## 83038 - The aqtaab and abdaal in Sufi thought

**the question**

I have heard and read about what are known as abdaal and aqtaab etc. Do they really exist amongst us? Is the hadeeth, “Do not revile the people of Syria, for there are abdaal among them” saheeh or not?.

**Detailed answer**

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

According to Ahl al-Sunnah, the wali (in the sense of being a close friend of Allaah) is as defined by Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted, in His holy Book, where He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“No doubt! Verily, the Awliya’ of Allaah, no fear shall come upon them nor shall they grieve.

63. Those who believed, and used to fear Allaah much (by abstaining from evil deeds and sins and by doing righteous deeds).

64. For them are glad tidings, in the life of the present world, and in the Hereafter. No change can there be in the Words of Allaah. This is indeed the supreme success”

[Yoonus 10:62-64]

This verse states that the wali (close friend) of Allaah is the pious believer who fears Allaah, who loves Allaah and supports His Religion, and seeks to please Him, who adheres to the limits He has set and supports His law and His religion. He is one of the slaves of Allaah, and is not beyond His control and authority, rather he does not even have the power to benefit or harm himself, and he does not know what Allaah has decreed for him. This is the wali of Allaah according to Ahl al-

Sunnah.

The way in which a person may attain the status of being a wali is to perform obligatory duties, then start to perform naafil acts of worship until Allaah loves him, then when He loves him, he will be a true wali of His. In the saheeh hadeeth it says:

“When Allaah loves a person, He calls Jibreel (A) and says: ‘I love So and so, so love him.’ So Jibreel loves him, then he calls out to the people of heaven, ‘Allaah loves So and so, so love him.’ So the people of heaven love him and he finds acceptance on earth”

Narrated by Muslim (2637)

Secondly:

With regard to the definition of the wali among the Sufis, it has another, innovated meaning that is different from that understood by Ahl al-Sunnah. Among them the wali of Allaah is one who has been chosen by Allaah, even if he does not have the characteristics of righteousness and piety that qualify him to be loved by Allaah. The status of wali, in their view, is a kind of divine gift that is given for no reason and with no wisdom. Hence they believe that some wrongdoers, evildoers, insane and immoral people etc are awliya’ simply because they perform extraordinary feats, such as hitting their bodies with knives, playing with snakes and fire, and so on. They even include among their awliya’ people who drink alcohol and commit zina, and they say: The true wali can never be affected by sin.

And they do not stop there in their definition of a wali; rather they say that the wali controls the universe; he says to a thing “Be!” and it is. In their view, every wali has been appointed by Allaah to control some aspect of creation. Four awliya’ are holding the earth by its four corners, and they are called al-awtaad (lit. tent pegs). Seven other awliya’ each control one of the seven continents of the world, and they are called al-abdaal (because when one of them dies, another takes his place – badalahu). There are a number of awliya’ in each region: thirty or forty in Egypt, and a similar number in Syria and Iraq, each of whom is appointed in charge of something. Above all of them is one wali who is called the al-qutb al-akbar (lit. great pole or axis) or al-ghawth (source of

help), and he is the one who is running the affairs of the entire realm. Thus they believe in an unseen realm which controls the affairs of mankind like a political state. This state is led by the qutb or ghawth, followed by two imams or ministers, then the four awtaad, then the seven abdaal.

This is the concept of awliya' according to the Sufis, and it has nothing to do with the Islamic concept of awliya' that is mentioned in the Qur'aan. The wali in Islam is a person whom Allaah has guided and helped, and he has earned his Lord's pleasure by following the rules of His sharee'ah; he fears that he may fall into hypocrisy and meet a bad end, and he does not know whether Allaah will accept his deeds or not. Whereas they have given the Sufi wali divine characteristics by means of which he controls some aspect of the universe, and he ignores whatever he wants of the laws of Allaah, and the angels are subject to his will.

The basic principles of Sufi concept of awliya' are taken from ancient Greek philosophy which is based on the idea of polytheism. The first one to propose the idea of the Sufi concept of awliya' at the end of the third century AH was Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn al-Hasan al-Tirmidhi, whom they call al-Hakeem (the wise). He is not the same as the imam who wrote the well known collection of hadeeth which is called Sunan al-Tirmidhi. Then after that their views became well known and the books of their leaders are filled with these ideas. If we start reporting all that they have said about this issue and all their false notions, it would take too long. But so that no one will think that we are attributing to them things that are not true, there follow the names of some of their sources, and you will find that what we have mentioned is the least abhorrent of their ideas. See: al-Futoohaat al-Makkiyyah by Ibn 'Arabi (2/455, 537); al-Yawaaqeet wa'l-Jawaahir by 'Abd al-Wahhaab al-Sha'raani (2/79); al-Mu'jam al-Sufi by Su'aad al-Hakeem (189-191, 909-913). For references of Ahl al-Sunnah see: al-Fikr al-Sufi by Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahmaan 'Abd al-Khaaliq (343-383).

Thirdly:

The hadeeth mentioned by the questioner is a da'eef (weak) hadeeth, which is not saheeh at all. There is nothing narrated via any saheeh isnaad which mentions any of the degrees of awliya' as known to the Sufis.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in al-Manaar al-Muneef (136):

The ahaadeeth about the adbaal, aqtaab, aghwaath, nuqaba', nujaba' and awtaad are all falsely attributed to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). The closest of them is the hadeeth which says "Do not revile the people of Syria, for among them there are abdaal; every time one of them dies, Allaah replaces him with another man." This was narrated by Ahmad, but it is not saheeh either, because it is munqati'. End quote.

For more information on the ahaadeeth which have been narrated concerning that and an explanation of why they are da'eef please see al-Maqaalaat al-Qisaar by Abu Muhammad al-Alfi (69-81).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked about the hadeeth that was narrated about the abdaal – was it saheeh or munqati', and were the abdaal only in Syria or were there abdaal wherever Islam was established according to the Qur'aan and Sunnah, in Syria and elsewhere? Was it true that a wali could be present among a group although his body was absent? What did the 'ulama' say about the names used by some of those who claim to be religious and virtuous, and who say this is Ghawth al-Aghwaath, this is Qutub al-Aqtaab, this is Qutub al-'Aalam, this is al-Qutub al-Kabeer, this is Khaatim al-Awliya'?

He (may Allaah have mercy on him) replied:

As for the names that are in circulation among many of the pious people and common folk, such as the ghawth who is in Makkah, the four awtaad, the seven aqtaab, the forty abdaal and the three hundred nujuba', these are names that are not found in the Book of Allaah, nor are they narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) via any saheeh or da'eef isnaad, except the word abdaal, concerning whom there is a Syrian hadeeth whose isnaad is munqati'; it is narrated from 'Ali ibn Abi Taalib (may Allaah be pleased with him) and attributed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), that he said: "…for among them [the people of Syria] there are abdaal; every time one of them dies, Allaah replaces him with another man." These names are not found in the words of the salaf in the manner mentioned there, nor are they

narrated in this manner and with these meanings from the Shaykhs who are accepted by the ummah in general. They are narrated in this form from some of the middle shaykhs, who mentioned them either quoting from others or without confirming (that they are true). As for the phrase al-Ghawth and al-Ghiyaath, no one deserves this title except Allaah, who is the helper of those who seek help (ghiyaath al-mustagheetheen), so it is not permissible for anyone to seek help from anyone else, not from any angel who is close to Him or from any Prophet who was sent. Whoever claims that the people of earth can refer their concerns, such as asking to be spared harm or asking for mercy from the three hundred, and the three hundred refer that to the seventy, and the seventy refer that to the forty, and the forty refer that to the seven, and the seven refer that to the four, and the four refer that to al-ghawth, then he is a liar who has gone astray and is a mushrik.  And Allaah tells us about the mushrikeen (interpretation of the meaning):

“And when harm touches you upon the sea, those that you call upon vanish from you except Him (Allaah Alone)”

[al-Isra’ 17:67]

“Is not He (better than your gods) Who responds to the distressed one, when he calls on Him”

[al-Naml 27:62]

How can the believers refer their concerns via many intermediaries when Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad) concerning Me, then (answer them), I am indeed near (to them by My Knowledge). I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me (without any mediator or intercessor). So let them obey Me and believe in Me, so that they may be led aright”
[al-Baqarah 2:186]

All the Muslims know that neither the common folk of the Muslims nor their well known shaykhs conveyed their concerns to Allaah, whether outwardly or inwardly, via these intermediaries.

Exalted be Allaah above any resemblance to His creations such as kings, and far above what the wrongdoers say.  This is akin to the Raafidi claim that in every age there must be an infallible imam who is the proof of Allaah (Hujjat-Allaah) against those who are accountable, and that perfect faith cannot be attained otherwise. Rather this sequence and number of intermediaries is in some ways like the Ismaili and Nusayri etc belief in intermediaries (such as al-saabiq, al-taali, al-naatiq, al-asaas, al-jasad, etc) for which Allaah has not sent down any authority.

With regard to the awtaad, some say that So and so is one of the awtaad, meaning thereby that by means of him Allaah establishes faith and religious commitment in the hearts of those whom Allaah has guided through him, just as the earth is made firm by its “pegs” (mountains). This meaning applies to every scholar who met this description. Every person by means of whom knowledge and faith became established among the masses is like the awtaad and great mountains. Whoever has less knowledge is a lesserk inf of watad. But that is not limited to four or more or less than that, rather limiting the number to four is akin to the astrologers’ idea that the earth should have four awtaad.

With regard to the qutub, this is also found in their words: So and so is one of the aqtaab, or So and so is a qutub. Everyone who is the focal point of some religious or worldly matter, whether secretly or openly or outward, is the qutub and focal point of that matter. This is not limited to seven or more or less than that. But the one who is praiseworthy in this regard is one who is a focal point for maintaining soundness in religious and worldly matters, not simply maintaining soundness worldly matters. This is the qutub according to them.

The same applies to the word badal, which is mentioned by many of them.

With regard to the marfoo’ hadeeth, it is most likely that these are not the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), for faith existed in the Hijaaz and Yemen before the conquest of Syria. Syria and Iraq were kaafir lands, then during the caliphate of ‘Ali (may Allaah be pleased with him), it was proven that he (peace be upon him) said: “A group will split away from the main body of the Muslims and they will be fought by the one of the two groups that is closer to the truth.” ‘Ali and his companions were closer to the truth than the people of Syria who fought

them. It is well known that those of the Sahaabah who were with ‘Ali, such as ‘Ammaar ibn Yaasir, Sahl ibn Hunayf and the like, were better than those who were with Mu’aawiyah. So how can it be believed that all the abdaal, who are the best of creation, were all in Syria? This is definitely false, even though there are well known reports which speak of the virtue of Syria and its people, because everything has its own characteristics and limits. One should only speak on the basis of knowledge and justice.

Those who speak of the badal explain it in several ways, such as saying that they are substitutes for the Prophets, or that every time one of them dies, Allaah replaces him with another man, or that they change their bad attitudes, deeds and beliefs into good ones. None of these characteristics can be limited to four people or more or less than that, or to the people of one region of the earth. End quote from Majmoo’ Fataawa Ibn Taymiyah (11/433-444)

Fourthly:

It is mentioned in the words of some of the salaf and some of the later scholars: So and so is one of the abdaal. For example, in al-Tareekh al-Kabeer by al-Bukhaari (7/127), in the biography of Farwah ibn Mujaalid, it says: They did not doubt that he was one of the abdaal. End quote. As narrated by al-Daaraqutni in al-‘Ilal (6/29), Imam Ahmad said: If anyone in Iraq was one of the abdaal, it was Abu Ishaaq Ibraaheem ibn Haani’. End quote.

But they did not mean thereby what the Sufis mean in their innovated baatini terminology, rather they meant it in the linguistic sense. Whoever among the scholars is spoken of in such terms is one of the heirs of the Prophets by virtue of the shar’i knowledge that he has, and it is as if he is their substitute in conveying the message of the Revelation and teaching it to the people.

Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in Majmoo’ al-Fataawa (4/97):

As for the scholars, they used to say that they were the abdaal, because they were the substitutes of the Prophets, and they took their place in a real sense. They were not people who had no knowledge or who were unknown. Each of them took the place of the Prophets in the field in which he excelled, whether knowledge or worship. They said that they were the group that would

continue to prevail until the Hour begins, because they are following guidance and the true religion with which Allaah sent His Messengers, the religion which Allaah promised would prevail over all other religions,  and sufficient is Allaah as a witness. End quote.

See also question no. 10527.

And Allaah knows best.