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See also: ABILITY; ACQUISITION; ADULTERY AND FORNICATION; BLOOD RELATIVES; BOOKS; BOUNDARIES OF ALLAH; COMMUNITY; DESCENT OF THE QUR’ĀN; DIVINE DECREE; DOWRY; FEAR; INJIL; INHERITANCE AND PATRIMONY; LEGAL LIABILITY

(TAKLĪF); MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE; MUḤKAM AND MUTĀSHABIH VERSES; PRESERVED TABLET; QIBLĀ; SLAVES AND SLAVERY; WAITING PERIOD; WILL, WANT, AND VOLITION; WITNESS OF FAITH, WITNESSING, AND WITNESSES.

GIBRIL FOUAD HADDAD

ABSTINENCE

ZUHD

This article comprises the following sections: i. Definitions; ii. Relinquishing Unbelief and Sin; iii. Relinquishing Worldly Lusters; iv. Relinquishing One’s Own Rights; v. Relinquishing One’s Own Life; vi. Relinquishing All but Allah Most High; vii. Early *Zuhd* Literature; viii. Bibliography.

Definitions

The root *z-h-d*, which denotes abstinence, occurs in the Qur’ān only once, in the participial adjective form *zāhidīn* in the verse *and they attached no value to him* (Q 12:20). The terms *zuhd* and *zahāda*—which point to paucity (*qillat al-shay’*) according to Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004) (*Maqāyīs*)—the infinitive nouns from the root *z-h-d*, can be translated as abstinence, abstemiousness, asceticism, austerity, continence, doing-without, moderation, renunciation, self-denial, simple living, and other related terms. “Lexically, *zuhd* means to disincline from something, while legally it means to despise the world and avoid it,” or, “in the language of the Arabs, it means to shun wealth and status” according to al-Jurjānī (d. 816/ca.1413) and al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) respectively (*al-Ta’rīfāt*; *Qam’ al-ḥīns*, p. 157). Ibn Manẓūr’s (630-711/1233-1312) *Lisān*, following al-Farāhidī’s (100-175/718-791) *‘Ayn*, differentiates between *zuhd* and *zahāda*, the former (“disinclining from the world” in the religious sense) being a spiritual subset of the latter (“disinclining from all things”).

Conceptually, however, *zuhd* is a major theme in the Qur’ān—from the Fātiḥa (Q 1) to Sūratul Nās (Q 114)—emphasizing the everlastingness in Paradise over this fleeting life. From this Qur’ānic metaphysical orientation stems a wide spectrum of ethical choices: others over oneself, truth over falsehood, virtue over vice. Many other verses highlight the importance of abstinence, such as those related to fasting, spending on others and sacrificing one’s personal interests and selfish motives, and the ubiquitous emphasis on Godwariness (see TAQWĀ).

This Qur’ānic method comprises the following five aspects and goals: (i) relinquishing unbelief and sin; (ii)

relinquishing the lure of worldly desires; (iii) relinquishing even personal moral and physical rights; (iv) relinquishing life itself, and the fearless embrace of jihad; (v) relinquishing all other than Allah, which incorporates and bests all that precedes. These aspects summarize the holistic coverage of all the early works on *zuhd* (see below) as demonstrated by the wide range of their section-headings.

Relinquishing Unbelief and Sin

The individual's lifelong flight from sin is both the categorical precondition of Godwariness (*taqwā*) and its single most important element, both being enjoined in countless verses. Al-Zuhrī (58-124/678-742), Mālik (93-179/712-795), and Ibn 'Uyayna (107-198/ca.725-ca.814) all defined *zuhd* as *taqwā* and "relinquishing what Allah Most High forbade" (al-Qurṭubī, *Qam' al-hirṣ*, p. 158). Thus, *zuhd* is first and foremost abstinence from sin (as borne out by the title of Ibn Ḥazm's work, see Section vii below) and all that Allah Most High hates, beginning with the enormities of the Age of Ignorance (see JĀHILIYYA) such as polytheism (Q 3:64, 95; 4:48; 7:180), murderous feuds and clannishness (Q 3:103; 48:26), female infanticide (*wa'd*, Q 6:51, 137; 17:32), fornication (Q 4:22; 7:28; 17:32, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *sub* Q 6:120), usury (*ribā*, Q 2:278; 30:39), disloyalty to parents and relatives (Q 2:181, 215; 29:8; 31:14; 46:15...), treachery to strangers (Q 4:36), and mistreatment of slaves and the poor (Q 4:36; 30:38). Relinquishment is required to the point that one may not even let out a grumble against parents (Q 17:23), and the believers are summoned to part once and for all with even the very thought of sin: *And abandon the outwardness of sin and its inwardness (zāhir al-iḥm wa-bāṭimah*, Q 6:120), where according to Sahl al-Tustarī "the outwardness of sin is its commission; the inwardness, love of it" (Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya* 10:198).

Al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286) brings together the two strains of relinquishing evil and being conscious of Allah in the following definition of righteousness (*q.v.*):

In the terminology of sacred law *taqwā* is a name for one who guards himself from what harms him in the hereafter. It has three levels:

1. Guarding oneself against everlasting punishment by clearing oneself of polytheism, as in His saying, *and He imposed on them the word of Godwariness* (Q 48:26);
2. Avoiding everything that constitutes sin—whether doing something or omitting to do it—including small sins according to

some. This is what is commonly known by the name of *taqwā* in sacred law and what is meant in His saying, *And if the people of the townships had believed and guarded against evil* (Q 7:96);

3. To keep oneself free of what preoccupies one's inward other than the True, and to dedicate oneself to Him heart and soul.

sub Q 2:2

Relinquishing Worldly Lusts

The life of this world (al-ḥayāt al-dunyā) (q.v.) is mentioned no less than fifty-five times in the Qur'an invariably with deprecation, notably in such verses as *Stretch not your eyes toward what We gave certain classes of them to enjoy—the flower of the life of the world—that We may test them thereby. The provision of your Lord is better and more lasting* (Q 20:131, cf. Q 15:88); *And whatever you all have been given is a comfort (matā') of the life of the world and an ornament thereof; and that which Allah has [in store] is better and more lasting. Have you then no sense?* (Q 28:60, cf. Q 42:36, 87:17). The most frequent meaning of *zuhd* is freedom from the attraction of *dunyā*, in which sense *zuhd* closely parallels the Qur'anic virtues of God-dependence (*tawakkul*), steadfastness (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), the constant remembrance of death (*dhikr al-mawt*), and expectancy of next-worldly reward (*iḥtisāb*) together with the practice of hunger and the embracing of poverty (*q.v.*). Shining examples of these qualities are documented in the corresponding chapters of *Nawādir al-uṣūl*, the works of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/ca.857) and al-Sulamī (325-412/936-1031), al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī's (d. 378/988) *al-Luma'*, al-Kalābādhi's (d. 380/990) *al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's (d. 386/996) *Qūt al-qulūb*, al-Qushayrī's (376-465/ca.986-ca.1073) *Risāla*, and other pre-Ghazālīan Sufi classics which culminated with al-Ghazālī's own *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, in addition to the *zuhd* compilations of the first five centuries.

The beauty of *dunyā* constitutes both a remembrance of Allah (*q.v.*) and a test for creatures: *We have placed all that is in the earth as an ornament thereof that We may try them: which of them is best in conduct* (Q 18:7). At the same time, "Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty" (Muslim, *Īmān*, taḥrīm al-kibr; Tirmidhī, *Birr wal-ṣila*, mā jā'a fī-l-kibr, *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ gharīb*). Accordingly, the believer also recognizes that "the universe is the apex of beauty" (cf. Ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūḥāt* §372 and elsewhere). However, attraction to *dunyā* in obliviousness of the Creator, coupled with ingratitude, is characteristic of unbelievers: