms of belief and rectitude, is to combine in the individual travelling along

such paths, correct belief and methodology, so that he can be elevated to the rank of the “people of purity” (*ahl al-ṣafā*)’). This is fulfilled by struggling against the soul (*al-nafs*) and training it. Similarly, one of the fundamental tasks of the Prophets and Messengers was also to purify the souls of their followers. In this regard, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) states:

Purification of the souls (*tazkiyat al-nufūs*) is more severe and more difficult than treating the body; so whoever purified his soul by training (*riyāḍa*) and disciplining (*mujāhada*) [it] and spiritual retreat (*khalwa*) in a manner that was not brought by the Messengers then he is like a sick person who attempts to treat himself using his own opinion. And how does his opinion compare to that of a genuine physician? The Messengers are the physicians of the heart and, as such, there is no way to purify them or reform them except [by adopting] their method, putting yourself in their hands, with absolute compliance and submission to them.¹²⁵

Continuing on this theme and developing it to express the scope and nature of purification of the soul, Sa‘īd Ḥawwā states:

Tazkiyat al-nafs is one of the tasks of the prophets, it is the goal of the righteous and through it will be salvation or destruction. *Tazkiya* linguistically has two meanings: [first,] purification (*taḥhūr*) and [secondly] growth (*namūw*). Similarly, it has the same meaning terminologically, as purification of the soul (*zakāt al-nafs*) means its cleansing (*taḥhīruhā*) from sicknesses and faults, its realisation is through spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) and its [the soul’s] adoption of [divine] names and attributes. Thus, *tazkiya* in summary is cleansing, realisation and adoption. Its means are legally legitimate and its essence and fruits are the *sharī‘a*. Its effect is seen in one’s behaviour, in one’s relationship with God the Mighty and Exalted, in one’s relationship with the creation and in one’s control of the limbs with regard to God’s command.¹²⁶

In addition to this, a number of contemporary scholars have attempted to elucidate this concept further. For example, ‘Umar al-Ashqar states:

Tazkiyat al-nafs terminologically means the cleansing of the soul from corruption that intermingles with it and its development with good and blessed things, which is all achieved by the performance of righteous deeds and the leaving of despicable acts. The purified soul (*al-nafs al-zakiyya*) is the one that has been cleansed in accordance with the *sharī‘a* of God; it is the good soul (*al-nafs al-ṭayyiba*) being the one that is deserving of praiseworthy characteristics in the worldly life and reward and recompense in the hereafter.¹²⁷

Similarly, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Abū Fāris, states, ‘*Tazkiyat al-nafs* is achieved through cleansing of the soul of polytheism, disbelief, base characteristics and

despicable acts; it is also achieved through developing the good and the growth of piety in the soul, which is a path that leads to paradise'.¹²⁸ In an exposition of the singular *ḥadīth* mentioning this term, Karzūn, summarises, '*Al-tazkiya*: is the cleansing (*taḥhīr*) of the soul (*al-nafs*) from being inclined to iniquity and sin and the development of the natural disposition to good within it, which leads to its rectitude and it reaching the level of spiritual perfection (*iḥsān*)'.¹²⁹ Also, Āl 'Abd al-Laṭīf defines the concept succinctly thus: '*Al-tazkiya* linguistically means cleansing (*al-taḥhīr*), growth (*al-nimā*) and increase (*al-ziyāda*) but the meaning here is reformation of the soul and its cleansing via beneficial knowledge, performing righteous deeds and carrying out what has been commanded and refraining from what has been forbidden'.¹³⁰ Finally, in a more elaborate definition, Zarabozo states, 'Purification of the soul equals the process in which the healthy elements found in the soul are fostered, built upon and added to while any invading contaminants are removed or controlled such that the person worships God properly and fulfils his purpose in life, which can culminate in the ultimate expression of true *ihsaan*'.¹³¹

Upon examining the views of the '*ulamā*' one cannot help but be impressed by the rich variety that is found, regarding both the terms '*tazkiya*' and '*nafs*', as well as their compound derivative. It must be said, however, that little has been forwarded in this section regarding the term '*tazkiya*'. Many of the scholarly opinions are somewhat repetitive, particularly in their exposition of the linguistic usage of the term and it remains very much with the realms of to grow and flourish (*namā*), or to increase and augment (*zād*), which indicates an overall process of development, which could be termed 'purification' in the broad sense. Having said this, their interpretation of these implications in the Islamic paradigm does yield an interesting response. For example, as we have seen, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) develops this theme not just to mean the positive sense of 'growth' and 'development' but quite astutely observes that this process of development will not occur with the presence of negative influences. Indeed, the 'cultivation' simile is a common feature of the literature on this point, the negative qualities of sin and iniquity being likened to the 'weeds' that endanger the growth of any 'crop'.

Furthermore, there is a tendency to a very practical approach to the topic, being represented in an absolute and complete implementation of Islam at its every level, from issues of belief to physical acts of worship, to seemingly 'beat' the *nafs* into submission. This 'broad scope' of *tazkiya*, as Islahi suggests, needs to permeate every aspect of the human being; this encompasses not only the soul but also the intellect (*al-'aql*), actions, relationships, interactions and the very consciousness of a person's humanity. Consequently, *tazkiya* is represented as an absolute method to reform the human state, which is the very goal of revelation.

On examining the concept of the *nafs*, which by now we can comfortably equate to the human soul, we find – somewhat expectedly – a much more diverse set of views. The very nature of the soul, its vague description and almost ineffable quality, have occupied the minds of thinkers and ideologues for millennia and consequently it is not surprising that Islam's scholarly elite have also engaged in this debate. Thus, almost every section of Muslim scholarship provides discussions whether they be of theologians or philosophers, or Sufis and jurists. The rich

variety of this debate can easily be seen in Ibn Abū 'l-'Izz's (d. 792/1390) introductory paragraph before discussing the theological view of the soul, where many non-Islamic influences seem equally evident.

It may be said that when examining would-be definitions of the soul, such efforts often enlighten our concept of the soul rather than facilitating a definitive view of it. In fact, one may argue that attempting to define the soul is a thankless task, let alone a near impossible one. The Qur'ān itself alludes to the ineffability of the human soul, in an incident where the Prophet is reported to have been asked regarding the soul, the Qur'ān responds (17: 85), 'They ask you concerning the soul (*al-rūḥ*), say: the soul is the concern of my Lord and you [mankind] have been given nothing more than a little knowledge'. This verse is particularly poignant, as it not only affirms the fact that both the soul and, consequently, its purification are concerns of the divine but also that whatever knowledge mankind has regarding the soul can only be a fraction of the true knowledge of its nature.

Despite this, however, where the Qur'ān is particularly informative is regarding the description of the soul, its attributes and its states. In this particular field the Sufis have concentrated a great deal of effort; their entire concern has been to oppose the *nafs* and its every whim. This seems to be due to the fact that they equate the *nafs* with the base form of the soul, which the Qur'ān terms 'the soul prone to evil' (*al-nafs la ammāra bi 'l-sū'*). Consequently, much time is dedicated to discussion of the faults of the soul (*āfāt al-nafs*), its deception (*khud'a*) and the duality of its nature, the goal of these discussions being to enlighten the owner of such a soul to its dangers and to put in place a programme to eliminate such negative qualities. This focus, however, is to the detriment of the other two states of the soul mentioned in the Qur'ān, i.e. the self-reproaching soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*) and the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*), which is the goal of the *tazkiya* process.

In addition, many contemporary scholars have revived the study of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, seemingly in an attempt to oppose the 'unorthodox' nature of many Sufi practices and to accentuate the spiritual element of the Islamic faith. As such, they attempt to revive the practical approach so evident in the writings of scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and his student, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350).¹³² These are useful attempts that provide a valuable addition to the literature, as well as the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, which is apparent from their definitions of these terms.

Conclusion

As the title of this book suggests, the main aim of this work is to explore the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* in Islam and draw a comparison between it and the teachings of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī. In conclusion the author, rather than attempting to define the term *tazkiyat al-nafs* in a strict sense as other writers have, would prefer to present an overview of the understanding of this term as discussed in this chapter. Consequently, it may be suggested that our understanding of *tazkiyat al-nafs* has now developed to mean: the growth, augmentation,

reform, development and purification of the human soul, via divine guidance, Prophetic example and individual effort, to attain its most elevated form, that of the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*). This process involves the nurturing of its positive potentialities and eradicating its negative inclinations, to bring about its purification (*tazkiya*) and eliminate its defilement (*tadsiya*). This in turn is attained by executing a balanced and integrated process of punitive measures, such as striving against it (*mujāhada*) and taking it to account (*muḥāsaba*), as well as implementing both the basic beliefs and practical actions of Islam, to bring about a richness of the soul (*ghinā al-nafs*), which is indicative of the soul's success (*falāh*) in both this life and the next.

From an Islamic perspective, the religion of Islam, whether in terms of tenets of faith or legislation, is said to have been completed during the lifetime of the Prophet.¹³³ Despite this, this teaching is thought to have lived on after his death, being preserved in the practice and teachings of his Companions and their Successors, until the Islamic tradition was formalised and codified in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries. Nevertheless, this tradition, during this period and up until the present day, has had an ethos of informed interpretation and intellectual enquiry. Moreover, Islamic history bears the names of a multitude of theologians, exegetes and jurists who enhanced and enriched this tradition. It is suggested here that the field of *tazkiyat al-nafs* was no different and in the same way that there were jurists (*fuqahā'*) capable of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) known as *mujtahids* in the field of jurisprudence, outstanding exegetes (*mufasssirūn*) in the field of Qur'ānic interpretation (*tafsīr*) and exemplary intellectuals in the field of *ḥadīth* (*muḥaddithūn*); there were also exceptional and erudite scholars of *tazkiyat al-nafs*.

One may posit that Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī was one such scholar and, furthermore, one may also suggest that he and his works are a case study of how the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* may be implemented. Therefore, the final chapter will discuss al-Muḥāsibī's methodology of *tazkiyat al-nafs* in light of the understanding of this concept within the context of the current chapter.

Notes

- 1 See Ibn 'Abbād, Ismā'īl, *al-Muḥīṭ fī 'l-Luḡha*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan Āla Yāsīn, 8 vols. (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1994), vol. 6, p. 300; Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mar'ashlī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1997), vol. 2, p. 1695; Muḥammad b. Mukram Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, ed. Amīn Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb and Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq al-'Ubaydī, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1999), vol. 6, p. 64; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Fayyūmī al-Muqri', *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, ed. Yūsuf al-Shaykh Muḥammad, 2nd edn (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 1997), p. 133; Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā, Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt, 'Abd al-Qādir Ḥāmid and Muḥammad 'Alī al-Najjār (eds.), *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, 2nd edn, 2 parts in 1 vol. (Istanbul: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, n.d.), p. 396; Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1992), p. 273; and Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1867), vol. 2, p. 1240.
- 2 Literally, to attribute 'purity' and 'excellence' to one's self.
- 3 For example, a letter of recommendation or reference is often termed *risāla tazki'iyya*.

- 4 Ibn 'Abbād, *al-Muḥīṭ fī 'l-Lughā*, vol. 6, p. 300; al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 2, p. 1695; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 6, pp. 64–5; al-Muqri', *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, p. 133; Muṣṭafā *et al.* (eds.), *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, pp. 396–7; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, p. 273; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2, pp. 1240–1.
- 5 Ibn 'Abbād, *al-Muḥīṭ fī 'l-Lughā*, vol. 8, p. 341; al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1, p. 790; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, pp. 233–4; al-Muqri', *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, p. 318; Muṣṭafā *et al.* (eds.), *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, p. 940; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, p. 672; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2827.
- 6 It has also been explained that this is why women who experience blood flows as a result of post-natal bleeding are termed *al-nufasā'*, which is derived from the same root as *nafs*. See al-Muqri', *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, p. 317.
- 7 Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1, p. 790; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, pp. 234–5; al-Muqri', *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, pp. 317–18; Muṣṭafā *et al.* (eds.), *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, p. 940; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, p. 672; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2828.
- 8 In Islamic theology it is actually an angel – the Angel of Death (*Malak al-Mawt*) – who takes the *nafs* but the command itself comes from God.
- 9 See Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, p. 234; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, p. 672; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2827.
- 10 Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1, p. 790; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2827.
- 11 Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1, p. 790; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, p. 235; Muṣṭafā *et al.* (eds.), *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, p. 940; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, p. 672; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, pp. 2827–8.
- 12 Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, pp. 234–5; al-Muqri', *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, p. 318; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, p. 672; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2828.
- 13 This may also be indicative of the positive human qualities and virtues that a person may develop if the soul is nurtured in the correct manner.
- 14 Ibn 'Abbād, *al-Muḥīṭ fī 'l-Lughā*, vol. 8, p. 341; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, pp. 234–5; and Muṣṭafā *et al.* (eds.), *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, p. 940.
- 15 Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1, 790; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, p. 235; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2828.
- 16 Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1, p. 790; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, p. 234; and cf. Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 337–8; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī, 4th edn, 20 parts in 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 2001), vol. 4, pp. 60–1; and Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 3rd edn, 13 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), vol. 3, pp. 229 and 231.
- 17 This is the explanation given in the lexical sources and although it is a possible interpretation, it should also be noted that the works of exegesis provide long discussions as to the meaning of this verse. See Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, p. 234; Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2828; and cf. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 3, p. 295; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 12, pp. 291–2; and al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, pp. 356–8.
- 18 This particular rendering seems to be appropriate to the general context of the verse, which ends, 'Indeed, You are the Knower of the unseen (*innaka anta 'Allām al-Ghuyūb*)'. See Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, p. 234; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2827.
- 19 Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1, p. 790; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14, p. 234; Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2827; and cf. al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 6, p. 347; and al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, pp. 138–9.

- 20 It may well be that these could be negative qualities which manifest themselves in the soul if it is not disciplined in the correct manner.
- 21 Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1, p. 790; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. 14, p. 235; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2828.
- 22 Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1, p. 790; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. 14, p. 238; Muṣṭafā *et al.* (eds.), *al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ*, p. 940; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2828.
- 23 See al-Zurqānī, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīm, *Manāhil al-‘Urfān fī Ulūm al-Qur‘ān*, ed. Amīn Sulaymān al-Kurdī, 2nd edn, 2 vols. in one book (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1997), pp. 16–18.
- 24 The current section is a revised version of a separate, previously published work. See Gavin Picken, ‘Tazkiyat al-nafs: the Qur’anic paradigm’, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, 7 (2, October 2005): 101–27.
- 25 The word *nafs* here could have the any of the following meanings: ‘[from a single] soul, person, human being . . .’ and refers to the first created man and prophet Ādam. This is significant in itself as in the Islamic tradition God created Ādam as a ‘single *nafs*’ and then God created his mate from this single *nafs*; consequently, through a normal procreative process many *nafs* were produced from a single lineage. Therefore, it is also logical that since the source of humanity is a single *nafs*, each of the individual human beings who followed would share some form of that humanity and certain qualities, which would be common to all. See Qur‘ān (4: 1), (7: 189), (39: 6) and (6: 98), al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, vol. 3, pp. 565–6; Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘Azīm*, 4 vols. (Cairo, Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1988), vol. 1, p. 424; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li Ahkām al-Qur‘ān*, vol. 5, pp. 5–6; Muḥammad b. ‘Umar [Fakhr al-Dīn] al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr aw Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 32 vols. in 16 books (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2000), vol. 9, pp. 128–31; and Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘Azīm wa ‘l-Saba‘ al-Mathānī*, ed. ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Bārī ‘Atīyya, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2001), vol. 2, pp. 390–2.
- 26 Also see the following verses: (6: 98), (7: 189), (31: 28) and (39: 6).
- 27 The forms quoted in the Qur‘ān other than form II include the form I of the verb ‘to purify’ (*zakā*) in the past tense (23: 21) and it is used to indicate that it is God who purifies the human being and that this is from His bounty upon them. The form V derivative, also meaning ‘to purify’ in both the past tense (*tazakkā*) and in the present tense (*yatazakkā*), is also used, (20: 76), (35: 18), (79: 18), (87: 14) and (35: 18) and (92: 18) respectively, and alludes to the human being taking the initiative to purify himself from the ‘filth’ of disbelief (*kufr*), polytheism (*shirk*), ignorance (*jaḥl*) and sin (*dhanb*). It should also be noted that this derivative also exists in a condensed form (*yazzakkā*) where the *tā* has been merged (*idghām*) as found in verses (80: 3) and (80: 7), with a similar connotation. Also, the superlative (*azkā*) is found on four occasions (2: 232), (18: 19), (24: 28) and (24: 30) with the implication of being ‘purer’ or more ‘pure’.
- The adjectival derivative is also used in both its masculine (*zakī*) and feminine (*zakiyya*) forms in verses (19: 19) and (18: 74) respectively, again with a similar connotation of ‘purity’ or ‘innocence’ and in fact the feminine form, i.e. (18: 74), being used in conjunction with the word *nafs*.
- In addition, the derived noun ‘*zakāt*’ used as Islam’s monetary duty can be found in 32 verses in various places.
- See Muḥammad Fu‘ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu‘jam al-Mufahras li ‘l-Qur‘ān al-‘Azīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1996), pp. 406–7; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Naḥḥās, *I‘rāb al-Qur‘ān*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Khalīl Ibrāhīm, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2001), vol. 5, pp. 94–5; and Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur‘ān* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 1325–7.
- 28 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, vol. 4, pp. 129–31 and vol. 11, pp. 529–30; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘Azīm*, vol. 1, pp. 484–5 and vol. 4, pp. 257–9; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘*

- li *Ahkām al-Qurʿān*, vol. 5, pp. 236–8 and vol. 17, pp. 93–8; al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, vol. 10, pp. 101–2 and vol. 29, pp. 9–10; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 3, p. 53 and vol. 14, pp. 63–4.
- 29 The verse actually reads, ‘... and God will not be unjust [even the amount of a] *fatīlā*’, the *fatīlā* being the delicate fibre-like material that covers the depression in the centre of a date stone. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 4, pp. 131–3; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿAẓīm*, vol. 1, p. 485; al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Ahkām al-Qurʿān*, vol. 5, p. 238; al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, vol. 10, p. 102; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 3, p. 53.
- 30 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 4, pp. 129–31, vol. 9, p. 288, vol. 2, pp. 94–5 and vol. 3, pp. 318–21; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿAẓīm*, vol. 1, pp. 484–5, vol. 3, pp. 266–7, vol. 1, pp. 195–6 and vol. 1, pp. 354–5; al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Ahkām al-Qurʿān*, vol. 5, pp. 236–8, vol. 12, pp. 175–85 and vol. 2, pp. 230–1; al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, vol. 10, pp. 101–2, vol. 23, pp. 161–2, vol. 5, pp. 23–5 and vol. 8, pp. 91–4; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 3, p. 53, vol. 1, p. 441 and vol. 2, pp. 196–7; and Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, ed. Muḥammad b. Saʿīd al-Qaḥṭānī (Riyadh: Dār al-Muslim, 1994), pp. 41–2.
- 31 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 606–8, vol. 2, pp. 39–40, vol. 3, pp. 505–6 and vol. 12, pp. 88–9; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿAẓīm*, vol. 1, pp. 175, 186 and 396–401 and vol. 4, p. 363; al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Ahkām al-Qurʿān*, vol. 2, pp. 129–30 and 166, vol. 4, pp. 256–7 and vol. 18, pp. 81–2; al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, vol. 4, pp. 59–62 and 128–30, vol. 9, pp. 64–6 and vol. 30, pp. 4–5; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 1, pp. 384–5 and 416–17, vol. 2, pp. 324–6 and vol. 14, p. 288.
- 32 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 6, pp. 463–5; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿAẓīm*, vol. 2, p. 103; al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Ahkām al-Qurʿān*, vol. 8, pp. 223–7; al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, vol. 16, pp. 140–6; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 6, pp. 14–15; and Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, pp. 50–1.
- 33 See ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-Mufahras*, pp. 803–7; and Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qurʿān*, pp. 824–30.
- 34 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 5, pp. 270–1; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿAẓīm*, vol. 2, pp. 149–50; al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Ahkām al-Qurʿān*, vol. 7, pp. 37–9; al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, vol. 16, pp. 69–71; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 4, pp. 211–12.
- 35 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 10, pp. 221–2; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿAẓīm*, vol. 3, p. 435; al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Ahkām al-Qurʿān*, vol. 14, p. 72; al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, vol. 25, p. 138; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 11, pp. 99–100.
- 36 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 9, pp. 501–2; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿAẓīm*, vol. 3, p. 345; al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Ahkām al-Qurʿān*, vol. 13, p. 148; al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, vol. 24, p. 158; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 10, pp. 164–5.
- 37 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 6, pp. 165–7, vol. 7, pp. 264–7 and vol. 11, pp. 414–15; al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Ahkām al-Qurʿān*, vol. 17, p. 11; and al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, vol. 15, pp. 86–9, and vol. 27, p. 140.
- 38 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 12, pp. 325–9 and 440; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿAẓīm*, vol. 4, pp. 224–6, 447–9 and 470; al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Ahkām al-Qurʿān*, vol. 19, pp. 83–4 and 180–1; al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, vol. 30, pp. 189–91 and vol. 31, pp. 47–8; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 13, p. 328, and vol. 15, pp. 151–2 and 237–8.
- 39 It is also worth mentioning that many of the linguistic usages of the term *nafs*, particularly the more obscure usages, are entirely absent from the Qurʿān.
- 40 See Qurʿān (67: 2).
- 41 It should be also noted that in addition to the complete retaining of the *nafs* at death, the *nafs* is partially retained during sleep where it may be returned to the body in which life continues or retained completely, in which case death results. See Qurʿān verse (39: 42); and cf. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 14, p. 234; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāh*, p. 672; and Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2827.
- 42 Also see the following verses: (2: 87), (5: 70), (41: 31), (43: 71) and (53: 23).

- 43 This begins a series of qualities which display the duality of the *nafs* mentioned above and in verse (91: 7–8), where either quality – positive or negative – may be manifested by the *nafs*, or more commonly where one of the qualities mentioned is more apparent.
- 44 For example, see (2: 265), (4: 4), (4: 127), (18: 28), (59: 9) and (64: 16).
- 45 For example, see (2: 109).
- 46 For example, see (20: 67) and (20: 68).
- 47 For example, see (2: 21).
- 48 For example, see (4: 65) and (9: 118).
- 49 For example, see (4: 63).
- 50 These include (75: 14–15), (81: 14), (82: 4–5) and (91: 7–10).
- 51 See (2: 235) and (2: 284), (3: 153), (5: 52) and (5: 116), (12: 77) and (33: 38).
- 52 See (2: 48), (2: 233), (2: 281) and (2: 286), (3: 25), (3: 30) and (3: 165), (4: 79) and (4: 111), (6: 103), (6: 152), (6: 158) and (6: 163), (7: 42) and (7: 205), (10: 30), (10: 45), (10: 100) and (10: 108), (13: 33) and (13: 42), (14: 51), (16: 111), (17: 13–14), (20: 15), (23: 62), (32: 13), (39: 70), (40: 17), (50: 20–1), (59: 18), (65: 7), (74: 38–42) and (82: 19).
- 53 For this section see: Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*, vol. 2, p. 463; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 18, p. 126; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 7, p. 4; and Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb [Ibn al-Qayyim] al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Qutb and Walīd al-Dhikrā (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 2000), pp. 262–6.
- 54 See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*, vol. 2, p. 463; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 18, p. 126; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 7, p. 4.
- 55 Wehr, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, p. 27.
- 56 ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, al-Jurjānī, *al-Taʾrīfāt*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsil al-Sūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 2000); p. 239.
- 57 Al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, p. 263.
- 58 See al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, p. 262.
- 59 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, vol. 12, p. 327; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*, vol. 4, p. 448; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 19, p. 84; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 30, pp. 190–1; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 15, pp. 151–2; Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, p. 47; al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, pp. 261–2; and Ibn Taymiyya, *Ighāthat al-Lahfān min Maṣāyid al-Shayṭān*, ed. Muḥammad Hāmid al-Fiqī (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n. d.), vol. 1, pp. 76–8.
- 60 See al-Jurjānī, *al-Taʾrīfāt*, p. 239.
- 61 It is worthy of note that the verse itself is almost indicative of both circumstances in the worldly life and in the hereafter, as the verse mentions the Day of Judgement (*al-qiyāma*) prior to mentioning the self-reproachful soul. As such, there is a subtle indication of self-recrimination in the worldly life that is private and self-governed, whereas on the Day of Judgement, according to Muslim theology, the censuring will be imposed and extremely ‘public’.
- 62 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, p. 47; al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, p. 262; and Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*, vol. 4, p. 448.
- 63 See al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, p. 262.
- 64 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, vol. 12, pp. 580–4; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*, vol. 4, pp. 511–12; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 20, pp. 52–4; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 30, pp. 160–2; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 15, pp. 345–8; Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, p. 47; and al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, pp. 256–61.
- 65 See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, p. 883; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, vol. 12, pp. 580–1; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*, vol. 4, p. 511; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 20, pp. 52–3; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 30, pp. 160–1; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 15, p. 345.
- 66 See al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 20, pp. 52–3; and al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, pp. 256–7.

- 67 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p. 38.
- 68 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 12, pp. 581–3; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 4, p. 511; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 20, pp. 53–4; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 30, pp. 161–2; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 15, pp. 345–8; Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, p. 47; and al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, p. 256–61.
- 69 See al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, p. 259.
- 70 This is said to be one of the main differences between the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*) and the self-reproaching soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*); whereas the former has gained mastery over its appetites and desires through extreme effort, strong conviction and imposing punitive measures, the latter remains somewhat disposed to the soul inclined to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū*), despite its best efforts to overcome it. See al-Jawziyya, *al-Rūḥ*, pp. 265–6.
- 71 Al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta'rifāt*, p. 239.
- 72 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 12, pp. 601–2; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 4, pp. 517–18; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 20, p. 68; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 31, p. 174; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 15, p. 360.
- 73 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, pp. 38–9.
- 74 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 12, pp. 601–2; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 4, p. 517; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 20, pp. 68–9; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 31, p. 175; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 15, p. 360–1.
- 75 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 4, p. 517.
- 76 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 12, pp. 601–3; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 4, p. 517; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 20, pp. 68–9; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 31, p. 175; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, ed. by 'Atīyya, vol. 15, p. 360.
- 77 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 12, pp. 603–4; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 4, p. 517; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 20, pp. 69–70; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 31, pp. 175–6; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 15, pp. 361–2.
- 78 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 12, p. 603; and al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 15, pp. 361–2.
- 79 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, p. 38; and Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 4, p. 517.
- 80 It should be noted that this latter rendering is the preference of Ibn Taymiyya who also suggests that the introduction of the word 'qad' at the beginning of this verse and the one following it changes the suggested meaning of the verse from merely informing (*khabar*) to being an imperative (*amr*) and thus, the implications alluded to in the verses are indeed incumbent duties upon the faithful. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, pp. 37–42.
- 81 See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 12, pp. 603–4; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 4, p. 517; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 20, pp. 69–70; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 31, pp. 175–6; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 15, pp. 361–2; and Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, p. 378.
- 82 See al-Jawziyya, Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb [Ibn al-Qayyim], *al-Jawāb al-Kāfi li man Sa'ala an al-Dawā' al-Shāfi* (Beirut: Dār al-Nadwa al-Ḥadītha, 1985), p. 95.
- 83 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, p. 43.
- 84 See Ibrāhīm al-Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān wa I'rābuhu* (Beirut: Ālam al-Kitāb, 1988), vol. 5, p. 332.
- 85 In addition, there will also be some reference to the narrations transmitted from Prophetic Companions and their Successors, commonly known as *athar* (pl. *āthār*), if deemed appropriate.

- 86 See Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad [Abū Ḥamid] al-Ghazzālī, *al-Mustaṣfā min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*, ed. Muḥammad Sulaymān al-Ashqar, 2 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1997), vol. 2, pp. 217–34; 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Āmidī, *al-Ihkām fī Uṣūl al-Ahkām*, ed. Sayyid al-Jamīlī, 3rd edn, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 223–41; and Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'a*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir al-Fāḍilī, 4 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 2000), vol. 4, pp. 5–52.
- 87 See Sulaymān b. Aḥmad b. Ayyūb al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Ṣaghīr*, ed. Muḥammad Shakūr Maḥmūd al-Ḥājj Amrīr, 2 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1985), vol. 1, p. 334; Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), vol. 4, p. 161; Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), vol. 3, pp. 31–2; and Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā' al-Rijāl*, ed. Bashshār Awād Ma'rūf, 8 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1998), vol. 4, p. 293.
- 88 See Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥa*, 2nd edn (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1979), no. 1046.
- 89 After a prolonged discussion from a variety of sources regarding this *ḥadīth*'s chain of narrators, Zarabozo concludes the lack of authenticity of the narration. See Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul*, pp. 73–4.
- 90 It is worth mentioning, however, that the meaning of this *ḥadīth* is contained in another famous authentic narration known as *ḥadīth Jibrīl*, where the Prophet is questioned by the angel Gabriel, 'And inform me of spiritual perfection (*iḥsān*)', to which he replies, 'It is to worship God as if you see Him [and know] that if you do not see Him, He sees you'. See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, pp. 26–7.
- 91 See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p. 1181; Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī al-Ṣuḡhrā* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1999), p. 743; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal* (Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkār al-Duwaliyya, 1998), pp. 1412–13; and Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawawī*, 18 vols., in 8 books (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995), vol. 17, p. 34. It is also worth mentioning that Ibn Kathīr relates similar narrations regarding the exegesis of verse (91: 8) mentioned above in the Qur'ān section, thus creating the link between Islam's primary text and the *sunna* of its Prophet. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 4, pp. 517–18.
- 92 It should also be noted that al-Nawawī (d. 626/1277) considers the meaning not to be preferential but rather, 'It [the soul] has no purifier (*muzakkī*) except You'. Al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawawī*, vol. 17, p. 34.
- 93 See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p. 1181; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī al-Ṣuḡhrā*, p. 743; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, pp. 1412–13; Muḥammad [Ibn Ḥibbān] al-Tamīmī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān*, 2nd edn, 18 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1993), vol. 3, p. 293; and al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawawī*, vol. 17, p. 34.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 See 'Alī b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad [Ibn Abū 'l-'Izz] al-Ḥanafī, *Sharḥ al-Taḥāwīyya fī 'l-'Aqīda al-Salafīyya*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr (Riyadh: Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya wa 'l-Awqāf wa 'l-Da'wa wa 'l-Irshād, 1997), p. 356.
- 96 For this particular phraseology and variations of it see Sulaymān b. al-Ash'ath (Abū Dāwūd) Sijjīstānī, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1999), pp. 165–6 and 715; Muḥammad b. 'Isā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1999), pp. 266–7; Muḥammad b. Yazīd (Ibn Mājah) al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1999), p. 271; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī al-Ṣuḡhrā*, pp. 198–9; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, p. 252; it is also worth mentioning that al-Albānī (d. 1420/2000) considers both the narrations in *Sunan Abū Dāwūd* to be inauthentic (*ḍa'īf*) but since the concept of the evil of the soul (*sharr al-nafs*) is established in the remaining transmissions it can be considered to be an authentic concept. See Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *ḍa'īf Sunan Abū Dāwūd* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1991), pp. 108 and 503.

- 97 See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, pp. 183 and 545; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p. 316; Sijistānī, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, p. 195; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī al-Ṣughrā*, p. 231; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, p. 553; Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq [Ibn Khuzayma] al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Khuzayma*, 4 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1970), vol. 2, p. 174; al-Tamīmī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, vol. 6, p. 293; Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad [Ibn Ḥajar] al-'Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Imām Abī 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Shaybat al-Ḥamd, 13 vols. (Riyadh: n. pub., 2001), vol. 3, pp. 30–4; and al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawawī*, vol. 6, pp. 58–9.
- 98 See al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawawī*, vol. 6, pp. 58–9.
- 99 See al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, pp. 620–1; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, p. 643–4; and cf. Qur'an (38: 58).
- 100 In some narrations, 'The religious warrior (*al-mujāhid*) is the one who struggles against his soul in the obedience of God, the Mighty and Exalted'. See 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Ibn Abū al-Dunyā, *Muḥāsabat al-Nafs*, ed. Abū Ḥatīm 'Abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thiqāfiyya, 1988), p. 72; 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Ibn Abū al-Dunyā, *Muḥāsabat al-Nafs wa 'l-Izrā' 'Alayhā*, ed. Muṣṭafā b. 'Alī b. 'Iwaḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1986), pp. 102–3; al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, p. 392; and Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, p. 1795.
- 101 See Ibn Abū al-Dunyā, *Muḥāsabat al-Nafs*, ed. al-Sharqāwī, p. 47; and Ibn Abū al-Dunyā, *Muḥāsabat al-Nafs wa 'l-Izrā' 'Alayhā*, ed. 'Iwaḍ, p. 72.
- 102 See Ibn Abū al-Dunyā, *Muḥāsabat al-Nafs*, ed. al-Sharqāwī, p. 33; and Ibn Abū al-Dunyā, *Muḥāsabat al-Nafs wa 'l-Izrā' 'Alayhā*, ed. 'Iwaḍ, p. 22.
- 103 See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, p. 318; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, p. 6761; al-Tamīmī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, vol. 14, p. 118; and al-'Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, ed. Shaybat al-Ḥamd, vol. 4, pp. 264–6.
- 104 See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, p. 1119; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p. 422; al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, p. 541; al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, p. 604; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, p. 567; al-Tamīmī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, vol. 14, p. 101; al-'Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, ed. Shaybat al-Ḥamd, vol. 11, pp. 276–7; and al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawawī*, vol. 7, p. 125.
- 105 See al-'Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, ed. Shaybat al-Ḥamd, vol. 11, p. 277; and al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawawī*, vol. 7, p. 125.
- 106 Al-'Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, ed. Shaybat al-Ḥamd, vol. 11, p. 277.
- 107 See Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Āsimī (Riyadh: al-Ri'āsa al-'Āmma li Shu'ūn al-Ḥaramayn al-Sharīfayn, 1984), vol. 10, pp. 97–8.
- 108 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, pp. 42–3.
- 109 Ibid., p. 48.
- 110 Amin Ahsan Islahi, *Self Purification and Development* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2000), pp. 19–20.
- 111 Ibid., p. 21.
- 112 Ibid., p. 23.
- 113 Ibid., pp. 23–4.
- 114 Ibid., p. 25. Islahi alludes to the Ancient Greek aphorism, 'γνώθι σεαυτόν', which was said to be inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. See H. W. Parke and D. E. W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), vol. 1, p. 389.
- 115 Used in the context of the terminology of the philosophers being the opposite of a substance (*jawhar*).
- 116 Al-Ḥanafī, *Sharḥ al-Taḥāwīyya fī 'l-'Aqīda al-Salafīyya*, ed. Shākir, pp. 384–88.
- 117 Al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta'rifāt*, p. 239.
- 118 Muḥammad b. 'Alī [al-Ḥakīm] al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-Uṣūl* (Istanbul: n. pub., 1876), p. 201; and al-Najjār, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Nafsī*, p. 42.

- 119 See Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz, *Kitāb al-Ṣidq*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n. d.), pp. 35–7 and al-Kharrāz, *Kitāb al-Ṣidq*, ed. and trans. A. J. Arberry, as *The Book of Truthfulness* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 12–13 [Arabic], p. 10 [English].
- 120 ʿAbd al-Qāhir b. ʿAbd Allāh [sic. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd Allāh] al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb ʿAwārif al-Maʿārif*, 2nd edn (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1984), p. 453.
- 121 Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb [Ibn al-Qayyim] al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-Sālikīn bayn Manāzil ʿIyyāka Naʿbud wa Iyyāka Nastaʿīn*, ed. Muḥammad al-Muʿtaṣim bi Allāh al-Baghdādī, 4th edn, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1997), vol. 2, p. 299.
- 122 Al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1404) says it is related by al-Bayhaqī on the authority of Ibn al-ʿAbbās. However, its chain of transmission contains Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ghazwān, who was a *ḥadīth* forger and hence the narration is rejected. See Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad [Abū Ḥāmid] al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), vol. 3, p. 4.
- 123 Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 4–5.
- 124 Anas Aḥmad Karzūn, *Minhaj al-Islām fī Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1997), vol. 1, p. 16.
- 125 Al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, vol. 2, p. 300.
- 126 Ḥawwā, Saʿīd, *al-Mustakḥlaṣ fī Tazkiyat al-Anfus*, 4th edn (Cairo: Dār al-Islām, 1988), p. 3.
- 127 ʿUmar Sulaymān al-Ashqar, *Manhaj al-Islām fī Tazkiyat al-Nafs* (Amman: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1992), pp. 19–20.
- 128 Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir abū Fāris, *Tazkiyat al-Nafs* (ʿAmmān: Dār al-Furqān, 2000), pp. 17–18.
- 129 Karzūn, *Manhaj al-Islām fī Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, vol. 1, p. 12.
- 130 Āl ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, *Maʿālim fī ʿl-Sulūk wa Tazkiyat al-Nufūs*, p. 57.
- 131 Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul*, pp. 76–7.
- 132 For examples see Picken, *Tazkiyat al-nafs*, pp. 120–3, n. 4.
- 133 See Qurʾan verse (5: 3).

5 Purification of the soul in the formative period

Al-Muḥāsibī's methodology of *tazkiyat al-nafs*

Since the discussion of the two major aspects of this book, namely the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* in Islam and the life and works of al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, have now been completed it is appropriate in this final chapter to discuss the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* from al-Muḥāsibī's perspective, through the medium of his works. In this sense the current chapter will follow a similar structure to that of Chapter 4 where both the terms *tazkiyat* and *nafs* were discussed in detail. The major emphasis, however, will be on comparing the teachings of al-Muḥāsibī with the ideas presented in both the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, since, in terms of language, it is not expected that al-Muḥāsibī's usage of the Arabic language would differ greatly and, similarly, much of what has been presented from the perspective of Muslim scholarship occurred in the post-al-Muḥāsibī period.

Consequently, the current chapter will examine the usage of the term *tazkiya* in the works of al-Muḥāsibī and its various synonyms to establish this scholar's understanding and usage of the term. Therefore, the analysis here will be concerned with the various facets of *tazkiyat al-nafs* within the works of al-Muḥāsibī, as well as discussing his concept of the term *nafs*; the qualities of the *nafs*; the states of the *nafs*; and the nature of the *nafs*, as presented in the extant works of this author. In addition, al-Muḥāsibī's theory and methodology of *tazkiyat al-nafs* will be examined and the salient features of his approach will be identified.

The concept of the term *tazkiya* within the works of al-Muḥāsibī

Upon surveying the works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, it is of little surprise that the compound term *tazkiyat al-nafs* is found. However, what is surprising perhaps is the fact that the incidence of this phrase is very rare, occurring only on a few occasions, and what is more surprising is that it is not used at all in the context used thus far in this exposition. Indeed, on each occasion the phrase is used in an exclusively negative context, as alluded to in both the language and Qur'ān sections of Chapter 4, meaning to indicate self-praise, this being considered a blameworthy quality. It is worth noting that al-Muḥāsibī, when discussing this concept, even uses one of the verses mentioned above, namely Qur'ān, verse (53: 32), 'And do not attribute purity to yourselves' (*wa lā tuzakkū anfusakum*), when commenting on the issue of a person attributing 'purity' and excellence to himself, particularly regarding religious

practice. Furthermore, he adds the commentary of Zayd b. Aslam (d. 136/754), who is reported to have said that the verse means, 'And do not attribute innocence to your souls'. In addition, al-Muḥāsibī himself comments in this regard saying that a person who engages in such self-praise (*zakkā nafsahu*) has indeed been afflicted with self-conceit (*al-'ujb*) and consequently does not censure his soul regarding its contradiction of the divine command, which may ultimately lead to his destruction.¹

In addition to this usage of the term *tazkiya*, other derivatives of the form II verb *zakkā*, are also found, but not in conjunction with the term *al-nafs*. Indeed, it is almost exclusively used with the term 'deed' (*'amal*), where the phrases 'pure deed' (*'amal zakkī*) and 'the deeds have been purified' (*zakkat al-a'māl/tazkū al-a'māl*) are found, seemingly indicating actions of the heart and limbs, which were performed sincerely, being free from any ulterior motive and, as such, are purely for God alone.² Although the term *tazkiya* is somewhat of a rarity in the works of al-Muḥāsibī, it is also worth noting that other synonymous terms with similar connotations of 'cleansing' and 'purification' are also found. One such word is *taṣfiya* meaning to 'clarify, rectify and purify' and being used in conjunction once more with the term righteous deeds (*a'māl al-birr*), in the sense of being purified from the influence of the soul's appetites (*shahawāt*).³ In a similar example, we also find another synonymous term to that of *tazkiya*, which is the word *yunqā'* being derived from *al-naqā'* and once again meaning 'purified and cleansed'. In this instance al-Muḥāsibī uses this phrase regarding the heart (*al-qalb*) and denotes its 'purification' from the influences of the soul (*al-nafs*), the desires (*al-hawā*) and the appetites (*al-shahawāt*).⁴

Despite this, however, by far the most commonly utilised terms synonymous with that of *tazkiya* are derivatives of the form I verb *ṭahara* and include both the form II verbal noun (*maṣdar*) *al-ṭaḥīr* and the equivalent form V conjugation *al-ṭaṭahhur*, which once again all have the connotation of 'cleansing, purging and purification'. One of these derived phrases in particular, *al-ṭahāra*, seems to indicate a highly desired state of purification as both the true believers and paradise are referred to as being 'the people of purity' (*ahl al-ṭahāra*) and 'the abode of purity' (*dār al-ṭahāra*) respectively.⁵ This term is also used for those wishing to 'purify' themselves 'before meeting their Lord' via repentance (*al-tawba*) and regret (*al-nadm*) for the defilement (*al-danas*) of every sin (*al-dhanb*), transgression (*al-ithm*) and evil deed (*al-sayyi'a*) committed by the heart and the limbs and also, by turning away from all that God hates (*al-ināba*).⁶ In fact al-Muḥāsibī considers this so important that he states:

The best and most beneficial of virtues is that you consider your soul (*nafsuka*) lesser than its true position; that your inward (*sarīra*) be better than your outward (*'alāniya*) and that you are just to people without requesting justice for yourself, as there can only be purification (*ṭaḥīr*) and then action (*'amal*) and purification is more appropriate for us than action. Purification (*ṭaḥīr*) is to move away from all evil (*al-sharr*) to the foundation upon which all good (*al-khayr*) is built, as a building may collapse but the foundations will remain

intact and equally, it is impossible that the foundations collapse and the building remains intact.⁷

Similarly, he exhorts his readers thus: ‘My brothers, scrutinise the hidden aspects of the soul and the secrets of the hearts and purify them (*taharūhā*) from enmity, envy, rancour, malice, having a bad opinion [of someone], animosity and hatred’.⁸ Therefore, we can see that even though the works of al-Muḥāsibī are not a rich source of the word *tazkiya*, they not only contain a great many synonymous terms and concepts, which are comparative to those already discussed regarding the principle of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, but also in many ways are closely identified with them.

The facets of *tazkiyat al-nafs* within the works of al-Muḥāsibī

It will be remembered from the previous chapter that from the Qur’ānic perspective the process of *tazkiya* was a multifaceted and multilayered process, involving three main elements: the divine, the prophetic and the human being. Upon surveying al-Muḥāsibī’s works, we find that there is definite reference to these three facets of *tazkiya*. Regarding the divine element of *tazkiya*, al-Muḥāsibī places so much emphasis on this that he holds the beginning of the aspirant’s path to God is that He makes him aware of the desires of his own soul, so that he is able to make it submissive to the wishes of his Lord.⁹ Even more important, however, is that al-Muḥāsibī lays great emphasis on supplicating to God (*al-du‘ā*) for His bounty and assistance in attempting to make both the soul and its desires subservient to His command.¹⁰ One of the most eloquent of examples of this is his admonition of the soul where he addresses it directly:

Woe unto you (*wayḥaki*)! Seek shelter (*ista‘īnī*) in the Most Merciful of those who are merciful and raise your complaint to the Most Generous of those who are generous! Continually seek His aid and do not become weary due to the extent of your grievance, so that perhaps He may have mercy upon your weakness and answer you. Indeed, your disaster has been magnified, your affliction intensified and your call unanswered; all of your stratagems have been undone and so there is no place to flee, no shelter [to be sought], no escape [from God’s anger] and no saviour except your Lord.¹¹

Therefore, it is clear to see that al-Muḥāsibī does not underestimate the divine element in the process of *tazkiya* but rather apports it a vital role. The seeking of God’s aid is not only restricted to the soul, however, but also to the negative effect that the Devil has on it:

And flee to God the Exalted and seek shelter in Him regarding all of your actions and demonstrate your poverty, your desperate need and your refuge in Him, as you have no stratagem [to save you] and there is no power save through Him. And ask God the Exalted to give you victory over him [Satan] through striving and finding pleasure in weeping and humility, by day and by

night, secretly and openly, privately and publicly, until combating your soul becomes insignificant in your eyes because of your knowledge of your adversary [i.e. Satan] and due to God granting you success, as indeed he [i.e. Satan] is the enemy of your Lord.¹²

Thus, reliance on God and seeking his assistance (*al-isti'āna/al-istghātha*) is seemingly a recurrent theme within al-Muḥāsibī's works as he continuously exhorts his readers to undertake this vital form of worship.¹³ From these sample texts alone it becomes clear that al-Muḥāsibī was not only aware of this divine contribution to the process of purification but also gave it precedence when approaching the topic of reforming the soul. In this regard he was clearly of the opinion that the disciplining of the *nafs* would not take place, first of all, if God did not will it and grant it and, secondly, if the human exponent of *tazkiya* did not put his complete trust in his Lord and seek His aid upon such a path. Thus, we can conclude that al-Muḥāsibī was entirely aware of the Qur'ānic perspective on this issue, as his perspective is congruent with the concepts seen in the previous chapter.

We also find a number of references in the works of al-Muḥāsibī regarding the second element of the process of purification, i.e. the role of divinely chosen messengers sent with revelation to guide aspirants on the path to God. The first of these examples was seen in the previous discussion concerning the divine element as we saw that al-Muḥāsibī consistently encourages the seeking of God's help in purifying the soul via supplication – an act that was equally encouraged by the Prophet. Similarly, it was also seen while discussing al-Muḥāsibī's scholarly background that he was known for his transmission of *ḥadīth* and upon examining his works we find that this was far from being a purely academic exercise, as he utilises such narrations to add authenticity to the discussion and, more importantly, to act as a source of guidance for his readers.¹⁴

Indeed, al-Muḥāsibī encourages the examination and study of the knowledge associated with the narrations of the Prophet, since this has a direct effect on the soul, being an alternative to the mundane, worldly and quite often sinful discourse offered by the rest of humankind.¹⁵ His encouragement does not stop there, however, as he also enjoins strict adherence to the Prophetic practice (*ittibā'*), this being the criterion with which all actions should be judged.¹⁶ In this regard he provides his own understanding of the term '*sunna*':

As for being correct (*al-ṣawāb*) it is the *sunna*; and by the *sunna* I do not mean excessive prayer, fasting or charity, nor [do I mean by the *sunna*] the intellect or understanding, nor peculiar wisdom, nor eloquence or admonition but rather, strict adherence and submission to the book of God and the practice of his Prophet and the rightly guided imams who came after him.¹⁷

Moreover, the process of *tazkiya* by virtue of prophetic guidance is not only restricted to adherence to the Prophetic practice but al-Muḥāsibī also introduces a second concept in this regard, which may be termed 'emulation of the Prophet' (*al-ta'assī bi 'l-rasūl*). This emulation is not merely a 'blind following' and

differs from strict adherence in the sense that al-Muḥāsibī intends that one should emulate the Prophet in his every action, not simply because one is commanded to do so but rather out of love and reverence for him. This may be considered a particularly useful device in cleansing the soul as someone who undertakes such emulation prefers the actions, motives and practice of the Prophet to that of his own and, as such, leaves his *nafs* no portion from its needs, whims and desires. Furthermore, al-Muḥāsibī considers this to be the characteristic of the knowledgeable, spiritual guide and it is such people who should be followed and indeed he quotes this as being one of the attributes of the scholars of the hereafter (*'ulamā' al-ākhirah*), whom he sought in his youth and whom he eventually found.¹⁸ Thus once again it would seem that al-Muḥāsibī is following a similar methodology regarding this facet of *tazkiya* as that seen previously and in this respect is very much within the Islamic paradigm.

This leaves the final facet of the process of *tazkiya*, namely the human being as the individual who is personally responsible for undertaking the task of purification by employing the above-mentioned facets and by exerting his own efforts, in subjecting the negative qualities of his soul and enhancing its positive potentiality. When surveying the works of al-Muḥāsibī one finds that this is by far the most important feature of *tazkiyat al-nafs* from his perspective. As such, his works have left a rich and insightful account of the human condition and, rather than discuss this important facet of purification at this juncture, it will remain to be seen in the coming sections.

The concept of the term *nafs* within the works of al-Muḥāsibī

It was noted previously that the most common synonymous term associated with the term *nafs* was the word *rūḥ*, which may be commonly referred to as 'the soul' in English. Since the term *rūḥ* is commonly associated with death, as this occurs when the *rūḥ* exits the body, it is little surprise that al-Muḥāsibī utilises this term in exactly the same context.¹⁹ We find that when discussing the state of an immoral person, al-Muḥāsibī describes such a person thus: 'Indeed some of them wish that their souls would never be extracted (*yunzi 'a nafsuhu*)' and similarly, '... and then he will know that his weakness will not save him from the punishment of God but unfortunately his soul will be extracted (*tanzi 'u nafsahu*) and then he will ask to return'.²⁰ Therefore, it is easy to see from these two examples that al-Muḥāsibī uses the term *nafs* to mean its synonym *rūḥ* in exactly the same way that we have seen it used previously.

Further evidence of this is that al-Muḥāsibī also comments on verse (39: 42) and quotes Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767) in this regard who is reported to have said:

The *rūḥ* and *nafs* are in the body of a person, being separated by something resembling a ray of sunlight. So if God takes the *nafs* [during sleep], the *rūḥ* remains in the body but if God seizes the *nafs* the *rūḥ* will also exit the body and if He doesn't cause the person's death, He will return the *nafs* to its place before the person awakes.²¹

Al-Muḥāsibī then comments, ‘And Ibn al-‘Abbās made a similar comment except that he termed the *nafs* the intellect (*al-‘aql*)’.²² It is interesting to note here that al-Muḥāsibī quotes a text which differentiates between the *rūḥ* and *nafs* but at the same time demonstrates their intrinsic link with each other. Similarly, he follows up this quotation with another explanatory comment from the famous companion and exegete ‘Abd Allāh b. al-‘Abbās, which we have also already seen regarding the same verse. Although less frequent than the usage of the term *nafs* to mean *rūḥ*, we can also locate in the works of al-Muḥāsibī the use of the word *nafs* meaning the human being’s power of understanding (*al-quwā al-mufakkira*), as seen in verse (27: 14) and characterised by the phrase, ‘. . . and their souls were convinced of it (*wa istayqanathā anfusuhum*) . . .’. The use of this concept is limited and, indeed, the exact phraseology differs slightly, being a derivative of the same verb, but nevertheless the concept remains intact, as al-Muḥāsibī comments regarding the self-deluded person (*al-muḡtarr*) concerning the way in which he has deceived himself: ‘Indeed, within his own soul he is absolutely convinced (*mūqin*)’.²³

Another connotation of the term *nafs* meaning the heart (*al-qalb*) is comparatively rare, but nevertheless remains present in the works of al-Muḥāsibī. During the course of al-Muḥāsibī’s discussion concerning the torments and agonies in the hereafter in his work *al-Tawahhum*, the following phrase is repeated twice, ‘. . . so your “*nafs*” became constricted in your chest (*fa dāqat nafsuka fī ṣadrika*) . . .’.²⁴ Since the *nafs* with its other usages mentioned here is not usually associated with a specific locale within the body and, conversely, the position of the heart is exclusively linked to the chest, we can safely assume that Muḥāsibī’s usage of the term *nafs* in this context means the heart (*al-qalb*).

In addition, the implication of the *nafs* meaning ‘the inclination to good and evil’ (*quwā al-khayr wa ‘l-sharr*) and hence, the duality of the *nafs*, is also tangible within the works of al-Muḥāsibī. Since this dual potentiality of the soul will be discussed in more detail in a later section, only a minimal exposition will suffice here. In one such example of this, al-Muḥāsibī speaks in broad terms stating, ‘And know that you have been created with the innate quality of good and evil (*maṭbū ‘tibā ‘hasana wa sayyi‘a*)’ and further gives a specific example of this saying, ‘. . . all of mankind have been created with a natural disposition (*tubi ‘a ‘alā*) to heedlessness (*al-ghafla*) and attentiveness (*al-tayaqquḡ*) . . .’.²⁵

Thus, from these two quotes it is easy to see that al-Muḥāsibī understood the very nature of the *nafs* to have a dual potentiality to both good and evil in the very broad sense and to particular manifestations of these in the specific sense. Indeed, his use of language is equally interesting here, as al-Muḥāsibī uses derivatives of the verb *ṭaba‘a* as if to indicate that these dual qualities are ‘imprinted’ and ‘stamped’ upon the soul and, as such, part of the very make-up of human nature. Furthermore, one may attain knowledge and insight into the potential duality of the *nafs*, as al-Muḥāsibī also states, ‘And know that whoever was from the people of solicitude with his soul (*ahl al-‘ināya bi nafsihi*) and had been granted comprehension of experience, then he has reached the understanding of good and evil (*al-khayr wa ‘l-sharr*) . . .’.²⁶ Therefore, al-Muḥāsibī maintains that, through having care and concern for the soul and understanding of its varying experiences

and conditions, one may be able to differentiate between the two potentialities that exist within it and consequently act appropriately.

As for the final connotation of the *nafs* meaning the human being (*al-insān*), then this is equally well evidenced in the works of al-Muḥāsibī, so much so that one may even be surprised by the extent of the physicality of the description of the *nafs*, since it is described variously as having a body (*jism*); tongue (*lisān*); tears (*dumūʿ*); speech (*luḡẓ*); silence (*sukūt*); nourishment (*ghidhāʿ*) and nakedness (*ʿawra*). This notion is extended even further as al-Muḥāsibī also attributes to the *nafs* a heart (*qalb*), intellect (*ʿaql*), a conscience (*ḍamīr*) and even a soul (*nafs*).²⁷ Thus, we may also safely assume that, bearing in mind both the physical ‘exoteric’ and the hidden ‘esoteric’ aspects of the *nafs* as described in his works, al-Muḥāsibī clearly means the human being as a whole in his every attribute.²⁸

The qualities of the *nafs* within the works of al-Muḥāsibī

In addition to the various concepts of the *nafs* that can be identified within the Qurʾān as discussed in the previous chapter, it was also seen that there are a variety of qualities and attributes which can also be identified with the human soul. When examining the works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, we can also identify the vast majority of these qualities and, as such, we can see that the *nafs*: experiences death²⁹; has perceptive faculties³⁰; has needs (*al-ḥājāt/al-maṭālib*)³¹; experiences difficulty and hardship (*al-mashaqqa*)³²; can exhibit generosity (*al-jūd*) and miserliness (*al-shuḥḥ*)³³; experiences anxiety (*al-dīq*) and distress (*al-ḥaraj*) as well as relaxation (*al-ittisāʿ*) and tranquillity (*al-inshirāḥ*)³⁴; is affected by eloquent speech (*al-taʿaththur biʾl-qawl al-balīgh*)³⁵; has the ability to comprehend (*al-idrāk*)³⁶ and the ability to conceal feelings³⁷; all these are observed in the works of our author to a greater or lesser degree. Similarly, the qualities of the *nafs* specifically seen in the *ḥadīth* literature, such as wealth of the soul (*ghinā al-nafs*)³⁸ and the good soul (*al-nafs al-ṭayyiba*) *vis-à-vis* the despicable soul (*al-nafs al-khabītha*),³⁹ are also identifiable within the discussions provided by al-Muḥāsibī.

Bearing in mind the great deal of attention al-Muḥāsibī affords to the negative attributes of the *nafs*, it is little wonder that in his exposition such qualities are mentioned more frequently, and good examples of these are envy and jealousy (*al-ḥasad*)⁴⁰ and conceit (*al-kibr*).⁴¹ In addition, it is also worthy of note that the more ‘positive’ qualities of regret (*al-nadm*), grief (*al-taḥassur*)⁴² and fear (*al-khawf*)⁴³ are equally well represented. Despite this, however, most of the qualities of the *nafs* mentioned thus far are relatively rare in the works of al-Muḥāsibī and so will not be discussed at length here. Conversely, there are qualities of the *nafs* in the works of al-Muḥāsibī such as the desires (*al-hawā*) and appetites (*al-shahawāt*) that are continuously reiterated throughout and therefore, due to their importance, the discussion of the qualities of the *nafs* within this section will concentrate on these attributes of the soul.

Of the above-mentioned qualities of the *nafs*, perhaps the most commonly mentioned attribute is that of the desires (*al-hawā*) and indeed this is very much a recurrent theme within al-Muḥāsibī’s works.⁴⁴ The problematic nature of this

quality of the soul is made extremely clear in the works of al-Muḥāsibī, as it is the primary source and cause of disobedience, being the result of heedlessness, that allows the desires to flourish and ultimately cause the corruption of the worshipper's intentions, motives and deeds.⁴⁵ In this regard al-Muḥāsibī provides a working definition of the desires, which he describes as follows, 'The attachment of the soul to its appetites (*al-shahawāt*) and its inclination to ease and comfort. Thus, according to the strength of the appetites, the soul will be afflicted with weakness and then the desires (*al-hawā*) will overpower it'.⁴⁶ Consequently, such a person eventually becomes overwhelmed by his desires, becomes dependent upon them and finds pleasure in them until he is eventually consumed by them.⁴⁷ Thus, the desires are an intrinsic quality of the *nafs*:

If the truth is required of it [*al-nafs*] it prefers its desires (*hawāhā*). If the time came for its actions to be tested it clings to its desires, divesting itself of knowledge, insight, the manifest aspects of its intellect and the hidden qualities of wisdom. Thus, it withdraws [from action] due to its desires, it acts in accordance with its desires, it becomes angry for the sake of its desires and it is pleased [with something] because of its desires.⁴⁸

Moreover, every good that is lost and every mistaken or incorrect opinion leading to innovation (*al-bid'a*) is a result of desires of the soul (*hawā al-nafs*).⁴⁹ Therefore, the soul's desires are pivotal in the growth and production of a number of negative potentialities within it. For example, when asked regarding the esoteric aspects of the world (*bāṭin al-dunyā*) al-Muḥāsibī replies that it is:

Strict adherence to the desires (*ittibā' al-hawā*) that are concealed within souls (*al-nufūs*), which are consequently pursued by the heart such as: conceit (*al-kibr*); malice (*al-ghill*); envy (*al-ḥasad*); ostentation (*al-riyā'*); having a bad opinion [of someone] (*sū' al-zann*); believing in the evil of the conscience (*i'tiqād sū' al-ḍamīr*); fallacious flattery (*al-mudāhana*); the love of praise (*ḥubb al-maḥmada*); the love of accumulating wealth (*ḥubb jam' al-māl*); excess (*al-takāthur*); bragging (*al-tafākḥur*) and the love of rank (*ḥubb al-sharaf*).⁵⁰

Indeed, the soul's adherence to this facet is fuelled by high hopes (*tūl al-amal*) and equally the desires of the soul are manipulated by Satan until one becomes a slave to them, being ultimately destroyed by them.⁵¹

It is little surprise then that al-Muḥāsibī exhorts his readers to gain mastery over the soul's desires (*ghalabat al-hawā*).⁵² In this regard al-Muḥāsibī does not underestimate the divine role in the process of purifying the soul of its desires as he suggests that it is only through God and through His assistance that the desires can be overcome.⁵³ As for the human being himself, then his greatest weapon against his soul's desires is his intellect (*al-aql*), which God awakens and through which the human being may make his desires subservient by overcoming the emotions of the soul with the light of reason, as al-Muḥāsibī states, 'The soul awaits its desires and

the desires await the intellect; so if the intellect restrains them, then they hold back but if it relaxes then they continue onward'.⁵⁴ Clarifying this further he says, 'If you want your intellect to be dominant over your desires, then do not rush to fulfil your appetites until you have considered the outcome, as indeed, it has been said, "regret for fulfilling one's appetites remains longer in the heart than the pleasure the heart experiences through fulfilling its desires"'.⁵⁵

Consequently, he equally exhorts his readers to: oppose their desires (*mukhālafat al-hawā*)⁵⁶; disassociate themselves from their desires (*mufāraqat al-hawā*)⁵⁷; to wear down the desires (*mukābadat al-hawā*)⁵⁸; combat their desires (*mujāhadat al-hawā*)⁵⁹; avoid adhering to the soul's desires (*ittibā' al-hawā*)⁶⁰; avoid the desires (*mujānibat al-hawā*)⁶¹ and repudiate the desires (*khal' al-hawā*),⁶² all of which indicates how dangerous this facet of the soul is and how important it is to discipline the *nafs* in this regard.

It is worth noting here, however, that al-Muḥāsibī's exposition regarding opposing one's desires is not only theoretical but rather he also gives practical advice and indicates, in the following text, as to how one should begin this process:

The first stage of opposing the desires (*mukhālafat al-hawā*) is to gain control over one's stomach, since if the devotee can control his stomach he will have charge of his limbs; he will have full knowledge of his heart; taking his soul to account (*al-muḥāsaba*) will become easy and he will be able to oppose his soul in everything it desires, if God wills. However, if you lose control of your stomach then the issue will become difficult for you, your limbs will go astray, your heart will overstep the bounds and be misguided, you will not truly know your state and you will not be able to take your soul to account.⁶³

Similarly, al-Muḥāsibī also provides a number of other devices that help in the process of restricting the desires, such as: remaining silent instead of indulging in vain talk; lowering one's gaze; avoiding backbiting; the avoidance of indulging in sins and excesses, as well as contemplation and remembrance of God, as all of these acts preoccupy the soul from its desires. Moreover, he gives a full account of how the desires may be weakened in the following excerpt:

Persist in: reflecting upon your past sins; fear regarding the hardship God has imposed upon you because of them; contemplating the resurrection; the questioning; hellfire and being forbidden paradise, as indeed you will have to answer to all of this. Also persist in: renewing your repentance and intention; caution regarding that which awaits you in the future and forbidding the soul (*al-nafs*) its pleasures, which its Lord, the Mighty and Exalted dislikes. If it [*al-nafs*] falters then return quickly and renew your intention and repentance. If you continue with the thought of instilling fear into your soul then your fear will be strengthened and if you continue to refute your soul and be disobedient to it, leaving the entertainment of its desires, then it [*al-nafs*] will be severed from its habits, despair from you providing it its pleasures and its

appetites will be terminated, as they are not being entertained. However, if you do entertain them [the appetites], you censure it [*al-nafs*] with fear and grief and then it will be strengthened and become upright upon truthfulness, ascending in the vigilance of God, the Mighty and Exalted, and [ascending] in sincerity to Him.⁶⁴

Thus, we may summarise al-Muḥāsibī's regarding the desires of the soul in his own words as he states, 'If the benefit of the soul (*al-nafs*) and its welfare lay in that which it desires and wishes for, then all of mankind would be from the righteous (*al-ṣāliḥīn*), so consider its reform to be in that which it dislikes and its corruption in that which it loves and wishes for'.⁶⁵

What is clear from the above discussion of the soul's desires is the intrinsic relationship between this and another quality of the *nafs*, that of the appetites (*al-shahawāt*). Indeed, on surveying the works of al-Muḥāsibī we find that this quality of the soul is mentioned with equally impressive frequency, thus indicating to us the importance that our author gives this facet of the *nafs*.⁶⁶ In his exposition of this quality of the soul al-Muḥāsibī relies on both Prophetic guidance through the medium of *ḥadīth* and the explanation of his Companions to elucidate the dangers of the *nafs*'s appetites, as the following quote shows:

Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd is reported to have said, 'Do not exceed the limits set by God' and then he mentioned the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, 'Indeed, paradise is surrounded by unpleasant things and hellfire is surrounded by appetites (*al-shahawāt*)'.⁶⁷ He [Ibn Mas'ūd] then commented, 'Whoever lifted the veil will fall into what is beyond it', [Al-Muḥāsibī] meaning: whoever exceeded the boundary of hellfire will fall into it, as its boundary is the appetites and the boundary of paradise is that which is unpleasant⁶⁸; so whoever went beyond the unpleasant entered paradise and whoever preferred the appetites entered hellfire and thus it is known that the point of departure (*al-maṭla'*) is exceeding [the limits] (*al-mujāwaza*).⁶⁹

In a variation of this *ḥadīth*, al-Muḥāsibī relates another narration to clarify his point further where the Prophet is reported to have said:

Indeed, God the Blessed and Exalted, created hellfire and said to Jibrīl, 'Go and look at it', so Jibrīl went and looked and said, 'By your Might, no one will hear of it and consequently enter it'. Then it [hellfire] was surrounded by appetites (*al-shahawāt*) and He said [to Jibrīl], 'Go and look at it', so Jibrīl went and looked and said, 'By your Might, I fear that there will be no one who didn't enter it'. Then He created paradise and said [to Jibrīl], 'Go and look at it', so Jibrīl went and looked and said, 'By your Might, no one will hear of it and consequently not enter it'. Then it [paradise] was surrounded by unpleasant things (*makāriḥ*) and He said [to Jibrīl], 'Go and look at it', so Jibrīl went and looked and said, 'By your Might, I fear that there will be no one who will enter it'.⁷⁰

Al-Muḥāsibī then comments, ‘So whoever leaves what his heart desires (*yahwā qalbuḥu*) and his soul wishes for (*tashtahī nafsuhū*) from that which his Lord, the Mighty and Exalted, dislikes then he has protected himself from hellfire and brought about proximity to God’.⁷¹ As with the soul’s desires (*al-hawā*), the appetites of the soul (*al-shahawāt*) are equally destructive and, indeed, there can be only one outcome from pursuing them – annihilation in hellfire. Consequently, al-Muḥāsibī expends a great deal of effort to explain what the appetites are and also their nature. Seemingly relying on the Qur’ānic verse (3: 14), al-Muḥāsibī enumerates a number of such appetites in the following excerpt, ‘. . . the bodily appetites (*shahawāt al-jasad*) are women, children and excess food, drinks, clothing and riding animals. These are all detrimental to abstinence (*al-zuhd*) . . .’.⁷² Thus, al-Muḥāsibī describes the bodily, carnal and ‘physical’ appetites, which he commonly terms ‘worldly appetites’ (*shahawāt al-dunyā*)⁷³ and which are inherent in all human beings, but also distinguishes a further ‘esoteric’ or ‘psychological’ category of appetite that is, in his opinion at least, even more destructive, as the following quote clarifies:

. . . The appetites (*al-shahawāt*) are not sins (*dhunūb*) and evil deeds (*sayyi’āt*): the appetites are foods; drinks; clothing; buildings; riding animals; women; gold and silver. However, the most destructive of appetites are [craving] status; the love of leadership; establishment of prestige; the attainment of rank; [the desire for] the acceptance [of one’s] command and prohibition; the fulfilment of needs; the love of good reputation among neighbours, friends and brothers and to be praised for the righteous deeds one has performed.⁷⁴

Therefore, all human beings are not only subject to a variety of ‘physical’ appetites, many of which are part of human innate nature,⁷⁵ but also a variety of ‘psychological’ appetites, which are hidden and much harder to identify.⁷⁶ This is, therefore, what al-Muḥāsibī terms ‘hidden appetites’ (*al-shahawāt al-khafīyya*), which are concealed within the soul and which he contrasts with the ‘manifest’ appetites (*al-shahawāt al-zāhira*) that are the focus of the body. The danger of such ‘hidden’ appetites is that a person may well exhibit the outward manifestation of righteousness, but inwardly may be afflicted with other ailments, which have a detrimental effect on the individual’s sincerity to God, as al-Muḥāsibī explains: ‘This does not become clear except through knowledge that indicates the nature of his intention, as they [*al-shahawāt*] are hidden and concealed from the person undertaking the act if he is not illuminated by knowledge’.⁷⁷

Apart from the hidden aspects of the appetites, which by default makes them treacherous, the appetites are also subject to many of the factors that affect the desires (*al-hawā*). For example, the appetites are a product of heedlessness (*al-ghafla*) and forgetfulness (*al-sahw*) and are increased by entertaining high hopes (*tūl al-amal*). Similarly, the soul by its very nature is given to its appetites being agitated (*hayajān*) and stimulated (*jayyāsh*) and, once again, Satan duly obliges by instigating the appetites by inviting the soul to them.⁷⁸ Indeed, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that the soul takes pleasure in (*ladhdha*) and enjoys the ‘sweetness’ (*ḥalāwa*) of its

appetites⁷⁹ and thus, if denied one of them, it immediately seeks out another, as al-Muḥāsibī observes: 'The soul, if it is forbidden from certain categories of appetites (*abwāb al-shahawāt*), then it will seek other appetites for its enjoyment, as a substitute for the appetites and pleasures it has been prevented from'.⁸⁰

Despite the complex nature of this adversary, al-Muḥāsibī remains undeterred and indeed in a similar fashion to the way in which he deals with the desires (*al-hawā*), he urges his readers to: be cautious from falling into the enticements of the appetites⁸¹; oppose the soul's desires (*mukhālafat al-shahawāt*)⁸²; to combat their appetites (*mujāhadat al-shahawāt*)⁸³; to wear down their appetites (*mukābadat al-shahawāt*)⁸⁴; overcome their desires (*ghalabat al-shahawāt*)⁸⁵; avoid their desires (*mujānabat al-shahawāt*)⁸⁶; be fearful of the voraciousness of the appetites (*darāwat al-shahawāt*)⁸⁷ and to have enmity towards their appetites (*al-bughḍ li 'l-shahawāt*).⁸⁸ Similarly, one of the consistent counsels that al-Muḥāsibī gives is to abandon one's appetites (*tark al-shahawāt*) for God's sake, so as to be safe from their harm and, indeed, this again is one of the attributes of the guiding scholars whom he sought in his youth.⁸⁹

Furthermore, as with the desires of the soul (*al-hawā*), al-Muḥāsibī's exposition of the soul's appetites is not just a theoretical presentation but rather he also gives practical advice: 'The most effective way to mortification of the appetites is to maintain grief (*al-ḥuzn*) in the heart'.⁹⁰ In a similar quote, he advises, 'Avert the sudden occurrence of appetites with grief (*al-ḥuzn*) and regret (*al-nadāma*) for the fulfilment of previous appetites, whose pleasures have been gratified but whose consequences have remained with you'.⁹¹ Therefore, we can assume that maintaining and inculcating grief (*al-ḥuzn*) into the *naḥs* is a major goal in al-Muḥāsibī's system of purifying the soul from the negative quality of its appetites. Another measure that al-Muḥāsibī suggests is the imposition of hunger (*al-jū'*), which he considers a valuable method of severing the soul from its appetites (*qaṭ' al-shahawāt*). If done sincerely for God, the divine element of *tazkiya* also plays a role, since God then causes such a person to 'taste' the 'flavour' of divine love and the 'sweetness' of conversing with Him, which in turn further severs him from his desires. Consequently, the carnal pleasures of the appetites are replaced with the spiritual delights of divine satisfaction.⁹²

Thus, the greater the extent to which the soul is disciplined (*ta'dīb*) the easier it is for the individual to reject his soul's desires (*rafḍ al-shahawāt*).⁹³ In this regard, al-Muḥāsibī comments: 'Indeed, the appetites (*al-shahawāt*) are a mere amusement (*li'b*), but if amusement exists, then seriousness is absent. However, the world will not exist and religion (*al-dīn*) will not be reformed except through being serious'.⁹⁴ Therefore, for al-Muḥāsibī the purification of the soul and its disciplining regarding its appetites is a pinnacle feature of spiritual life upon which the very status of religion is dependent.

States of the *naḥs* within the works of al-Muḥāsibī

During the discussion of the human soul it was discovered that, from the Qur'ānic perspective, the soul may experience three states, namely the tranquil soul

(*al-naḥs al-muṭma`inna*), the self-reproaching soul (*al-naḥs al-lawwāma*) and the soul inclined to evil (*al-naḥs al-ammāra bi`l-sū`*). Upon surveying the works of al-Muḥāsibī for the phrase ‘the tranquil soul’ (*al-naḥs al-muṭma`inna*), one does not find exact wording but only derivatives of it. For example, when discussing the importance of intimately knowing the soul al-Muḥāsibī states:

So if you gained knowledge of it [*al-naḥs*] you will increase in love and affection for God and in hatred and enmity for it; similarly [you will increase in] trust and confidence in God, the Magnificent and Exalted, and in despair of it. Likewise, you will increase in tranquillity towards God (*tuma`nīna ilā Allāh*) and in cautiousness concerning it.⁹⁵

On the same theme al-Muḥāsibī also states, ‘And whoever gained knowledge of his soul (‘*araḥa naḥsahu*) then self conceit (*al-`ujb*) will leave him, his gratitude to God will increase and his cautiousness regarding it [*al-naḥs*] and his tranquillity and his trust in his Master will be intensified’.⁹⁶ This is not exclusively an attribute for the worldly existence, however, as when clarifying the state of the believer who has been informed of their admittance into paradise post-mortem in the grave, al-Muḥāsibī describes him as follows: ‘. . . and so your soul will find tranquillity with God (*taṭma`innu ilā Allāh naḥsuka*)’.⁹⁷

Moreover, during the exposition of the tranquil soul, it was seen that reason behind the soul being described as ‘tranquil’ was the satisfaction (*riḍā`*) of both parties – the divine and the human – with one another and in particular the human being’s satisfaction with divine predestination and predetermination (*al-qaḍā` wa`l-qadar*). When surveying the works of al-Muḥāsibī we also find a great deal of emphasis laid on these qualities.⁹⁸ For example, when asked regarding the meaning of *al-riḍā`* he replies, ‘It is the satisfaction of the heart with the “bitterness” of divine predestination’,⁹⁹ and with regard to the manifestation of *al-riḍā`* in reality he reiterates, ‘It is satisfaction with divine predestination, meaning: the composure of the heart regarding the judgement of God and to entrust (*al-tafwīd*) [all affairs] to God before satisfaction (*al-riḍā`*) and to be satisfied after having entrusted [all affairs to Him]’.¹⁰⁰

Thus, we can conclude that even though al-Muḥāsibī does not use the specific phrase *al-naḥs al-muṭma`inna*, the concept was not alien to him and indeed, when dealing with the human soul, the quality of tranquillity and serenity (*al-tuma`nīna*) is seen to be an attribute of the person who has truly understood the nature of the *naḥs* and consequently gained success in the hereafter because of it. Similarly, he also exhorts his readers to the qualities that will bring about the reformation of the soul until it reaches a state of ‘tranquillity’, namely *al-riḍā`* with divine predestination, which in turn results in the pleasure of God.

This is further evidenced by the following excerpt which is an intuitive description of the tranquil soul:

So when his [the believer’s] state changes and it [*al-naḥs*] deems agreeable that which it used to be averse, found pleasant that which it found to be

distasteful and was abstinent concerning that which it desired, then his heart will be purified. As such, his heart will be illuminated with certainty in the hereafter and he will witness in his mind that which is unseen in the next life. Then, the exaltation of God will be strengthened in his heart, his fear of Him and hope in Him will be intensified and his shame in front of God will be awakened. Moreover, he will be irritated by every barrier that prevents him from proximity to his Lord and every issue that preoccupies him with other than Him.¹⁰¹

If mention of the tranquil soul is rare, then mention of the self-reproaching soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*) is even rarer, as it is not mentioned by name even once in the works of al-Muḥāsibī. Despite this, however, we can deduce some inference to the self-reproaching soul in a limited number of examples in al-Muḥāsibī's works. The first of these describes the actions of someone who has just come to the realisation of the true nature of his soul and his past misdeeds and, as such, al-Muḥāsibī describes his state thus:

And when this has become clear to him, he will know that in being obedient to it [the *nafs*] lies his perdition on the Day of Judgement and in being disobedient to it lies his salvation in the hereafter and that it has habitually attempted to destroy him, becoming accustomed to extended reticence and aversion to that which pleases his Lord.¹⁰²

In a similar example, al-Muḥāsibī describes the course of action of such a person as follows: 'So then he rebukes it [the *nafs*], reminding it of its sins; he then strikes fear into it that it may have incurred [God's] wrath because of them and that it did not perform its duty to Him as He truly deserves and also, as it does not know in what state it will die. Consequently, it became submissive, fearful, trembling and humbled'.¹⁰³ Moreover, although al-Muḥāsibī does not mention the self-reproaching soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*) by name, he does describe its state and the circumstances that bring about this state. Therefore, the description of the *nafs* given above is neither the base state of the soul inclined to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*) but nor is it the elevated state of the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*) and thus we can conclude that it is an intermediate state where the soul begins to blame itself for the transgression it has committed, inclining towards repentance, regret, self-recrimination and reproach, these being salient features of the self-reproaching soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*).

Bearing in mind the importance that al-Muḥāsibī gives to the discussion of the negative qualities of the *nafs* in general and of the desires and appetites specifically, as seen in the last section, it is little wonder that of the three states of the *nafs* related in the Qur'ān by far the most common in the works of al-Muḥāsibī is the third and final state, the soul inclined to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*). Indeed, al-Muḥāsibī makes mention of this form of the soul in both terms of concept and exact phraseology and this is indicative of the importance that al-Muḥāsibī gives to this state of the soul and the emphasis he lays on gaining

knowledge of it, combating it and reforming it.¹⁰⁴ Thus, his concentration on dealing with this form of the *naḥs* is due to the fact that, as we have seen, it alludes to the lowest level of the human soul, which not only encourages the performance of evil but also exerts effort to make such actions acceptable and appealing. Thus, the *naḥs* is described as enticing (*sawwalat*), subjecting (*tawwa'at*) and tempting (*tuwaswis*), causing the human being to be overcome by his desires, to the extent that he pursues the appetites of his soul, to the exclusion of everything else. Consequently, the limits set by God are made secondary in comparison to the fulfilment of his own needs and desires.

It is no surprise then that al-Muḥāsibī warns the aspirant on the path to God regarding this state of his soul, from associating with it, being in agreement with it and the effect of its desires on acts of obedience to Him, as the following excerpt clarifies:

And know that I am not suggesting that you abandon the performance of righteous actions, as every action you do not perform today will have no reward tomorrow but, rather, I am warning you concerning the deception of the Satan and the desires of your soul that is inclined to evil (*hawā naḥsika al-ammāra bi 'l-sū*).¹⁰⁵

Similarly, al-Muḥāsibī considers this state of the soul so important that he makes it one of the essential elements of his system of intimate knowledge and insight (*al-ma'rifa*), stressing its importance as follows:

And as for intimate knowledge of the soul inclined to evil (*ma'rifa al-naḥs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū*) then abase it [*al-naḥs*] as God has abased it, describe it as God has described it [i.e. that it is inclined to evil] and attack it with that which God has commanded you, as it is a greater enemy for you than Iblīs, since he gains influence over you through it, due to its acceptance of him.¹⁰⁶

Therefore, a person who has gained such intimate knowledge of his soul has, 'Comprehended from God that He has described his soul as being inclined to evil (*ammāra bi 'l-sū*) and enticing towards sins (*li 'l-dhunūb musawwila*) and it is the soul that has performed the transgressions for which his Lord will take him to account'.¹⁰⁷

Consequently, having achieved this understanding, the believer who attempts to purify this base form of his soul has:

Left the external defects and turned his attention to the internal defects, engaging the soul inclined to evil (*al-naḥs ammāra*). Thus, he disciplines it until it renounces such characteristics and strives against it (*jāhadahā*) until it submits, being sincere in combating it (*mujāhadatihā*) until it becomes righteous. As a result, he will approach his Lord purified, repentant and divested of both external and internal defects.¹⁰⁸

This being the case, from al-Muḥāsibī's perspective it is the soul inclined to evil that presents the greatest danger in this regard, since it is the biggest factor in the potential destruction of the human being in both this life and in the hereafter and therefore it is the target and goal of *tazkiya*. Thus, in summary we may quote al-Muḥāsibī, who, when discussing the danger and nature of this state of the soul said, 'It is sufficient for you to know that God, the Magnificent and Exalted, informed you that it is ever commanding to evil (*ammāra bi 'l-sū'*), except for whomever your Lord had mercy upon and upon whom He bestowed His favours'.¹⁰⁹

Once again we may conclude that despite al-Muḥāsibī not always specifically mentioning the three states of the soul alluded to in the Qurān, he clearly understood the implications of these phrases, being entirely in agreement with them conceptually at least. This is particularly true of the base form of the soul, the soul inclined to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*), which is specifically mentioned in his works and which is the focus of his attention due to the danger it poses to the security of the human being and. as such, from his perspective, it is this lowest manifestation of the *nafs* that must be purified.

The nature of the *nafs* within the works of al-Muḥāsibī

It was observed in the previous chapter that the creator of the human soul is God, as the following verse alludes: 'O Mankind, fear your Lord Who created you from a single *nafs* . . .' (4:1) and it is worth noting that al-Muḥāsibī also understood this point as the following excerpt shows: 'A person should know that the nature of all souls (*al-nufūs*) is quite similar. Indeed, all of them are prone to forgetfulness (*al-sahw*) and heedlessness (*al-ghafla*), and that his [the person's] soul is from the souls of creation, derived from the son of Ādam, peace be upon him'.¹¹⁰ Consequently, when al-Muḥāsibī speaks regarding the *nafs* it seem that he is virtually referring exclusively to the base form of the soul – *al-nafs ammāra bi 'l-sū'*.¹¹¹

In understanding the nature of soul, as we have already seen in this chapter, al-Muḥāsibī relies heavily on both of Islam's revelatory sources, namely the Qur'ān and *ḥadith*, as well as the opinions of the earliest generations, as the following extended quote indicates, where he is asked about the *nafs*:

Haven't you heard God, the Exalted's statement, 'Indeed, the soul is prone to evil (*inna 'l-nafs la ammāra bi 'l-sū'*) [12: 53]?' And His, the Exalted's statement, 'As for the one who feared the position of his Lord and forbid his soul (*nafsahu*) its desires (*al-hawā*) [79: 40]?'¹¹² And in the story of the son of Ādam, 'Then his soul made the murder of his brother seem appealing (*ṭawwa 'at lahu nafsuhu*) and so he killed him' [5: 30]? 'He [Ya'qūb] said: indeed your souls have enticed you (*sawwalat lakum anfusukum*) to some matter, so patience is more befitting' [12: 18]? 'He [Moses] said: And what have you to do with this O Sāmīrī?' until His statement, 'Thus did my soul entice me (*sawwalat lī nafsī*)' [20: 95–6]? In addition, the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, said, 'You have returned from

the lesser jihad (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*) to the greater jihad (*al-jihād al-akbar*); the struggle against your souls (*mujāhadat al-nufūs*). A man asked the Prophet, ‘What is the best form of jihad?’ and he replied, ‘Your personal struggle against your soul and your desires (*mujāhadatuka nafsaka wa hawāk*). . . . Al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] said, ‘Revive your hearts with the remembrance of God as indeed, they soon become rusty and vilify these souls (*al-anfus*) as indeed they are lame (*zul‘a*). . . . And the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, and his Companions would seek shelter in God from the evil of their own souls (*min shurūr anfusihim*) as, indeed, the soul (*al-nafs*) has the propensity to incline to the fulfilment of its desires, as long as it has not been ‘etched’ (*yaḥfiruhā*) by fear (*al-khawf*). . . .¹¹³

Therefore, it is little surprise that, when discussing the nature of the soul, al-Muḥāsibī expends a great deal of effort to clarify the dissension of the soul (*munāza‘at al-nafs*)¹¹⁴; the enticement of the soul (*taswīl al-nafs*)¹¹⁵; the doubts of the soul (*rayb al-nafs*)¹¹⁶ and warns against the sinister aspirations (*amānī*)¹¹⁷ and unrealistic hopes of the soul (*irtijā‘ al-nafs*),¹¹⁸ as well as the ailments and cure of the soul (*da‘ al-nafs wa dawā‘uhā*).¹¹⁹

Advancing the exposition of the soul above, which was entirely based upon classical Islamic sources, al-Muḥāsibī provides a no less negative but more ‘psychological’ and ‘introspective’ appraisal when asked about how to have contentment (*al-izdirā‘*) for the soul:

[t]hrough your knowledge of its true position and the evil of its aspirations and deeds. By knowledge of its true position I mean how it was created with a natural disposition and form; how it considers the path to salvation to be burdensome, not out of enmity for salvation but because it despises the imposition of hardship and equally despises having to abandon the things it adores from the transient world. Similarly, how it deems insignificant that which will bring about its destruction, without having any affection for destruction in the hereafter but, rather, due to its avoiding its pleasures and avoiding its desires therein. This is despite its affirming that both the reward and punishment in the hereafter are greater and more lasting and that both the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of the worldly life are lowly and ephemeral.

So despite its knowing and grasping that [the world is] lowly and ephemeral, it still prefers it to the greater and more lasting, not out of denying that [the hereafter] is greater and more lasting but rather, out of preferring something from the transient world, whether it be the fulfilment of a pleasure, comfort from hardship, or that it be diverted from its passions . . .

It is incumbent on someone who has comprehended this from God, the Mighty and Exalted, that if he wants to bring about its [*al-nafs*] salvation that he never leaves being attentive and contemplative and is never heedless of it or feels secure from it. Indeed, he should divest himself of having a good

opinion of it and be quick to accuse it if it was swift in seeking salvation, due to him knowing that it opposes this and due to what has already occurred in terms of the evil of its aspirations and deeds, as he knows that it considers the path to salvation to be burdensome, considers the path of destruction insignificant and that it will not submit to the path of salvation except through compulsion and coercion.¹²⁰

Bearing these factors in mind, al-Muḥāsibī warns against the destruction of the soul (*halk/talif al-nafs*)¹²¹; its procrastination (*taswīf al-nafs*) regarding the performance of righteous acts¹²²; its wickedness (*sū' al-nafs*)¹²³ that leads to it committing offences (*jināyāt al-nafs*)¹²⁴ and the many faults of the soul (*'uyūb al-nafs*),¹²⁵ which constitute the many things that it conceals and attempts to keep hidden (*khabāyā/khafāyā/sarā'ir al-nafs*).¹²⁶ Indeed, the cunning nature of the soul is manifested in the fact that it is given to deception (*khid'at al-nafs*),¹²⁷ deceit and falsehood (*kidhb al-nafs*)¹²⁸ and employs subterfuge and various stratagems (*ḥiyal al-nafs*)¹²⁹ to ensure that its appetites and desires are fulfilled. In this regard he says:

Don't be deceived by what it makes manifest to you, do not hope for what it wishes, if you released it you will have gone astray and if you fulfilled its request you will be destroyed. If you became heedless of taking it to account, then you will have fled [responsibility], if you were unable to oppose it, you will be drowned and if you submitted to its desires you will have been appointed [a place] in the hellfire. It [the *nafs*] has no truth and no good can come from it; it is the cause of every tribulation, a treasure trove of disgrace, the vault of Iblīs and the abode of every evil. It is as its Creator described it [i.e. *ammāra bi 'l-sū'*], every time it manifests fear then you are secure, every time it claims to be truthful it is lying and every time it mentions sincerity it is ostentation and self-conceit.¹³⁰

Therefore, even to have empathy for the soul is considered a mistaken approach as he explains, 'You have mercy on it [*al-nafs*] but it does not have mercy on you . . . it strives in that which pleases Satan and in that which lies the anger of your Lord'.¹³¹ Consequently, it is little surprise that al-Muḥāsibī considers the *nafs* a deadly adversary and the 'enemy within', which is clear from his statement, 'And take every precaution against your contemporaries (*ahl zamānik*) and especially against your soul, as indeed, it is your true enemy'.¹³² Similarly, he clarifies:

So through what God has commanded, be its [*al-nafs*] adversary opposing that which it invites you to from its desires. Spend all your time in mortifying its desires, burying its wishes and be cautious concerning its aspirations and procrastination. Turn to it repeatedly with disparagement and deprecation, reminding it of its shortcomings, so that perhaps its authority may dwindle and be crushed. May God, the Exalted, aid us and you against it without any punishment from Him! Thus, if you acted to extinguish this 'darkness' and

these despicable characteristics from your heart, you will have become purified with your Lord and nothing will defile your soul (*nafsaka*).¹³³

Thus, al-Muḥāsibī expends very effort to avert his readers from being overcome, conquered and subdued by the soul and its desires (*ghalabat al-nafs*).¹³⁴

In summary, we can conclude that al-Muḥāsibī's view of the soul is heavily grounded in not only his understanding of the revelatory sources of Islam and the tradition of early scholarship but also in his own, personal experience of reflection, introspection and contemplation. Consequently, he has a highly developed and intricate vision of the *nafs*, which forms the basis of much of his discourse within the field of Islamic spirituality and mysticism. His theory of the soul revolves around his censuring of its inclination to the fleeting and ephemeral and its proclivity to relaxation and comfort, these being its outstanding characteristics, which are seemingly 'imprinted' upon its nature. Moreover, he sets out to enlighten his readers about these facts and illuminate them to the subtle and precise facets of the soul, so as to ultimately bring about its reform and avoid its destruction.

Al-Muḥāsibī's methodology of *tazkiyat al-nafs*

Due to the nature and importance al-Muḥāsibī lays on the *nafs* in his works, much of this chapter has been concerned with providing an exposition of his view regarding the human soul and, having done so, it is now time to turn our attention to the way in which al-Muḥāsibī proposes to treat such a soul and, indeed, ultimately bring about its purification. Upon surveying the works of al-Muḥāsibī, one finds a great many expressions and phrases that may be conceived to relate to what could generally be termed the 'training' of the soul. In fact, careful examination of such phrases suggests that despite the almost exclusively 'negative' view of the soul that al-Muḥāsibī holds, his approach to disciplining the *nafs* is not exclusively 'negative' also, but includes terminologies which may be broadly considered to be 'positive' attitudes to the 'training' of the soul. The following discussion attempts to identify and isolate both these 'negative' and 'positive' approaches employed to bring about the soul's purification.

With regard to the 'negative' perspective, one is able to identify a number of concepts that al-Muḥāsibī employs to bring under control the detrimental potentialities within the human soul. These include dispraisal of the soul (*dhamm al-nafs*)¹³⁵ for its evil actions and intentions and the pursuit of its desires, the accusation of the soul (*ittihām al-nafs*)¹³⁶ due to its deceptive and deceitful nature described above and having contempt for the soul (*izdirā' al-nafs*),¹³⁷ as it is the 'enemy within' and exhibits behaviour that ultimately leads to the human being's destruction. Similarly, al-Muḥāsibī suggests that the soul be 'broken' (*inkisār al-nafs*),¹³⁸ through imposing punitive measures upon it (*uqūbat al-nafs*)¹³⁹; that the soul be abased (*muhānat al-nafs*)¹⁴⁰ due to its evil nature; that the soul be coerced (*ilzām al-nafs*)¹⁴¹ towards correct action and, on occasion, he even describes the soul as an enemy combatant that should be fought against (*qitāl al-nafs*).¹⁴²

Of the more common 'negative' themes within the works of al-Muḥāsibī is censuring of the soul (*mu'ātabat al-nafs*)¹⁴³ and in this regard al-Muḥāsibī clarifies that a person should:

. . . Censure his soul regarding its inadequacy (*tafrīḥihā*) and rebuke it for its committing of sins (*dhunūbihā*), out of adherence to the command of God, the Mighty and Exalted, to do so. He should also know that he is not consistent in this except that God, the Exalted, to Whom he has entrusted his affairs, has caused him to be successful. Thus, it is He Who has destined it for him, awakened him and granted him success to censure his soul.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, one of the more severe descriptions is that remembering the torments of the hereafter is a 'cauterising' of the soul (*taldhī' li 'l-nafs*).¹⁴⁵ More conventional descriptions, however, suggest that the soul be made to proceed cautiously (*tathbīt al-nafs*) by instilling fear into it (*al-takhwīf*),¹⁴⁶ that it be forced to shun ('*azūf al-nafs*)¹⁴⁷ the worldly life (*al-dunyā*), its pleasures (*ladhdhātihā*) and appetites (*shahawātihā*), to inculcate wisdom into it (*al-ḥikma*) by averting it (*inṣirāf al-nafs*)¹⁴⁸ from its nature and restricting it (*habs al-nafs*) from its desires.¹⁴⁹

Conversely, al-Muḥāsibī equally utilises a number of more 'positive' terms and concepts regarding disciplining the soul; these include that one should have both care (*ri'āyat al-nafs*)¹⁵⁰ and concern (*al-'ināya bi 'l-nafs*)¹⁵¹ for the soul; counsel and exhort the soul (*waṣīyat/naṣīhat al-nafs*)¹⁵²; be concerned with its state (*al-ishtighāl bi 'l-nafs*)¹⁵³ and even on occasion have gentleness with the soul (*al-rifq bi/al-shafaqa 'alā 'l-nafs*).¹⁵⁴ Similarly, al-Muḥāsibī frequently attempts to bring out the generosity of the soul (*sakhā' al-nafs*)¹⁵⁵ and, as well as instilling fear into the soul regarding God's punishment and its own destruction, also encourages his readers to instil hope into the soul (*rajjā' al-nafs*)¹⁵⁶ that its repentance be accepted and God's satisfaction be attained. Indeed, another feature of al-Muḥāsibī's discourse is the reformation of the soul (*iṣlāḥ al-nafs*),¹⁵⁷ regarding which he says, 'And be carefully observant concerning your aspiration and preoccupy yourself with the reformation of your soul (*iṣlāḥ naḥsika*) rather than being concerned with the faults of others, since it used to be said, "It is sufficient a fault in a person that he brings to light in people that which is hidden from himself in his own soul"'.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, when clarifying the initial stage of the process of reformation of the soul and explaining its true position, al-Muḥāsibī says, 'The first thing that is incumbent upon you with regard to reformation of your soul – which will not be reformed by any other means and which is the beginning of 'concern' (*al-ri'āya*) – is that you know that it [*al-nafs*] is an indentured slave'.¹⁵⁹ In making the soul realise this reality and the reality of its state, al-Muḥāsibī once again employs the intellect encouraging his readers to look closely at this intrinsic part of humanity (*naẓar ilā al-nafs bi 'l-'aql*),¹⁶⁰ such that it acts as a protection (*ḥirāsāt al-nafs*),¹⁶¹ guarding over the soul's treachery and deception. In addition, however, the reformation of the soul ultimately requires not only 'rational' examination but also 'physical' action and in this regard al-Muḥāsibī suggests spiritual

exercises (*riyādat al-nafs*)¹⁶² for the soul with the goal of weaning it from its habits (*iftām al-nafs*)¹⁶³ and bringing about its rectitude (*istiqāmat al-nafs*).¹⁶⁴

Thus, in summary al-Muḥāsibī introduces a number of terms and concepts, both punitive and progressive in an integrated manner, according to the state, condition and qualities of the soul, to nurture it and develop it and ultimately bring about its purification. This being as it may, these terms are relatively rare when compared to other concepts presented in the works of al-Muḥāsibī and, as such, are only part of the story regarding his methodology of purifying the soul. Indeed, al-Muḥāsibī himself alludes to other, more important methods in the following text regarding how to deal with the soul: ‘It is incumbent upon you to oppose it (*mukhālafatihā*), take it to account (*muḥāsabatihā*), be knowledgeable concerning it (*maʿrifatihā*) and strive against it (*mujāhadatihā*) . . .’.¹⁶⁵ This being the case, it is equally vital that these concepts also be examined.

Intimate knowledge of the soul (*maʿrifat al-nafs*)

As the above quote indicates, one of the principal features of al-Muḥāsibī’s teaching is intimate knowledge of the soul (*maʿrifat al-nafs*) and, indeed, it is a recurrent theme throughout his works.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, as we have seen previously, al-Muḥāsibī considers this aspect of the soul so important that he makes it one of the essential elements of his system of intimate knowledge and insight (*al-maʿrifa*). It may seem entirely obvious to indicate that one requires a certain amount of knowledge of a thing before one may begin to understand it and, indeed, in this case set about its purification. Yet, as the discussion so far has alluded, the *nafs* is a particularly unique adversary, since it dwells hidden deep within the nature of humankind and, this being the case, its faults and hence their elimination are especially difficult to identify. To this effect, al-Muḥāsibī has seemingly spent the better part of his scholarly career in attempting to elucidate and verify this esoteric knowledge (*ʿilm al-bāṭin*), so that his peers and the latter-day Muslim community may be fully aware of the dangers of their own souls and the terrible consequences of ignoring such dangers.

Thus, when asked regarding intimate knowledge of the soul (*maʿrifat al-nafs*), al-Muḥāsibī replied:

You have asked about the ‘root’ (*ʿaṣl*) of all good and evil and its branches (*furūʿihimā*), its outward and its inward, what is known of it and what is unknown. You have asked about a knowledge that no one can endure these days and whoever does endure it, does so only verbally, as they cannot endure action. This is because in this knowledge there is patience, hardship, struggling against outward and inward evil, enduring outward and inward good, which is the reality of sincerity in word and deed, true repentance, continuous grief and contemplation of the hereafter. How impossible it is that the servant will reach the knowledge of the faults of his soul (*ʿuyūb nafsihi*), except through extensive knowledge and use of the intellect, unequivocal understanding, profound wisdom and penetrating insight.¹⁶⁷

Therefore, reflecting on this quote from al-Muḥāsibī, it is easy to see the great emphasis that he places on this facet of the purification process, as he deems it to be the essence of distinguishing between good and evil, which is also seemingly an indication of the dual potentiality within the soul. Consequently, it is only through an intimate and erudite understanding of the soul that such potentialities will be distinguished. At the same time, however, due to the struggle and effort required in undertaking the study of this knowledge and its consequent implementation, al-Muḥāsibī also informs us that there are very few people who adopt such a path. Indeed, this path requires that every motive and action be examined through utilising not only the knowledge gained but also every asset of the perceptive faculties to reach the true nature of the human soul. Thus, despite the difficulties of acquiring intimate knowledge of the soul (*ma'rifat al-nafs*), it is an essential first step in the purification process, as without it the aspirant upon the path to God could not possibly hope to succeed.

No one can even begin to purify his soul, therefore, without first attaining some familiarity with it and, in this regard, al-Muḥāsibī says, 'If a person didn't know the faults of his soul (*'uyūb nafsihi*), then came to know them and rejected them, then he will be truly repentant'.¹⁶⁸ The implication of this is that true repentance – often regarded by Sufis to be the first stage on the mystical path¹⁶⁹ – cannot take place until knowledge of the soul's defects is comprehended and consequently, they are rejected. Indeed, by this statement al-Muḥāsibī alludes to another completely different concept of repentance, in the sense that repentance is customarily associated with the expiation of sins, whereas here al-Muḥāsibī suggests that one should first eliminate the cause of the sin in the first place – the faults of the soul. Therefore, the concept of purification commonly associated with repentance, i.e. that one is 'cleansed' from one's sins, is taken a step further to mean the 'cleansing' of the cause of the sin, which therefore extends the scope of purification to a new level. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why repentance (*al-tawba*) has not been included here in al-Muḥāsibī's theory of *tazkiya*, even though it is commonly associated with the 'cleansing' process. This is because al-Muḥāsibī, as alluded to here, seems to have been concerned with a completely different form of purification – that of identifying the defects of the soul and consequently purifying them so that the incidence of sin would be minimal in the first place and, as such, the need for repentance was equally limited.

In this context, the consequences of al-Muḥāsibī's understanding of *ma'rifat al-nafs* are often far-reaching, as the following excerpt indicates:

You will not be sincere to God until you are sincere to your own soul; and you will not be sincere to your own soul until you know it well; and you won't know it well until you examine closely and subject it to [remembering] death and the display in front of God, then its [true] states will be made manifest; and its [true] states will not be made manifest until you accuse it regarding that which it considers itself righteous therein and judge it according to its misdeeds. If you have accused it, then you have examined it and if you have examined it, then its [true] states will be made manifest. If its [true] states

have been made manifest, then you will also know its pretence, deception and deceit. So if you came to know it well you would be cautious concerning it; and if you were cautious concerning it, you will have scrutinised it; and if you have scrutinised it, you will see the true nature of its flight from the obedience of its Lord, the Mighty and Exalted, and its simulation of that which its Lord dislikes, as it is the treasure trove of every evil and the inviter to every affliction. Its Creator, the Mighty and Exalted, has informed you that it is ever inclined to evil (*bi 'l-sū' ammāra*), so take every precaution regarding it and accuse it for the sake of your religion.¹⁷⁰

According to this account of al-Muḥāsibī's conceptualisation of *ma'rifat al-nafs*, the very essence of religious practice – sincerity to God – is intrinsically related to the intimate knowledge of the soul, as sincerity of word and deed will not be attained except through this facet of purification. The acquisition of intimate knowledge of the soul is equally dependent, however, on subjecting the *nafs* to precise examination and scrutiny, through which its true nature of deception and deceit is known. Once a person has gained an understanding of these qualities of the soul, this in turn instils caution into him regarding it, which causes him to strive against it, further purifying it. Therefore, *ma'rifat al-nafs*, as al-Muḥāsibī views it, is also a multifaceted, multilayered process that has many positive consequences in dealing with the human soul and, indeed, he regards it as being pivotal to the essence of religious praxis.

The results of this 'essential knowledge of the soul' also become clear in the following text taken from al-Muḥāsibī's work that specifically deals with the concept of *ma'rifat*:

So if you come to know it, it will become contemptible [in your eyes] and you will have gained influence over it. Thus, if these three qualities existed in you,¹⁷¹ then remain steadfast and seek God's aid in maintaining them and do not be heedless. Then, if you managed to discipline your soul (*adab al-nafs*) and oppose it (*mukhālafatihā*) in that which it desires and wishes for, you will be strong in all characteristics, if God wills.¹⁷²

Thus, once one has gained a knowledge of the soul, its true nature becomes manifest, i.e. that it is lowly and despicable and, as such, once this is known the soul will hold no influence, since one is under no illusion as to the claims it makes nor the deceptions it attempts to mask. However, this particular quote is also significant from two other perspectives; first, that this is not the result of a singular effort but rather it requires continual, renewed perseverance and steadfastness, and secondly, even though one was characterised by the above-mentioned attributes, the divine role in *tazkiya* remains constant as this whole process will be impossible without God's assistance.

Therefore, in summary we may conclude that intimate knowledge of the soul (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) is an essential and intrinsic, primary facet of al-Muḥāsibī's vision of the soul's purification – a fact to which both the discussion in this chapter

so far and the works of al-Muḥāsibī himself bear testimony. Indeed, one brief statement from our author may summarise his whole approach to the topic, as he states, 'And the sign of truly knowing the soul (*ma'rifat al-naḥs*) is having a bad opinion of it (*sū' al-zann bihā*)'.¹⁷³

Observance of God (*al-murāqaba*)

In addition to the facets of purification mentioned in the above quote by al-Muḥāsibī, one is also able to identify another aspect of the *tazkiya* process, which is the continual observance of God (*al-murāqaba*). By this we mean the constant cognisance of divine observance of every thought, word and deed and therefore, both the external (*al-zāhir*) and internal (*al-bāṭin*) actions, which in turn causes the devotee to act in his every circumstance as if God is 'watching' his every move. In fact, this is a common feature of al-Muḥāsibī's works,¹⁷⁴ both conceptually and in terms of phraseology and indeed we have seen this concept alluded to previously, where the Prophet, when asked concerning spiritual perfection (*iḥsān*), is reported to have said, 'It is to worship God as if you see Him [and know] that if you do not see Him, He sees you'. Thus, we can conclude that the concept of observance of God (*al-murāqaba*) is virtually synonymous with that of Prophetic notion of spiritual perfection (*iḥsān*).

Having understood this and in an attempt to actualise this Prophetic narration, al-Muḥāsibī is unequivocal in stressing the importance of *al-murāqaba*, 'You should be concerned with three characteristics to the exclusion of all others: your Lord's observance of you (*murāqabatika rabbika*), taking your soul to account (*muḥāsabatika naḥsika*) and reminding yourself of your sins (*mudhākaratika dhanbika*)'.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, from al-Muḥāsibī's perspective, this facet of the purification process is a vital concern for any aspirant seeking to undertake the task of *tazkiya* and indeed, it is interesting to note that this along with another facet – that of taking your soul to account (*muḥāsabat al-naḥs*), which will be discussed shortly – constitute the only factors that one should be concerned with, indicating their vital and essential nature.

Al-Muḥāsibī exhorts his readers to give special emphasis to this quality, saying, 'I advise you, O my brother, after the observance of God (*murāqabat Allāh*) in your aspirations and in your every movement; to listen attentively to God and understand through Him, as indeed, within this Qur'ān, which has been revealed to us, is the clarification of everything and the knowledge of everything'.¹⁷⁶ Consequently, the essential nature of *al-murāqaba* is made absolutely clear, as the very first piece of advice al-Muḥāsibī offers is regarding it and not only this but also that it has a primary place in the advice he gives, as it precedes his counsel regarding the Qur'ān. Similarly, the subject matter is also made clear as it not only concerns outward action but also the inward facets of the human being.

Therefore, regarding the 'outward' acts of worship, this facet of *tazkiya* even has an effect on the most basic of Islamic duties – that of prayer, as, when describing the state of someone praying al-Muḥāsibī says, 'It is appropriate for anyone

who knew that God is approaching him and is in front of him [in prayer] that he be fearful, not be distracted and turn his attention elsewhere, as he should be ashamed that He is looking at him while he has turned away'.¹⁷⁷ However, as one might expect from al-Muḥāsibī's discourse, it is in the more 'esoteric' aspects of religious practice that one finds the greatest benefit:

The best of stations (*al-maqāmāt*) and the most noble of them is the observance of God (*murāqabat li Allāh*). And from the best of the observance [of God] (*al-murāqaba*) is that the slave is observant of being grateful for the bounties [he receives], acknowledges his misdeeds and turns his attention to pardon for them. Thus, his heart adheres to this station in all his actions and whenever he becomes heedless he returns to this [state], with the will of God. This [process] is assisted by abandoning sins, being free of preoccupations and being careful to critically examine [one's soul] (*al-murāja'a*). And from the actions of the heart that are purified (*tazkū*) through it [*al-murāqaba*] are: sincerity (*al-ikhhlās*); certitude (*al-thiqqa*); gratitude (*al-shukr*); humility (*al-tawādu'*); submission (*al-istislām*); counsel (*al-naṣīḥa*) and love and enmity for God's sake (*al-hubb wa 'l-buḥd li Allāh*).¹⁷⁸

It is worth noting here that al-Muḥāsibī considers *al-murāqaba* to be of the spiritual stations (*al-maqāmāt*), commonly associated with the Sufi path,¹⁷⁹ indicating his familiarity with this concept. Not only this, however, but in addition to acknowledging this idea, he also considers *al-murāqaba* to be the best of such spiritual stations, clearly indicating the importance he attaches to it and, by implication, its importance in the process of *tazkiya*. *Al-murāqaba* is also important, however, due to the fact that it instils gratitude into the believer for God's favours and also brings him to the realisation of his own shortcomings, for which he consequently seeks forgiveness.¹⁸⁰ The last phrase is the most important, however, as when discussing the effect of *al-murāqaba* on actions of the heart, al-Muḥāsibī describes these actions as being 'purified (*tazkū*) through it [*al-murāqaba*]', this being a clear indication of this facet of *tazkiya*'s contribution to the overall purification process.

In this regard, al-Muḥāsibī identifies two categories of *al-murāqaba*; the first of these deals with the 'outward' aspects of observance, whereas the second is concerned with the 'inward' aspects of religious life:

The best form of shyness (*al-ḥayā'*) is the observance of God, the Mighty and Exalted, (*al-murāqabat li Allāh*). Observance [of God] (*al-murāqaba*) is in three things: observance of God regarding His obedience by action; observance of God regarding His disobedience by abandoning it; and observance of God regarding intentions and fleeting thoughts due to the statement of the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, 'Worship God as if you see Him [and know] that if you do not see Him, He sees you'. Indeed, the heart's vigilance of God, the Mighty and Exalted, is harsher on the body than enduring the night prayer (*qiyām al-layl*), fasting during the day and spending one's wealth in the path of God.¹⁸¹

It is equally interesting to note here that al-Muḥāsibī alludes to the intrinsic link between *al-murāqaba* and shyness/shame before God (*al-ḥayāʾ/al-istiḥyāʾ*), which is an equally common theme within his works and he concludes that this facet of *tazkiya* is indeed the best form of the quality of *al-ḥayāʾ*.¹⁸² In addition, al-Muḥāsibī also distinguishes three forms of *al-murāqaba*; the first two of which may be regarded as 'outward' forms, whereas the third form is solely related to the 'inward' aspect of observance. It is equally interesting to note that al-Muḥāsibī, in this regard, relies on the very same *ḥadīth* that was quoted at the beginning of this section, indicating that he too understood *al-murāqaba* to be synonymous with the concept of *iḥsān* alluded to in this specific Prophetic narration. What is more important to observe, however, is the emphasis that al-Muḥāsibī places on *al-murāqaba*, since he considers it to be more effective in the purification process than many of the more familiar, 'physical' acts of worship.

With regard to the actualisation of observance [of God] (*al-murāqaba*), al-Muḥāsibī notes that its origin lies in, 'The heart knowing the proximity of its Lord, the Mighty and Exalted', which is perfected in, 'The heart maintaining and persisting in the knowledge that God, the Mighty and Exalted, has knowledge of your every movement'.¹⁸³ Therefore, we can conclude that *al-murāqaba* is an intrinsic feature of the heart, as, when discussing the three qualities that a person should maintain in his heart, al-Muḥāsibī states: 'Having fear in the heart that he will be heedless or falter and thus, be lowered in His sight, as such a fear will make him attentive, his attentiveness will make him mindful and his remembering will make him cautious, until he [reaches the stage where he] is observant of his supreme Sovereign (*yurāqib malīkahu*)'.¹⁸⁴

In addition, the process of *al-murāqaba* brings about other positive qualities, as al-Muḥāsibī elucidates: 'It causes him to have shame (*al-ḥayāʾ*) in front of God, the Mighty and Exalted and reverence for Him'.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, this quality of *al-murāqaba* is the antidote to the ailment of heedlessness (*al-ghafla*), which, as was seen earlier, leads to the affliction of the desires (*al-hawāʾ*) and the appetites (*al-shahawāt*). At an advanced stage, someone may even reach a level where they are occupied with the affairs of the world externally but, at the same time, they are observant of God's pleasure in their hearts. When this stage is reached, three qualities become apparent:

First, the joy of satisfaction that awakens in his heart out of hope for the pleasure of God and not that of the people; secondly, being secure from the sins of the heart due to [the heart] being occupied with conversing with his Lord the Mighty and Exalted and finally, security from the sins [he committed] in the rest of his life in his dealings with people, which brought no benefit, neither in the religious nor in the worldly life. Such a person is observant of his Lord (*murāqib li rabbihi*), fearful of Him in his innermost thoughts, prefers His love to what he himself loves and has detached himself from creation preferring God, glorified be He. As such, his outward appearance is that of the people of the worldly life, whereas his inward state is that of those who revere their Lord and are in awe of Him.¹⁸⁶

Thus, for such a person, through *al-murāqaba* the outward state of the worldly life is maintained, being comparable to that of the rest of his peers but inwardly, within his heart, he is in the ‘presence’ of his Lord. Seemingly relying on the Qur’ān as his source,¹⁸⁷ al-Muḥāsibī then clarifies the need for intensity and precision of *al-murāqaba*:

So do not be heedless of observance [of God] (*al-murāqaba*) such that even an atom’s weight [of something] does not escape your mind and do not become satiated or bored with it as, indeed, God is not heedless of you; He observes you and watches over your conscience, accounting for even an atom’s weight or the weight of a mustard seed,¹⁸⁸ so that He may recompense you for it.¹⁸⁹

As such, every thought, word and deed must be carefully observed, as indeed, even the motives, intentions and aspirations of each of these very hidden, internal actions is subject to divine scrutiny, as the following excerpt indicates:

O young man, indeed the state (*ḥāla*) in which all the states are combined is one state – that of observance [of God] (*al-murāqaba*). So maintain in your heart and your soul the knowledge that God is watching you in your every movement as, indeed, you are fixed in the sight of God, the Mighty and Exalted in your every moment; you are in His grasp wherever you are and the eyes of God are cast upon your heart, examining your internal and external [states]. O young man, this characteristic is an ocean that has no shores; an ocean from which streams and rivers flow and ships sail therein to acquire its treasures.¹⁹⁰

Thus, in summary we can conclude that continual observance of God (*al-murāqaba*), being synonymous with the Prophetic concept of spiritual perfection (*iḥsān*), is a salient feature of al-Muḥāsibī’s methodology of *tazkiyat al-naḥs*. Moreover, it is a vital and essential facet of the purification process and, at the same time, is intrinsically linked to the first element of his approach, as the following quote bears testimony: ‘No one sought aid against his own soul and sought to fortify his religion with anything better than the observance of God (*murāqaba li Allāh*) and through it [he would] attain shame in front of God, the Mighty and Exalted, this being the essence of intimate knowledge and insight (*al-ma’rifā*)’.¹⁹¹

Combating the soul (*al-mujāhada*)

It will be remembered from the previous chapter that when discussing the nature and purification of the soul the following *ḥadīth* was quoted: ‘The religious warrior (*al-mujāhid*) is the one who struggles against his soul for the sake of God, the Mighty and Exalted’, and, indeed, in this chapter we have also seen al-Muḥāsibī quote the following narrations attributing them to the Prophet:

The Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, said, ‘You have returned from the lesser jihad (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*) to the greater jihad

(*al-jihād al-akbar*) – the struggle against your souls (*mujāhadat al-nufūs*). A man asked the Prophet, ‘What is the best form of jihad?’ and he replied, ‘Your personal struggle against your soul and your desires (*mujāhadatuka nafsaka wa hawāk*)’.

In the same way that Prophetic guidance provided al-Muḥāsibī with the second facet of his methodology of purifying the soul, other such narrations also furnished him with the third aspect – that of combating or struggling against the soul (*mujāhadat al-nafs*). Indeed, al-Muḥāsibī himself mentions this aspect of *tazkiya* in the above-mentioned quote from *Sharḥ al-Maʿrifā* and upon closer examination one finds that this methodological tool in purifying the soul, although not as common as the previous two aspects, still occupies a central position in the works of our author.¹⁹² Once again, with regard to combating the soul (*mujāhadat al-nafs*) al-Muḥāsibī is unequivocal in clarifying the importance of this task as he addresses his readers, telling them that they have been afflicted with the duty of struggling against their souls and exhorts them saying, ‘Fight your souls with a war that is more beneficial for you than any other type of war’.¹⁹³ Thus, al-Muḥāsibī clarifies in no uncertain terms that the devotee has to do battle with his own soul to bring about its reformation and in this sense can be viewed as ‘the greater jihad (*al-jihād al-akbar*)’, referred to in the above *ḥadīth*, since, as we have already seen in this chapter so far, the *nafs* is a more than capable adversary.

Al-Muḥāsibī sets about the task of explaining in what respect the soul is to be fought against and in his work *al-Naṣāʾih* we find a number of aspects in which he explains that *mujāhadat al-nafs* must be employed. To this effect al-Muḥāsibī utilises the phrase, ‘. . . and struggle against your souls regarding . . . (*wa jāhidū anfusakum ʿalā . . .*)’, and then lists various aspects of the soul that require disciplining. The first of these qualities is to struggle against one’s soul to be patient when afflictions and disasters strike, since even though the soul has the potential to be patient, it is rarely the case that it is. The danger in this, as al-Muḥāsibī clarifies, is that impatience with an event that befalls one is tantamount to rejecting the predestination of God and may consequently incur His wrath. Conversely, if one were to be patient when afflicted, then one would have gained God’s pleasure and satisfaction (*al-riḍāʾ*), a quality that, it will be remembered, was closely associated with the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭmaʿinna*). Thus, by undertaking the process of *al-mujāhada*, one may purify the soul and so attain an attribute of its most elevated form.¹⁹⁴

Similarly, al-Muḥāsibī also encourages the struggle against one’s soul in loving that which God loves, since if someone was to fulfil this, they would not only please their Lord but also deny the soul its inclination to its own passions at the same time, causing it once again to be purified.¹⁹⁵ From these few examples alone it is easy to see the positive effect that *al-mujāhada* has on the soul and we may summarise al-Muḥāsibī’s view with one of the counsels he provides from the very same work:

My brothers, this is the path to God, so adhere to what I have described to you, believe in it in your heart, construct your actions based upon it and

struggle against your souls (*jāhidū anfusakum*) to establish it as, indeed, I see that the soul inclined to evil (*al-naḥs al-ammāra*) is determined to disregard the command of God, the Mighty and Exalted. So be observant of God (*rāqibū Allāh*) and do not neglect it [*al-naḥs*] or your religion will be destroyed.¹⁹⁶

Therefore, *al-mujāhada* is an essential feature of the purification process and especially in its initial stages as al-Muḥāsibī, when describing the beginning of the path for the aspirant and his attempt to be sincere, asserts that it is attained:

[w]ith struggle (*al-mujāhada*) and endurance (*al-mukābada*) due to the strength of the appetites, the weakness of his intention, the lack of practice at being sincere and being habitually ostentatious. This is because the weak slave, since his childhood, has been used to being insincere in front of his peers and if he wished to wean his soul away from this habit and break the strength of his appetites whilst his intention is weak and he lacks practice at being sincere, his soul will refuse and deem it difficult. Thus, he struggles (*jāhada*) and endures (*kābada*) until he is consistent in refuting his soul, sincerity becomes the norm and ostentation is rejected. Then the reward of sincerity from God enters his heart with light and insight, the soul is broken due to it being prevented its passions for a protracted period and the enemy [Iblīs] despairs and withdraws, awaiting [the advent of] the appetites and heedlessness. Then God, the Mighty and Exalted, draws near with assistance and aid due to what He has seen of his patience for His sake and his consistency in combating his desires (*al-mujāhada li hawāhu*).¹⁹⁷

Therefore, through continuous struggle against one's soul, one is able not only to overcome the base qualities of the *naḥs* but also to bring about the most essential feature of a religious act – that of sincerity for God alone. In addition, when this act of sincerity is observed at the heavenly level, the divine facet of *tazkiya* plays its role also, as God then grants His servant the bounty of His assistance in maintaining this heightened spiritual state, further adding to the process of reform and purification. The divine facet of *tazkiya* is further evidenced in the following text:

So when God, the Mighty and Exalted, grants the devotee strength of conviction, consistency in combating it (*mujāhadatihā*) and subduing it [*al-naḥs*] will despair from him giving it its desire, its nature will be made subservient by strength of conviction and the light of truth, it will be overcome by the concerns and worries of the hereafter, becoming tranquil to its [the hereafter's] invitation, severing hope in seeking its habits.¹⁹⁸

The practice of *al-mujāhada* is not restricted to the novice, however, and indeed it is an attribute of the most spiritually advanced on the path to God, as when discussing the characteristics of the spiritual instructors (*ṣifāt al-murabbiyyīn*) whom he sought in his youth and whom he eventually found:

The sign of this in the truthful person (*al-ṣādiq*) is that when he contemplates he is admonished, when he is silent he reflects, when he speaks he is reminded, if he is prevented [from something] he is patient, if he is presented [with something] he is grateful, if he is tried he recalls, if [some act of] ignorance was committed against him he forbears, if he gains knowledge he becomes humble, if he teaches he is gentle and if he were asked he expends [his efforts in answering]. He is a healing for the aspirant, an aid to the seeker of guidance, an ally of truth, a repository of righteousness, easily pleased regarding his own rights and is zealous regarding the rights of God. His intentions are better than his actions and his actions are more effective than his words. His abode is the truth, his sanctuary is shyness, his knowledge is scrupulousness and his witness is reliable. He has insights from light that he sees with, realities of knowledge which he speaks with and evidences from certainty which he expresses.

Those who reach this are only those who have strived against their own souls for God, the Exalted's sake (*jāhada nafsahu li Allāh ta'ālā*), made their intention sincere for His obedience, feared God secretly and openly, reduced their hopes, 'buckled the belt' of caution and 'set sail with the wind' of salvation 'upon a sea' of supplication.¹⁹⁹

Thus, a major factor in bringing about this change in state and undertaking the process of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, culminating in the highest of spiritual levels, is combating one's soul for God's sake and the positive consequences of this are many and varied, as he continues to enumerate its benefits:

Thus, his time is a blessing, his affairs are secure, he is not deluded by the adornment of the abode of deception and he is not distracted from the torments of the day of resurrection by the lustre of a mirage's breeze . . . so he [became] learned after ignorance, rich after poverty, genial after ferocity, intimate after being remote, rested after fatigue, his affairs were united and his concerns drawn together . . . the ignorant consider him speechless but it is his wisdom that has silenced him. The foolish consider him to be talking idly but it is his advice which has caused him to speak. [Some] consider him rich but it is his modesty which has sufficed him and [some] consider him poor but it is his humility which has humbled him. He doesn't involve himself in that which doesn't concern him, he doesn't burden himself more than he needs, he doesn't take that which he doesn't require, he doesn't leave that with which he has been entrusted and people are comfortable with him, while he is in a state of fatigue. He has killed his avarice with scrupulousness, terminated his greed with piety and annihilated his appetites with the light of knowledge.²⁰⁰

In addition to *al-mujāhada* being implemented on the soul, as may have been noticed in previous excerpts, the target of *al-mujāhada* is also the two most manifest negative qualities of the *nafs*, i.e. the appetites (*al-shahawāt*) and the desires

(*al-hawā*).²⁰¹ As such, the phrase ‘combating or struggling against the soul’ (*mujāhadat al-naḥs*) can be understood to mean the soul and its every negative facet. It is also worth noting that the practice of *al-mujāhada* is not restricted to the soul only in the works of al-Muḥāsibī but also to the other hidden adversary – Satan. In this regard, al-Muḥāsibī states, ‘And know that your love for obedience lies in fighting your enemy (*al-muḥāraba li ‘aduḥik*), combating your soul (*al-mujāhada li naḥsika*) and opposing your desires (*al-mukhālafat li hawāk*), especially if your soul is compliant with its desires, as your desires are Iblīs’s poisoned arrow, through which he reaches your heart’.²⁰² Moreover, in al-Muḥāsibī’s system of intimate knowledge and insight (*al-mar‘rifa*), Satan plays an intrinsic part and as such, al-Muḥāsibī explains, ‘And as for the intimate knowledge (*mar‘rifa*) of the enemy of God, Iblīs, it is that you should know that the Almighty, may He be praised and His names sanctified, has commanded you to fight him (*muḥārabatihi*) and to combat him (*mujāhadatihi*), in secret and in public and in obedience and disobedience’.²⁰³ Further clarifying the manner in which one should approach this despicable adversary, he says, ‘So fight him with the most severe battle and combat him with the most intense war, in secret and in public, outwardly and inwardly and do not be deficient in this until you have expended every effort in fighting him and combating him, as combating him is fighting him in every thing that he invites you to, whether it be good or evil’.²⁰⁴

Therefore, in summary we can clearly see that combating the insinuations, enticements and whisperings of the Devil are an equally intrinsic part of the practice of *al-mujāhada* and, as such, an equally intrinsic part of *tazkiya*. Consequently, the targets of *al-mujāhada* are both Satan and his ally, the negative facets of the human soul and thus *al-mujāhada* consists of a two-pronged attack on both the hidden external enemy and his internal counterpart.²⁰⁵

In addition, it is also worth noting that al-Muḥāsibī utilises a similar concept to *al-mujāhada*, namely that of opposing or contradicting the soul (*mukhālafat al-naḥs*) and once again we find this phrase well-evidenced in his works.²⁰⁶ Moreover, we may consider these two terms as being synonymous since whoever opposed his soul has most certainly struggled against and combated it. In this regard, al-Muḥāsibī states, ‘. . . Look at what your soul desires and then oppose it (*khālīfā*), as its desires only invite [you] to the affairs of the worldly life, so oppose (*khālīf*) the invitations of your soul and adhere to the command of your Lord, the Mighty and Exalted . . .’.²⁰⁷ Therefore, it is easy to see the similarity between *mukhālafat al-naḥs* and *mujāhada al-naḥs*, which is further evidenced by the following excerpt, which also stresses the divine facet of *tazkiya*:

It has been affirmed by the people of understanding (*ūla ‘l-nuḥā*) that whoever attained righteousness and obedience did so through opposing (*yukhālīf*) the soul’s passions, via some fatigue that afflicts it or by preventing it from some relaxation or pleasure it attempts to gain. As such, this is a clear proof and clear testimony against it [*al-naḥs*] that the one who caused it to oppose its passions is not the soul itself but, rather, the One Who is bounteous to it and as such, all praise and gratitude is due to Him.²⁰⁸

Therefore, in summary we can conclude that, as al-Muḥāsibī himself alludes to, *mukhālafat al-nafs* and *mujāhada al-nafs* are intrinsic features of the purification process through which the soul and its base qualities of the appetites (*al-shahawāt*) and the desires (*al-hawā*) are purified and the soul's nemesis – Satan – is controlled. This in turn brings about the pleasure of the soul's Creator and consequently, His greatest reward, as al-Muḥāsibī alludes to when describing the believer who is a 'worker' (*āmil*) and merchant (*tājir*) for God's pleasure in the hereafter saying, 'He is a combatant of his soul (*mujāhid li nafsihi*) and endures his desires (*mukābid li hawāhu*); he hopes that He will look at him whilst in that state and thus, be pleased with him (*yardā 'anhu*), which in turn brings about his eternal existence in His abode and secures him from His punishment'.²⁰⁹

Introspective examination (*al-muḥāsaba*)

In addition to the multifarious verses related to the concept of the account and recompense (*al-ḥisāb*) in the hereafter, exhibited in the Qur'ān,²¹⁰ it was found in the previous chapter that the earliest authorities in Islam are said to have made reference to the concept of 'examining the soul'. Taking these sources into consideration, al-Muḥāsibī would apply a method of intricate, precise and introspective examination and taking the soul account (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*) to himself so seriously, out of fear for the evaluation of his deeds on the Day of Judgement by God, that he became famous for it to the extent that it became synonymous with him.

Therefore, it is little surprise that he employs the concept of introspective examination (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*) as a valuable and intrinsic facet of the purification process. In addition, it is worth noting, however, he also utilises other different but related terms within this context such as 'appraisal and evaluation of the soul' (*murāja 'at al-nafs*) and 'inspection of the soul' (*mufātashat al-nafs*), which are used collectively and frequently throughout his works.²¹¹ Similarly, he also makes use of the phrase 'scrutinising [the hidden aspects] of the soul' (*tafaqqud [sarā'ir] al-nafs*)²¹² with an analogous connotation and together these phrases all indicate an in-depth, insightful, precise and exact examination of the soul and its qualities, which is invaluable as a method of *tazkiyat al-nafs*.

One may be struck by the fact that a scholar is attributed an appellation based on an esoteric spiritual practice but, when examining the works of al-Muḥāsibī, it is not surprising that he was renowned as 'al-Muḥāsibī', bearing in mind the huge stress he places on this facet of purifying the soul. Regarding the great emphasis al-Muḥāsibī places on introspective examination and taking the soul to account, he explains this to one of his students saying, 'And know that I only frequently remind you and myself of appraisal [of the soul] (*al-murāja 'at*) because it has been made clear to me how necessary it is'.²¹³ The necessity of introspective examination lies in the fact that it plays an essential role in religious and spiritual life as a whole, as al-Muḥāsibī explains, 'The basis of obedience is scrupulousness (*al-wara'*) and the basis of scrupulousness is "God consciousness" (*al-taqwā*); the basis of God consciousness is examining the soul (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*) and the basis of examining the soul is hope (*al-rajā'*) and fear (*al-khawf*)'.²¹⁴

Therefore, as far as al-Muḥāsibī is concerned *muḥāsabat al-naḥs* is a pinnacle feature of the internal faith system since it is the basis of God consciousness (*al-taqwā*), this in turn being the very essence of piety and righteousness. The relationship between *muḥāsabat al-naḥs* and *al-taqwā* therefore seems to lie in the fact that introspective examination is based on two other essential features of the contemplative, moral faith system in Islam – those of hope (*al-raǧāʿ*) and fear (*al-khawf*) – since if one is continually hoping in God’s mercy and paradise and fearing His wrath and punishment it would seem reasonable that a person may be described consequently as ‘God conscious’. Similarly, it is also understandable that al-Muḥāsibī would consider hope and fear as the basis for *al-muḥāsaba*, since if one were continually hoping in God’s mercy and paradise and fearing His wrath and punishment, they would clearly be concerned with making their account in front of God on the Day of Judgement as easy as possible and consequently would take great pains to make sure that this account was fully in order in this life.

Although al-Muḥāsibī mentions in the previous excerpt that the important moral quality of scrupulousness (*al-waraʿ*) is intrinsically related to God consciousness (*al-taqwā*), he also states that scrupulousness also has an important link to *al-muḥāsaba* when he says, ‘The beginning of scrupulousness (*al-waraʿ*) is introspective examination of the soul (*muḥāsabat al-naḥs*) when fleeting thoughts occur in the heart’.²¹⁵ Consequently, when asked by one of his students to elucidate the form of *al-muḥāsaba* that brings about scrupulousness, he clarifies that it is:

Proceeding cautiously in every circumstance before acting or abandoning an act, whether it be an intention in the heart or an action of the body, until it becomes clear that he should either act or abandon the action. Thus, if it became clear to him that it is something that God hates then he avoids it with a firm intention in his heart and he causes his body to refrain from that which God, the Mighty and Exalted, hates or [alternatively] he prevents his soul from non-performance of a compulsory duty and was swift to fulfil it.²¹⁶

Thus, for al-Muḥāsibī the process of *al-muḥāsaba* concerns every type of action that the human being performs, both the exoteric and esoteric, and revolves around God’s pleasure and command. With regard to the esoteric aspect, with which al-Muḥāsibī seems more concerned, before relating the narration of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb seen in the previous chapter, he says, ‘And examine your soul (*ḥāsib naḥsaka*) regarding every fleeting thought (*khaṭra*) and be vigilant of God (*rāqib Allāh*) in every breath (*naḥas*)’.²¹⁷ As such, al-Muḥāsibī considers the practice of *al-muḥāsaba* so important that it should even be carried out upon the most hidden of human faculties – the thought process – that may not even last for a fraction of a second. In addition, he also alludes to the fact that an intrinsic feature of *al-muḥāsaba* is another facet of *tazkiya* that we have already seen – that of *al-murāqaba*, since through maintaining vigilance of God one may establish whether the action at hand is indeed pleasing to Him or not. Al-Muḥāsibī makes this even clearer in the following text:

It is not appropriate for an intelligent person to be indifferent regarding inspecting his aspirations (*muḥāṣabat himmatihī*), examining his soul (*muḥāṣabat nafsihī*), purifying his conscience (*naqā' damīrihī*), being vigilant of God (*muḥāṣabat Allāh*), Glory be to Him the Exalted, concerning every action he wants to perform – or otherwise he is deceived.²¹⁸

In an even more apparent exposition of the esoteric aspect of *al-muḥāsaba*, al-Muḥāsibī makes clear that another important aspect of this practice when he says, 'And from examining it [*al-nafs*] (*muḥāṣabatihā*) is that you be alone with it and remind it of its deeds, saying, "O soul, you cannot deceive and overcome God, so do not accept Satan's deceit and his attempt to overcome [you] and do not follow your desires as they will ruin and destroy you"'. Therefore, as we can plainly see from this text and from others he provides,²¹⁹ al-Muḥāsibī even advocates addressing the soul as if it were another person, as the effect of this is more manifest when attempting to censure the soul (*mu'ātabat al-nafs*) regarding its immoral behaviour.

In addition to this, it is also worth noting that al-Muḥāsibī apports the intellect (*al-'aql*) a pivotal role in introspective examination as he explains that *al-muḥāsaba* is, 'The intellect (*al-'aql*) being put in charge over guarding the soul's treachery and scrutinising its accomplishments from its deficiencies'.²²⁰ Thus, it is the light of reason that is an indispensable tool in discerning the motives and intentions of the soul and differentiating between acts performed sincerely for God alone or, alternatively, carried out at the behest of the soul's appetites and desires. With regard to discriminating between such features of the believers' interior life being related to God's pleasure and command in the process of *al-muḥāsaba*, al-Muḥāsibī clarifies the criteria for action when he says, 'Ask before any act you intend to perform, "Why and for whom?" So if it was for God then you continue in performing it but if it was for other than God then you refrain from it'.²²¹ Thus, the only criterion for action is God's pleasure alone, this being the pinnacle of sincerity.

Similarly, *al-muḥāsaba* saves one from the fear of deficiency and the disgrace of loss in the hereafter, since in the same way a merchant takes his business partners to account for the state of their business affairs, out of trying to avoid a deficit and in the hope of attaining profits, the believer equally has to take his soul to account to ensure that he has no 'deficit' with his Lord.²²² Moreover, *al-muḥāsaba* produces an increase in insight (*al-baṣīra*), makes one swift in being able to establish proofs, makes one refined in discernment and increases one in understanding, according to the extent that one maintains examining the heart and soul.²²³ In addition, the practice of *al-muḥāsaba* inculcates the faculty of attentiveness (*al-tayaqquḥ*) into the practitioner of introspective examination of the soul and, as such, brings him out of a state of forgetfulness (*al-sahw*) to one of remembrance (*dhikr*).²²⁴ Bearing in mind the many positive qualities that adopting *al-muḥāsaba* brings about, this also has an effect in the divine realm as al-Muḥāsibī considers such people to have attained a noble rank and position with God (*maqām sharīf/manzila sharīfa*) due to their sincerity to God.²²⁵

Conversely, the negative effects of not carrying out the process of *al-muḥāsaba* are equally disastrous as al-Muḥāsibī observes: ‘The farthest person from justice and the most heedless of them is the one who examines his soul the least (*aqal-lahum muḥāsabatan li nafsihi*)’.²²⁶ Similarly, when describing a person’s slippery slide into sin and disobedience al-Muḥāsibī observes:

The beginning of indifference is laziness (*al-kasal*), so if ‘concern’ (*al-ri’āya*) has any power over him then laziness will be suppressed but if not, then it will increase until it becomes ‘uneasiness’ (*jazi*); so if compassion prevents him he desists [from uneasiness] but if not then it will increase until he becomes averse to obedience; so if he has softness in his heart he desists but if not he will become astray and we seek shelter in God from that. Thus, if he was astray he has exited the authority of fear and is left to the deception of security²²⁷; then he will increase in error to the abode of destruction, the veil of integrity will be lifted from him and he will be disgraced by the witnessing of glory.²²⁸ And this is all due to a lack of examining the soul (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*).²²⁹

Therefore, the solution and cure to all of the above-mentioned ailments is the application of this facet of the purification process. In addition, *al-muḥāsaba*’s effect is not only limited to the soul but its sphere of influence extends to the heart also:

The basis of the heart’s corruption is abandoning examining the soul (*al-muḥāsabat li ’l-nafs*) and being deceived by high hopes (*al-ighṭirār bi ṭūl al-amal*). So if you wanted to reform your heart then pause to examine your intention and every fleeting thought, accepting that which is for God, abandoning that which is for other than Him and seeking aid against high hopes with consistent remembrance of death.²³⁰

It is also worth noting, however, that with respect to the application of introspective examination of the soul, al-Muḥāsibī distinguishes between two categories of *al-muḥāsaba*, which he terms examining the soul regarding future actions (*muḥāsabat al-nafs fī mustaqbal al-a’ māl*) and examining the soul regarding past deeds (*muḥāsabat al-nafs fī mustadbar al-a’ māl*).²³¹ With regard to the first category, al-Muḥāsibī states, ‘It is to contemplate while proceeding cautiously before slipping into error, to discern that which harms you from that which benefits you; consequently, you abandon that which harms you according to knowledge and you act in accordance with that which benefits you according to knowledge’.²³² As a result, even before performing an action *al-muḥāsaba* is employed to differentiate between good and evil actions to act as a preventive measure and thus it limits the potential to commit sins before the action even takes place.

As for the second category of *al-muḥāsaba*, then this – as the name suggests – takes place after the action has been completed. In this sense the deed is evaluated in its every aspect and a series of questions need to be posed, such as: ‘Why

and for whom?', regarding the intentions behind the action, 'How would it be if it were presented in front of the Creator?', 'Has it been performed in a way it would be pleasing to Him?' and 'Was it completed in the way that He commanded?' Depending on the answers to these questions, the person performing these deeds will then need to make amends for the deficiencies therein by seeking God's forgiveness and repenting or finding a way in which the deed can be consequently made acceptable.²³³

Furthermore, to make this process effective, al-Muḥāsibī suggests that the following three qualities be observed:

First, to sever oneself from the relationships that hinder focusing one's concern on *al-muḥāsaba*, as whoever wanted to take his debtor to account emptied his heart of all preoccupations. Secondly, to dedicate oneself to it out of choice because of the benefit that is hoped for from it and thirdly, the fear that God, the Mighty and Exalted, will ask him concerning what he neglected regarding that which reached him upon the tongue of His Prophet, peace be upon him, when he said, 'The believer should be seen at four "hours": [from them] an hour in which he examines his soul (*yuḥāsib nafsahu*)'.²³⁴

However, people vary in their ability to apply this process of *al-muḥāsaba* as al-Muḥāsibī observes:

People with regard to assessing their deeds are of two types: first, a person who evaluates his soul and examines his habitual practice and when he finds out that the burden of proof is established against his soul, he casts it aside and, as a result, falls into the snare of Iblīs. Secondly, a man who evaluates his soul and made his intellect the burden of proof between him and his desires, so whatever was found to be acceptable by his intellect he accepted it and whatever was found to be unacceptable by his intellect he discarded it. Therefore, this man knew his faults through examining his soul (*muḥāsabat nafsihi*) and opposing his desires (*mukhālafat hawāhu*), such that he continued to change until he became from the party of God (*ḥizb Allāh*), the Exalted, and became one the most anxious and worried of people in the worldly life, until death came to him and he was apprehensive, afraid and trembling.²³⁵

Thus, the effect that *al-muḥāsaba* has on those who apply it is tremendous and consequently it is an essential feature of the purification process. As testimony to this, after elucidating the state of the worst of God's servants, al-Muḥāsibī then says:

Then there is the servant who is an aspirant and is concerned with his soul, who is heedful of the book of God, the Mighty and Exalted and the *sunna* of His Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, whose aspiration is examining his soul (*muḥāsabat nafsihi*) to distinguish his inner thoughts; [ask yourself] with which of them is God more pleased and with which of them is He more angry?²³⁶

Therefore, in summary, we may conclude that the practice of introspective examination (*muḥāsabat al-nafs*) has a deep-rooted basis in the Islamic revelatory sources and, in addition to this, has been developed further by al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī into an in-depth, insightful, precise and exact examination of the soul and its qualities, to the extent that he became synonymous with the practice he played a huge role in developing. In addition, this process takes into consideration not only the past deeds of a person but also his future actions and thus subjects them to a simple, yet strict set of criteria to establish their validity in the religious context. Furthermore, it can be observed that the practice of *muḥāsabat al-nafs* has numerous beneficial results and conversely there are equally numerous negative consequences in not applying it. Consequently, we can see that this contemplative and highly spiritual exercise has a profound effect on the soul and, as such, is an essential and vital facet of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī's methodology of *tazkiyat al-nafs*.

Conclusion

In summary, one is able to provide a variety of conclusions regarding al-Muḥāsibī's methodology of *tazkiyat al-nafs*: first, although he does not use the term *tazkiya* in the technical sense employed in the current work, his in-depth knowledge and insight regarding the nature of the human soul and its consequent nurturing and disciplining intrinsically link al-Muḥāsibī's teachings with the process of purification and development indicated by the term *tazkiya*. Indeed, it is his profound knowledge of the intricate workings of the inner sanctuary of the human soul that makes his work unique and to try and encapsulate his ideas regarding it is by no means an easy task.

However, the discussion in this chapter has also shown that al-Muḥāsibī's thought regarding the purification of the soul, the exposition of the *nafs*, its faults and consequent training are thoroughly grounded in Islam's revelatory sources, namely the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*, as many of the concepts and terms alluded to in Chapter 4 are reiterated in our subject's works. In consequence, al-Muḥāsibī gives importance to both the divine and prophetic facets of the process of *tazkiya* but, at the same time, by far the greatest emphasis is given to the personal element in this process, as it is the individual who is ultimately responsible and has a vital role to play. Similarly, although he makes brief reference to the two 'higher' forms of the soul, i.e. 'the self-reproachful' (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*) and 'the tranquil' (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*), it is the base form of the soul, the 'soul inclined to evil' (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi 'l-sū'*) which is the target of al-Muḥāsibī's exposition, as it is this internal adversary that threatens the individual's ultimate destruction and, therefore, must be transformed. In addition, however, al-Muḥāsibī is not satisfied merely by explaining such concepts, as many authors have attempted, but rather he develops them further, introducing his own vernacular regarding the *nafs*, and provides practical, methodological advice regarding the purification of the soul.

Al-Muḥāsibī's methodology as described here revolves around an in-depth and intimate knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the *nafs* and its nature, which thus provides the

basis for the reformation of the soul, since one could possibly bring about this change without first knowing the 'enemy within' and the enormity and complexity of the task. Thus, al-Muḥāsibī provides a practical method in dealing with such a 'rebellious' soul that revolves around the individual continually maintaining of God's observance of him (*al-murāqaba*), out of fear of His punishment and wrath and out shame (*ḥāya*) of committing an offence in His 'presence' and thus, by doing so, reaching the state of spiritual excellence (*iḥsān*) described by the Prophet. Similarly, bearing in mind the soul's nature, i.e. that it is inclined to evil (*ammāra bi 'l-sū'*) and the negative personal and moral qualities associated with it, al-Muḥāsibī also suggests a continual striving against the *nafs* (*al-mujāhada*), including censuring it (*al-mu'ātaba*), imposing penalties upon it (*al-'uqūbāt*), causing it to proceed cautiously (*al-tathbīt*) and restraining it (*al-habs*) and averting it from its nature (*al-inṣirāf*) to reform it (*al-iṣlāḥ*) and ultimately eradicate evil from it and its actions.

In addition, an intrinsic part of the above-mentioned process is an assessment of one's external state through an introspective analysis of one's motives and intentions (*al-muḥāsaba*) to ascertain their sincerity for God. This is undertaken not only regarding past deeds as one may expect but also in the present before one acts, in an attempt to avoid an indiscretion before it even takes place. This consequently facilitates the initiation of repentance (*al-tawba*) for past misdeeds, further instils the maintaining of God's observance of one's state (*al-murāqaba*) and, if negative elements are found, the extent to which the soul is to be combated (*al-mujāhada*). Thus, *al-muḥāsaba* is pivotal in governing and regulating the other various facets of the purification process.

Therefore, in addition to the multifaceted and multilevel exposition of *tazkiyat al-nafs* within the Islamic paradigm supplied in the previous chapter, al-Muḥāsibī, through his knowledge of this and his development of a methodology regarding it, has provided an equally multifaceted approach to *tazkiyat al-nafs*. It is through this methodology that he seeks to bring about the reform of the human being as a whole and thus reach the perfection of the human state described as 'the tranquil soul' (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*), which is both satisfied with its Lord and has, at the same time, attained its Lord's satisfaction.

Notes

- 1 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 49; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 38–40 and 73–5; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 417.
- 2 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 69; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Ādhār/Nīsān, 1954), p. 188; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 54 and 96; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 260–1; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 588.
- 3 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 88.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 5 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fi A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 56–7 and 67; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 69 and 74–5.

- 6 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 60; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 41, 55 and 69; Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 92; al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Ṣalāt*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 42–3; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 273 and 307; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fi 'A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 111 and 130; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 104, 106, 179, 180, 588 and 662.
- 7 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 76.
- 8 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 40.
- 9 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 23–4 and 34; and Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 433.
- 10 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 119, 128 and 135–6; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 34, 37–8 and 70–1; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qasd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh in al-Waṣāyā*, p. 266; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 67–9; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 81, 411, 433, 435 and 438.
- 11 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 48.
- 12 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 34.
- 13 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 25, 34, 37–8, 54, 56, 70–1, 77, 86 and 88–9; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 48–9, 56–7 and 67–9; Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 31; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 138, 411, 435 and 438.
- 14 There are many examples of this in the works of al-Muḥāsibī but one of the most apparent is his discussion of careless use of the tongue in *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 62–3.
- 15 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 27.
- 16 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 57–8, 78 and 145; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, pp. 93–4; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 87.
- 17 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 78.
- 18 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 12–13 and 94.
- 19 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 47 and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 181, 189 and 647.
- 20 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 189.
- 21 I have deliberately avoided translating the terms *rūḥ* and *nafs* to limit any further confusion.
- 22 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 647.
- 23 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 579.
- 24 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 39 and 60.
- 25 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāṭ, 1955), p. 47, and (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 452.
- 26 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 116.
- 27 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 40–2; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 47, 51 and 76; al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 60–1; al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 26; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 45–6; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 46.
- 28 It is equally interesting to note that this is the most common usage of the term *nafs* in al-Muḥāsibī's works and therefore makes the scope of *tazkiya* much broader and, indeed, brings it into line with the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* arrived at in Chapter 4.
- 29 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 47; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 31–2; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 181–95 *passim* and 647.
- 30 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 24; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 55 and 69.

- 31 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 34; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 55.
- 32 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 24.
- 33 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 25; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 617 and 628; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 37.
- 34 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 38 and 79; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, ed. Aṭā, p. 225; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 151, 199, 311, 379 and 434.
- 35 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 30.
- 36 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 81; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 69; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 79; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 579.
- 37 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīha*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 46.
- 38 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 172; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 558.
- 39 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 34 and 70; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 55, 101 and 130; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 87.
- 40 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 108–10 and 115–17 *passim*; and Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 605–43 *passim*.
- 41 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 31; Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 109; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 38 and 79; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Maṣā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 48–9 and 127; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 278, 469–549 *passim*, 592, 600 and 617.
- 42 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 61, 94, 125, 128, 163, 166 and 169; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīha*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 72 and 88; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 48, 59, 65 and 71; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 218 and 318; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 60; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 224; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Maṣā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 46, 56 and 132; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 68, 70, 105, 111, 177, 223, 258 and 309.
- 43 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 24; Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 56, 81–2, 95, 98–9 and 163; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 38–9, 48, 51, 54–5 and 65; al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Ṣalāt*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 56 and 70; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 220–1; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 58 and 88; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 143; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 119; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 451–2, 459, 473 and 476–80 *passim*; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 75 and 94; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 225, 237, 309–12, 319 and 321–8; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Maṣā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 112–14 *passim*, 118–20, 126 and 130; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 52, 55, 61, 82–3, 89–91, 101–3, 105–6, 156, 170–2, 180, 193, 206, 221–2, 235, 294–5, 326, 363–8, 392, 407, 438, 440, 456, 527, 530–2, 534–6, 560, 563, 568, 570, 572, 574–5, 580–1, 589–90, 635, 649 and 655.
- 44 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 61, 88–9, 128–9 and 135–6; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīha*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 46, 53–4, 57 and 61; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 54; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 71; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 79, 81 and 131; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, pp. 82 and 93; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 49; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 217 and 236; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 50, and (Tamūz/Tashrīn,

- 1955), pp. 452, 473, 479 and 480–5 *passim*; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 14, 31, 38, 42, 44, 46, 53, 67, 86 and 91; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh in al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 225, 227, 230–1, 234, 248, 291 and 297; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 46, 50, 58, 69–72, 77, 78 and 148; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 46, 68, 74, 81, 82, 84–5, 89, 110, 111, 116, 121, 125, 128, 235, 241, 258, 305, 306, 317, 320, 327, 356, 378, 381, 384, 391, 397, 401, 402, 407, 408, 419, 432, 433, 434, 436, 439, 512, 527, 576, 584 and 587.
- 45 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 79; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 49; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 217 and 236; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 31 and 42; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 46, 110, 111, 116 and 401.
- 46 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh in al-Waṣāyā*, p. 231.
- 47 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 61; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 54; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 81; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 82; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 49; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 217 and 236; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 82 and 110.
- 48 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 46.
- 49 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 408, 419, 432 and 584.
- 50 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh in al-Waṣāyā*, p. 248.
- 51 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 38, 44 and 91; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 436.
- 52 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 61 and 88–9; Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 483; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 14; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh in al-Waṣāyā*, p. 234; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 68, 235 and 587.
- 53 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 81.
- 54 *Ibid.*, pp. 306 and 433.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- 56 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 53–4 and 57; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 473, 479, 481 and 482; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 42, 46 and 53; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 576.
- 57 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 79.
- 58 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 452; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, p. 50; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 121.
- 59 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 480; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 86; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 241, 305, 327, 391 and 397.
- 60 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 481; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, p. 58; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 512 and 587.
- 61 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 46.
- 62 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, p. 46.
- 63 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 53–4.
- 64 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 378.
- 65 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 128–9.
- 66 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 88, 93, 135–6 and 169; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 60 and 77; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 119; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 32–3, 39, 56 and 71; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 81; al-Muḥāsibī,

- Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 82; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 236; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 47, and (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 452, 453, 470 and 480; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 13, 14, 18, 23, 28, 33, 34, 35, 57, 69 and 91; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh in al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 230–1, 244, 291, and 307; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 102, 116, 131, 149–50, 159 and 163; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 46, 68, 78, 80, 83, 84–5, 110, 111, 115, 116, 160, 162, 200, 234–8 *passim*, 237, 240, 241, 247, 248, 304, 306, 327, 377–80 *passim*, 391, 395, 405, 407, 433, 434, 435, 511, 600 and 634.
- 67 See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, pp. 1124–5; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p. 1228; and al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, p. 582.
- 68 In the sense that it requires personal effort and may incur some difficulty.
- 69 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Naḥs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 32–3; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 149–50; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 84–5.
- 70 See Sijistānī, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, p. 670; al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, p. 582; and al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī al-Ṣuḡhrā*, p. 529.
- 71 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 85.
- 72 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 470.
- 73 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 23 and 34.
- 74 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nuḥūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 88.
- 75 A good example of this is eating, as human beings would simply die if they didn't have the appetite to nourish their bodies. Therefore, al-Muḥāsibī is not suggesting that one divest oneself of this quality, as this would be simply preposterous but rather he is proposing that such appetites be controlled and reined in. The consequence of not doing this is that the appetites can then lead to an excess that in turn causes an exceeding of the limits, which is exactly what the above *ḥadīths* are referring to.
- 76 Thus, once again al-Muḥāsibī shows just how adept he was at identifying the character traits of the human soul.
- 77 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 200; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 91.
- 78 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nuḥūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 93 and 135–6; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 77; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 110, 115, 238, 240, 377, 379, 407 and 600.
- 79 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 110, 116, 234, 240, 378, 511 and 600.
- 80 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 111.
- 81 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Naḥs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 39.
- 82 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 236 and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 433.
- 83 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 241 and 391.
- 84 *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- 85 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh in al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 230–1; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 235–6.
- 86 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 46.
- 87 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 81.
- 88 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 69.
- 89 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 13; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh in al-Waṣāyā*, p. 244; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, p. 102; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 80.
- 90 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, p. 131.
- 91 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nuḥūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 169.

- 92 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 71 and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 291 and 307.
- 93 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 119.
- 94 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 452.
- 95 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 409.
- 96 Ibid., p. 437.
- 97 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 32.
- 98 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 111, 146, 150 and 173; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 32 and 88; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 34; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 56; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 37; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 275–8; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fi A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 46 and 129–30.
- 99 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 276.
- 100 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 146.
- 101 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 32.
- 102 Ibid., p. 25.
- 103 Ibid., p. 31.
- 104 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 88–9 and 93–4; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīha*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 29 and 35–8; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 92; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'an*, p. 229; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 480; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 26; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 434.
- 105 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 88–9 and 93–4.
- 106 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīha*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 29 and 35–8.
- 107 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'an*, p. 229.
- 108 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 92.
- 109 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 434.
- 110 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 440.
- 111 This is not to say there is no reference to positive qualities of the soul in the works of al-Muḥāsibī but indeed they are rare. For example, there is a reference to the patience of the soul (*ṣabr al-nafs*) and other limited references to the conscience of the soul (*damīr al-nafs*). See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Ādhār/Nīsān, 1954), pp. 188; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fi A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, p. 91; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 215 and 530.
- 112 The *sūra* continues, 'Then indeed, paradise is his abode' (79: 41).
- 113 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 480–1; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 89; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 126–7.
- 114 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 44, and (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 452; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 87; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 243, 355, 356 and 407.
- 115 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 49; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 55; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 126–7.
- 116 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 53.
- 117 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 81.
- 118 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 53.
- 119 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 47, 89 and 91; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'an*, p. 222.
- 120 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fi A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 148–9; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 96–7; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 26.

- 121 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 74, 97, 113, 137, 142 and 173; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 155; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 233; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 91 and 148; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 402, 438 and 558.
- 122 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 76.
- 123 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 40, 91 and 94; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 148 and 149.
- 124 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 23.
- 125 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 51; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Ādhār/Nisān, 1954), p. 189, (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), pp. 44, 47, 48 and 52, and (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 475, 476, 478 and 480–5 *passim*; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 387, 403 and 410.
- 126 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 72, 75, 80, 81, 82 and 90; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 530.
- 127 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 48; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 102, 103, 107, 108, 157, 158, 159, 317, 360, 362, 374, 403, 529, 543, 550, 554 and 664–5.
- 128 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 475–6.
- 129 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, p. 143.
- 130 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badhl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 36; and cf. pp. 47–9.
- 131 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 55–6.
- 132 Ibid., p. 89
- 133 Ibid., p. 74.
- 134 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 44; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 110, 170, 361 and 379.
- 135 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 76; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 102.
- 136 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 62; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 41; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 151; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 92 and 149; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 473 and 485; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 109, 402–3, 404, 417, 432, 439, 440, 442, 562, 563, 583, 586 and 600.
- 137 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 40 and 55.
- 138 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 241 and 305.
- 139 Ibid., p. 258.
- 140 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, p. 60; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 37; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 119.
- 141 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 45.
- 142 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 453, 459–61 and 474; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 65.
- 143 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 25–6; al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Ṣalāt*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 62 and 70; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 94, 128, 436 and 527.
- 144 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, p. 146.
- 145 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 92–3 and 95.
- 146 Ibid., p. 102.
- 147 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 238 and 293.
- 148 Ibid., p. 238.

- 149 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 145; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 269 and 307; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 128 and 218.
- 150 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 80.
- 151 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 116 and 142–3; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 479.
- 152 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 40 and 91; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 636; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 283 and 284; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 76.
- 153 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 46; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 392 and 662.
- 154 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 60; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 70–1.
- 155 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 83; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 168, 170, 174, 218, 301, 302, 304, 307, 308, 344, 351, 361, 362, 373, 374, 377, 553, 556, 617, 628 and 636.
- 156 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 117, 119, 555, 557 and 558.
- 157 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 112–13; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 485.
- 158 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 50.
- 159 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 63.
- 160 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 31.
- 161 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 229 and 232.
- 162 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Ādhār/Nīsān, 1954), p. 189.
- 163 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 395.
- 164 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 480.
- 165 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 37.
- 166 See, for example: al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' Man Anāba ilā Allāh*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 24; al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 74, 128–9, 146 and 176; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 37, 41 and 45–6; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Ādhār/Nīsān, 1954), p. 190, (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), pp. 44, 49 and 52, and (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 473, 474, 477, 479, 480, 481 and 482; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 289 and 323; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il ft A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 148–53; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 110–12, 220, 298, 402–3, 415, 437, 454, 589 and 602.
- 167 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 481.
- 168 Ibid. (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 44.
- 169 See al-Kalābādhī, *al-Ta'arruf*, pp. 107–9; al-Tūsī, *al-Luma'*, pp. 40–2; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 89–97; and al-Suhrawardī, *'Awārif al-Ma'arif*, vol. 5, p. 221.
- 170 Al-Muḥāsibī, al-Hārith b. Asad, *al-Ri'āya li Huqūq Allāh*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), pp. 326–7.
- 171 Meaning: knowledge of the soul (*ma'rifat al-nafs*), that it is contemptible in your eyes (*hawānuha*) and your influence over it (*al-quwwa 'alayhā*).
- 172 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 37.
- 173 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 146.
- 174 See, for example: al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 69–71, 95, 125, 143, 145, 157–8, 169 and 175–6; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 23, 32, 37 and 54; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 91, 127 and 181; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Ādhār/Nīsān, 1954), p. 188; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 35 and 44; al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Salāt*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 58; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed.

- Aḥmad, pp. 31, 33, 39, 45, 48, 51, 53, 54, 60, 67–9, 72 and 77; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 280–1, 287 and 313–18; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 129–30 and 150; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 166, 168, 175, 178, 199, 368, 377–8 and 527.
- 175 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 169.
- 176 Ibid., p. 158.
- 177 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Ṣalāt*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 58; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, p. 54.
- 178 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 69.
- 179 See al-Ṭūsī, *al-Luma'*, pp. 51–2; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 189–92; and al-Suhrawardī, *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, vol. 5, pp. 222–3.
- 180 Compare this with: al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 67–9; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 95.
- 181 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 181; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 70–1 and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 166.
- 182 See, for example: al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 71 and 125; al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 36, 59, 61 and 66; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 32; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 158; al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Ṣalāt*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 58; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 86; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 210–11; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 479; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 31, 39, 50, 53, 68, 69, 86 and 87; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 287, 316–18 and 319; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 51, 55, 99, 150 and 158; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 168, 246, 278, 341–6, 368–9, 391, 568, 639 and 659.
- 183 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 313.
- 184 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Aṭā, p. 35.
- 185 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 315.
- 186 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fī A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, pp. 129–30.
- 187 See verses: 10: 61, 21: 47, 31: 16, 34: 3 and 99: 7–8.
- 188 This is an indication to the minute detail that will characterise this 'accounting' and subsequent 'recompense'.
- 189 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 158.
- 190 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 280.
- 191 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 23.
- 192 See, for example: al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 150; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 32 and 34; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 104; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, p. 92; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, p. 237; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), pp. 44, 46 and 52 and Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955, pp. 452, 480–1, 482 and 485–6; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 37, 39, 40–1, 45, 51, 53, 54, 56, 72, 75, 78, 83, 84, 86 and 92; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 80, 120–1, 157, 241, 243, 248, 252, 305, 328, 355, 378, 391, 395, 396, 397, 402, 406, 415 and 435.
- 193 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 452.
- 194 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 37–8.
- 195 Ibid., p. 51.
- 196 Ibid., p. 45.
- 197 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. Aṭā, pp. 192–3.

- 198 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. 'Atā, p. 350; and cf. pp. 322–4, 330 and 354.
- 199 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 102–4.
- 200 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 105–6.
- 201 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 305, 391 and 397.
- 202 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), p. 482.
- 203 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 32.
- 204 *Ibid.*, p. 33; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), pp. 46–7; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 252–5.
- 205 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 355.
- 206 See, for example, al-Muḥāsibī, *Adāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 150; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 37 and 53; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), pp. 46–7, and (Tamūz/Tashrīn, 1955), pp. 485–6; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 109, 327, 356, 377, 402, 434 and 436.
- 207 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, p. 268.
- 208 *Ibid.*, p. 350.
- 209 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 210 For example, see verses: (6: 52), (6: 69), (21: 1), (23: 118), (24: 39), (26: 113), (40: 17), (40: 27), (40: 40), (65: 8), (69: 20), (69: 26), (78: 27), (78: 36), (84: 8) and (88: 26); and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'an*, pp. 265 and 436.
- 211 See, for example, al-Muḥāsibī, *Adāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 59–60, 73, 74, 92–3, 116–17, 125, 128, 129, 130, 142–3, 150 and 169; al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 31, 36, 37, 53–4, 57, 72–3, 83 and 85; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, pp. 71 and 103; al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 46, 48, 110 and 123; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'an*, pp. 265 and 436; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, in *al-Mashriq* (Kānūn al-Thānī/Shabāt, 1955), p. 47; al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 13, 24, 27, 36 and 55; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 228 and 229–31; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Masā'il fi A'māl al-Qulūb wa 'l-Jawāriḥ wa 'l-Makāsib wa 'l-'Aql*, p. 132; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 63–4, 65–77, 160 and 164.
- 212 See, for example, al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 40, 71, 78 and 91; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 229; and al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 106, 403, 562, 563, 574, 577, 578, 579, 590, 596, 597, 600, 602, 662 and 665.
- 213 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Adāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 92.
- 214 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 63–4.
- 215 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. al-Khusht, p. 103.
- 216 *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- 217 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 46–7; and cf. al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, p. 164.
- 218 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Adāb al-Nufūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, pp. 142–3; and cf. pp. 149–50.
- 219 See, for example, al-Muḥāsibī's text entitled *Mu'atabat al-Nafs*, which is replete with examples of this.
- 220 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 229.
- 221 *Ibid.*
- 222 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 229.
- 223 *Ibid.*, p. 230.
- 224 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, p. 123; and al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih*, ed. Aḥmad, pp. 55.
- 225 See al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣīḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, pp. 31 and 57.

- 226 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nuḥūs*, ed. al-Sayyid, p. 74.
- 227 Meaning that he is deceived by thinking he is secure.
- 228 Meaning by believing in the glory of God's mercy and pardon only and not taking into account his punishment and wrath that he will be disgraced.
- 229 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 228.
- 230 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*, ed. Abū Ghudda, pp. 110–11.
- 231 See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. al-Barr, pp. 65–77 *passim*.
- 232 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 233 *Ibid.*, pp. 73–4.
- 234 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa 'l-Rujū' ilā Allāh* in *al-Waṣāyā*, p. 230.
- 235 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Sharḥ al-Ma'rifa wa Badl al-Naṣiḥa*, ed. al-Shāmī, p. 83.
- 236 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li Ḥuqūq Allāh*, p. 122.

Conclusion

From the outset and as the title of this book indicates, the current study is concerned with two major features of the Islamic learning, namely the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, as manifested in this tradition, and equally the life and works of al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī. It has been demonstrated that the discipline of *tazkiyat al-nafs* has a firm foundation in the classical Islamic disciplines but, at the same time, many would associate it with what is now included under the broad heading of ‘Islamic Mysticism’ or, more commonly, ‘Sufism’. The two major terms used to describe Sufism are the words ‘spirituality’ and ‘mysticism’, which in turn are often prefixed by the term ‘Islamic’ to distinguish them from other forms of spirituality or mysticism. Therefore, bearing in mind the nature of al-Muḥāsibī’s discourse, it is equally important here to comment on spirituality and mysticism in general, so as to understand where both he and *tazkiyat al-nafs* ‘fit’ in the overall picture of these concepts.

Spirituality

The first of these terms, ‘spirituality’, is particularly difficult to define due to its derivation from another problematic term, namely ‘spirit’.¹ Its roots, however, would appear to lie in the Christian tradition where it has a long history of theology and religious practice.² The spiritual can be understood by contrasting it with the physical, material and external, being primarily an internal quest. Some understand the ‘spiritual’ as more diffuse and less institutionalised than the ‘religious’. Others, however, understand spirituality to be the very core of religion, particularly through religious and mystical experience. The subject matter of spirituality has been a perennial human concern and modern interest in spirituality has been combined with an emphasis on the individual subject and self-development, thus becoming a universal term to indicate a search for direction and meaning.³

Similarly, spirituality has often been described as an attempt to grow in sensitivity – to the self, to others, to non-human creation and to God, or as an exploration into what is involved in becoming human; a quest for full humanity. Thus, spirituality, not as an idea or a concept, but as a praxis found throughout human history, is resonant with the longings of the human heart for the permanent, eternal, everlasting – for wholeness, peace, joy and bliss – which have concerned human

beings through the ages and which many people continue to search for today.⁴ In the past, however, much of the spirituality that was taught and lived was developed by a social, cultural and intellectual group which alone had the necessary devotion for cultivating mind and spirit.⁵

Mysticism

As for the term ‘mysticism’, its origin lies in the Greek root *mu-*,⁶ suggesting something closed, hidden, or secret and the group of words constructed from it – *mystikon*, *mysterion*, and *mystes* – were used in connection with the Greek mystery religions.⁷ Mysticism is not necessarily confined to ‘religion’, however, as many describe ‘mystical experiences’ in a non-religious context. Thus, in theistic tradition it is often described as a fundamentally unitive experience of love and communion with God, whereas in non-theistic traditions it is described as an intuitive, contemplative approach to ultimate reality. In either case it is understood as an experience beyond ordinary human experience and reason but at the same time is not antagonistic to them. The study of mysticism is undertaken from the perspectives of theology, philosophy and psychology and examines the nature and interpretation of religious experience.⁸

For most people, mystical experience is only indirectly accessible via mystical literature, which exists in many different genres. Common to them is the insistence on an experience of fundamental unity or oneness transcending the diversity of everyday life. To this end many religions prescribe techniques of contemplation and meditation, as well as a variety of spiritual disciplines and ascetic practices, as a means to reach mystical experience. The majority of mystics maintain that their experience is fundamentally ineffable, i.e. it cannot be adequately expressed; yet this claim does not preclude the describability of such experiences to which the mystical literature in all religions bears witness.⁹

Despite this, however, when trying to define mysticism we encounter as many, if not more difficulties than with spirituality.¹⁰ A myriad of definitions exist but due to the concise nature of the discussion, there are a limited number of dictionary definitions which will suffice. In the first mysticism is said to be, ‘Reliance on spiritual intuition or exalted feeling as the means of acquiring knowledge of mysteries inaccessible to intellectual apprehension’. This, however, does not mean that mystics discover new facts as this is the role of science, but we mean that they seek a wisdom that gives a new vision and understanding of the world.¹¹ The dictionary also gives its central definition of mysticism as, ‘belief in the possibility of union with the divine nature by means of ecstatic contemplation’ and it further defines the mystic as ‘one who, whether Christian or non-Christian, seeks contemplation or self surrender to obtain union with or absorption into the Deity’.¹²

Even from the brief discussion above it is clear that spirituality and mysticism are not the same; although they may occupy a similar sphere of existence, their goals are clearly quite different. As will be seen, the initial period of Islamic history was filled with individuals, al-Muḥāsibī included, who were essentially trying to realise a form of the spirituality described above. However, as time

passed and the spirituality born out of asceticism progressed, new concepts were derived and an elaborate tradition known by the name ‘Sufism’ was born and often combined many of the ideas presented above as ‘mystical’.

Thus, if we were now to attempt to identify the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* with either of these disciplines, we would find that this concept of disciplining the soul in Islam has far more in common with spirituality than mysticism, since in spirituality, the longings of the human heart for the permanent, eternal and everlasting would easily fit in with the concept of the tranquil soul elucidated in Chapter 4. Conversely, *tazkiyat al-nafs* has little to do with mysticism’s quest for a unitive experience of the divine, since this concept has not been cited during the examination of this term and thus we may conclude that *tazkiyat al-nafs* is essentially a ‘spiritual’ quest rather than a ‘mystical’ one.

In addition, it should also be noted that from the very outset al-Muḥāsibī was regarded by Smith – as the title of her book suggests – as a mystic, seemingly based primarily on his exposition of divine love in the treatise *Faṣl al-Maḥabba*.¹³ However, upon examining this work and al-Muḥāsibī’s other ‘mystical’ teachings, it emerges that they are not as ‘mystical’ as Smith suggests but rather seem to fall within the realms of Islam’s broader teaching. This is especially true when examining the remainder of al-Muḥāsibī’s works, as one finds that they are usually within the precepts of Islam’s ascetic and spiritual tradition and have a strong theological basis in both of Islam’s revelatory sources. Indeed, if one were to characterise al-Muḥāsibī, it would be more appropriate to perhaps consider him as an ‘introspective moral psychologist’ because his teaching revolves around the reformation of the moral and ethical, esoteric nature of humanity, rather than a mystic seeking experience of unity with the divine, which is a concept that has not presented itself in the current study.¹⁴

Equally, with regard to the relationship of Sufism with the two topics of *tazkiyat al-nafs* and al-Muḥāsibī, one has to begin by posing the question: ‘What form of Sufism do we mean?’ Indeed, if we mean the ascetical tradition prevalent in the first two Islamic centuries, then there is a strong suggestion that in both cases a link may be established, since the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* and teachings of al-Muḥāsibī bear a strong resemblance to the early ascetical teaching of the likes of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, for example. However, if we mean by the term ‘Sufism’ the intoxicated mysticism of al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) or the mystical theosophy of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), then one would have to conclude that there is little evidence to suggest a close relationship between these contrasting approaches.

In addition, concerning al-Muḥāsibī specifically, although there is clearly a tangible link to the sober mysticism associated with the Baghdadi school through his student al-Junayd in particular, it is difficult to attribute the term ‘Sufi’ to al-Muḥāsibī *stricto sensu*, as both he and his teaching were not especially ‘mystical’. He was, ultimately, not a mystic striving for union with the Divine but rather an expert in the human condition and masterful exponent of the inner depths of the soul. He does, however, occupy a fascinating position within Islamic history as he is an intermediate between the nascent asceticism of the post-Prophetic era and the mystical schools of third-/ninth-century Baghdad and thus acts as a

conduit between these two worlds. Perhaps it is for this reason, and bearing in mind the deep and insightful knowledge of al-Muḥāsibī manifested in the current study, it is little surprise that outside fanatical Ḥanbalite circles al-Muḥāsibī enjoyed a great deal of praise and influence. Indeed, one may attribute this to the relevance of his works in every age since, from the Islamic perspective and as al-Muḥāsibī himself notes, the nature of human souls is quite similar and therefore for aspirants on the path to God his works are as relevant today as they were when he first wrote them.

In conclusion, it has been shown that, far from being a simple Sufi, al-Muḥāsibī was a multifaceted and multi-talented scholar who wrote in a variety of fields of Islamic learning and, consequently, he made a considerable contribution to the tradition as a whole but most notably in the field of *tazkiyat al-naḥs*. Perhaps it is fitting to end with a quote from the most famous of the later Ḥanbalite scholars, the eminent *shaykh al-Islām* Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who did not follow his school’s eponym in repudiating al-Muḥāsibī but rather appreciated the value of his teachings saying, ‘He possessed knowledge, virtue, asceticism and discourse regarding the spiritual realities (*al-ḥaqā’iq*), which has been widely celebrated’.¹⁵

Notes

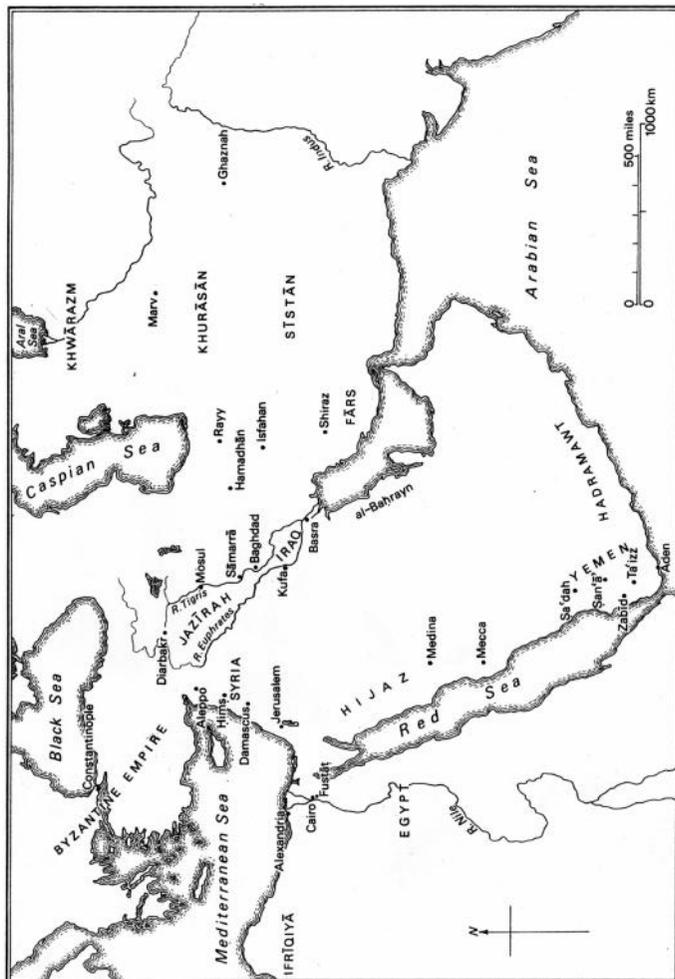
- 1 John R. Hinnels (ed.), *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, pp. 492 and 494; and Gordon S. Wakefield (ed.), *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1983), p. 361.
- 2 Hinnels (ed.), *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, pp. 494–5; and M. Eliade, and J. M. Kitagawa, *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, 6th edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 81.
- 3 Hinnels (ed.), *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, p. 495; and Wakefield (ed.), *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, p. 361.
- 4 Hinnels (ed.), *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, p. 495.
- 5 Ibid.; and Wakefield (ed.), *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, p. 362.
- 6 It has been suggested that the term originates from the form *muein*, meaning to close the lips or eyes, with the probable sense of ‘one vowed to keep silence’ and hence ‘one initiated into the Mysteries’, which were secret cults that appear to have survived from both underground and emotional survivals of the pre-Greek religion of the worship of the Earth Mother. See Geoffrey Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World’s Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), p. 8.
- 7 Wakefield (ed.), *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, p. 272. This developed in the theory and practice of Christianity; already in the Apocrypha of the Old Testament a ‘mystery’ was known to the initiated (*mystes*) as a secret doctrine, which, though not necessarily difficult to understand, should not be revealed. In the New Testament the ‘mystery’ is the revelation of the word of God, which had not been known in previous ages but was now revealed to the believers. Paul developed this further using terms that could have a technical, mystical association, such as ‘illuminated’, ‘fullness’ and ‘wisdom’. Other, later Christian writers and theologians spoke regularly of the sacraments as *mysteria*, baptism as *mystikon* and the celebrants of the Eucharistic mystery were ‘mystagogues’. The basis of all of this, however, was in the Neoplatonism of Plotinus, who combined Platonic and other mystical ideas into a coherent whole and whose essays are from the classics of mysticism. Plotinus taught the union (*enosis*) of the soul with the divine one, which is the Good and the source of all existence and

values. Later Christian writers absorbed Neoplatonic ideas and a crucial role was played by the short but potent writings of the so-called 'pseudo Dionysius'. Pseudo Dionysius seems to have been an anonymous Syrian monk who lived around 500 CE and who used many technical terms of the Mysteries. He, like Plotinus before him, wrote of the 'union' of the soul with God and the gradual 'divinisation' (*theosis*) of man, and says that by the exercise of mystical contemplation, the mystic will rise 'by unknowing' (*agnosia*) towards the union, as far as it is attainable, with him who transcends all being and knowledge. See Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World's Religions*, pp. 8–10.

- 8 Hinnels (ed.), *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, p. 333.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 334.
- 10 For an excellent discussion regarding the definition of mysticism see Robert S. Ellwood (Jnr.), *Mysticism and Religion* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1980), pp. 27–31. The author eventually settles for the following definition: 'Mystical experience is experience in a religious context that is immediately or subsequently interpreted by the experiencer as an encounter with ultimate divine reality in a direct, non-rational way that engenders a sense of unity and of living during the experience on a level of being other than the ordinary'.
- 11 Ellwood, *Mysticism and Religion*, p. 11.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 13 See Smith, *An Early Mystic*, pp. 57–8 and 222–52.
- 14 Indeed, al-Muḥāsibī was extremely critical of expressions of such unitive and mystical experiences, as the incident with Abū Ḥamza related by al-Hujwīrī in his *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* indicates.
- 15 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, p. 521.

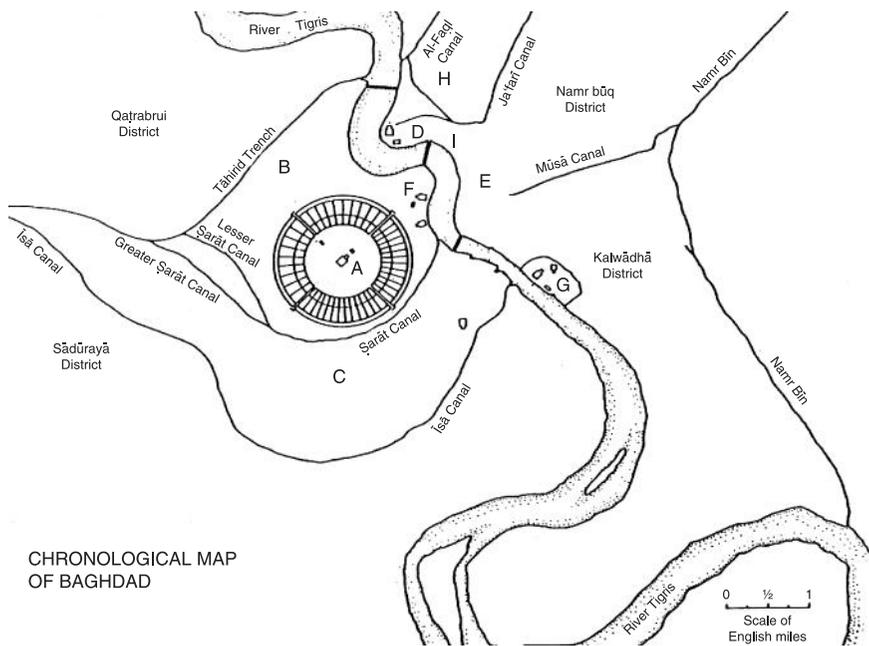
Appendix 1

Map of Iraq and its surrounding regions at the time of the early 'Abbāsids



Appendix 2

Map of Baghdad at the time of the early 'Abbāsids



- A. The Round City, also known as Madīnat al-Manṣūr. The first palace complex of the 'Abbāsīd Capital, it contained the palace-mosque of the Caliph, the administrative agencies of the government, and the residences of various public officials. Construction began in A.H. 145 and was completed in A.H. 149.
- B. Al-Ḥarbīyah. A suburban area north of the Round City, it contained the military cantonments of the Khurāsānī army stationed at Baghdad. Its development was concurrent with the construction of the Round City, with its major growth in A.H. 151 and 157.
- C. Al-Karkh. The great market suburb of the greater urban area, it was occupied in Pre-Islamic times, with large-scale development concurrent with the construction of the Round City. It was redeveloped in the suburban expansion of A.H. 157.

- D. Al-Ruṣāfah. The Palace complex of the Caliph al-Mahdī, it contained his residence and a second principal mosque. Construction began in A.H. 151 and was completed in A.H. 159.
- E. Al-Mukharrim. A residential district, it was possibly occupied as early as A.H. 151, with significant redevelopment after A.H. 159.
- F. Al-Khuld. Al-Manṣūr's second residential palace, it was built in A.H. 157 and later occupied by Hārūn al-Rashīd and Muḥammad al-Amīn.
- G. Dār al-Khilāfah. The third palace complex, it was built by the 'Abbāsīd Caliphs in stages, subsequent to their return from Sāmarrā in A.H. 279.
- H. Al-Shammāsīyah. Originally a staging ground for military reviews and a camping ground, it was developed as a palace area by the Būyīd amīrs in the tenth century.
- I. Bāb al-Tāq. Contained the commercial section serving al-Ruṣāfah and the upper reaches of al-Mukharrim. The general area probably underwent some development as early as A.H. 151 with great expansion after A.H. 159.

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