

CHAPTER FOUR

ON KNOWLEDGE AND SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

4.1 Historical Background

Epistemological discussion in the Malay world prior to al-Falimbānī was hardly traceable. If there were any, then it might have not been as popular as the metaphysical and ontological discussion particularly those of the *wujūdiyyah* debates as we observed since the time of al-Fanṣūrī (d. circa 1607) and al-Rānīrī (d. 1068/1658). It does not require much effort for one to trace the intellectual climate prior to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of al-Falimbānī, since the earliest extant writings in the Malay world began with the sixteenth century scholar, al-Fanṣūrī (d. circa 1607). Further, during those two centuries between al-Fanṣūrī and al-Falimbānī, only a handful of Malay scholars rose to prominence. They were people like Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrānī (d. 1038/1629), Nur al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1068/1658), ‘Abd Ra‘uf al-Sinkīlī (d. 1104/1693), Yusuf al-Maqassārī (d. 1110/1699), Arshād al-Banjārī (d. 1226/1812), and Dāwūd al-Fatānī (d. 1263/1847). Al-Falimbānī was perhaps the first Malay scholar began to write in great detail on the concept of knowledge in the manner as expounded in his works *Siyar* or *Hidāyat*. The same also applies to discussion on the purification of the soul. In the context of Malay scholars, it was al-Falimbānī who first began discussing this issue using al-Ghazālī framework.

Due to the scarcity of works written by al-Falimbānī’s predecessors stressing on these points, namely on knowledge and spiritual education, comparison of ideas with those previous Malay scholars is not possible. What

we shall do here is only to compare the teachings of al-Falimbānī with those of al-Ghazālī by highlighting their similarities and differences.

In this chapter, we begin by discussing some of the main teachings of al-Falimbānī, namely his Ṣūfī teachings. In spite of the fact that al-Falimbānī is one of the most important Malay figures of the eighteenth century, nonetheless, his teachings have not been much elaborated by succeeding Malay scholars of the following centuries after his demise. One of the reasons is perhaps that his works such as *Siyar al-Sālikīn* and *Hidāyat al-Sālikīn* are voluminous in themselves and therefore need no further explanation. Secondly, because al-Falimbānī has not provided ‘new’ perspectives which could be seen as his original ideas and would require further elaboration. Most of his thoughts especially in *Siyar* and *Hidāyat* are repetitions with explanation of what have been already said by al-Ghazālī in his books, as we have alluded earlier.

Al-Falimbānī, as mentioned in Chapter Three, has a number of works to his credit on diverse topics of Islamic sciences. His most outstanding expertise, however, is in Sufism. Of all his writings, the two most celebrated works are, as mentioned before, *Siyar* and *Hidāyat*, which up till now are used as Ṣūfī textbooks in the traditional *madrasahs*¹ and as reading texts in many mosques in the Archipelago.² In these works lie al-Falimbānī’s prime thoughts on Sufism. This

¹ Shaghir, *Hidāyat*, vii; the texts are still being read in many *pondoks* throughout the Malay Peninsula and among them are, Pondok Pasir Tumbuh (Bakriyyah Institute of Islamic Studies), and Pondok Lubuk Tapah (Rahmaniyyah Institute of Islamic Studies), Kelantan. El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, 62-63. The same paper was re-produced by the same author in *Peradaban Dalam Islam*.

² According to Dato’ Salleh Haji Ahmad, he has been teaching *Hidāyat* in the mosques around Kuala Lumpur for many years now; Shaghir claims it has been used in many mosques, traditional schools as a reading text since more than two hundred years until the present day (Shaghir, *Hidāyat*, vii). One of the staff in a famous Islamic bookstore in Kelantan, Syarikat Jaafar Rawas, claimed that the demand for *Siyar* is on the rise from time to time.

chapter therefore concentrates mainly on these two works with special attention given to the concept of knowledge and spiritual education.

Muhammad ‘Uthman el-Muhammady, in fact has briefly studied al-Falimbānī’s concept of education and written an article in this context.³ In a nutshell, el-Muhammady sees al-Falimbānī’s educational process as follows:

The process of purifying the base metal of the fallen soul from all the dross, and transmuting it – by means of the spiritual alchemy available in the Islamic tradition – into a soul of gold which glitters with spiritual virtue.⁴

Cosmologically, al-Falimbānī’s spiritual education is a spiritual ascent towards the Absolute Being, a journey from the Realm of Sensible ascending through various degrees of cosmic manifestations.⁵ In the Sufi teachings, the stages of the journey towards the Absolute Being will depend on the degree of the purification of the soul. The ultimate end of al-Falimbānī’s educational process is the ‘realisation of true knowledge, ‘gnosis’ (*ma‘rifah*), being knowledge of things through God’, who is the ultimate source of everything in accordance with the principle of *tawhīd*.⁶

Al-Falimbānī believes that only through spiritual purification of oneself then one is capable of knowing God, since he who knows his ‘self’ then will know his Lord. This must however concurrently couple with adorning oneself with all the spiritual virtues as practised by the Prophet. For al-Falimbānī, purification of the soul alone does not ensure one to be amongst ‘those who brought near’ (*al-muqarrabīn*), without the practice of Shari‘ah in one’s daily life. Al-Falimbānī does

³ El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, no.1, July 1972, 59-83.

⁴ El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, 60.

⁵ El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, 60.

⁶ El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, 60. The concept of *ma‘rifah* will be further discussed in the succeeding section.

not make a dichotomy between intellectual conviction (*imān*) and the practical aspect (*islām*) as some philosophical or *wujudiyah* Sufīs do. As such al-Falimbānī's Sufism falls under the Sunnī Sufism rather than philosophical.

4.2 Sources of al-Falimbānī's Teachings

The primary sources of al-Falimbānī's thoughts are none other than the works of the 'Proof of Islam' (*Hujjat Islām*) al-Ghazālī. It is without exaggeration to say that al-Falimbānī's philosophical framework is founded upon al-Ghazālī's teachings, mainly from his *Ihyā'*, and also *al-Arba'īn fī Usūl al-Dīn* where the latter is basically a 'mini' version of *Ihyā'*, as it were. Other works of al-Ghazālī that have been repeatedly mentioned are *Minhāj al-'Abidīn* and *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah*. Al-Ghazālī's thought is clearly discernible in almost all al-Falimbānī's writings, notably his *Siyar*⁷ and *Hidāyat*, where these two works were translated with adaptation from *Ihyā'*⁸ or *Lubāb' Ihyā'*⁹ and *Bidāyat* respectively.¹⁰

⁷ The edition which will be quoted throughout this work is the one with the original *Jāwī* script published in four volumes by Pustaka Nasional, Singapore. Date of publication is not mentioned. There are several other editions published with transliterated Romanised in modern Malay language such as *Siyarus Salikin*, Syed Ahmad Semait, ed., (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional Pte.Ltd, 2004), 4 vols.; *Sairus Salikin*, Abu Ali al-Banjari An-Nadwi, ed., (Kedah: Khazanah Banjariah, 2003), 4 vols and by Jahabersa. These editions have both *Jāwī* and Romanised versions. The titles sometimes appear to be "*Siyar*" or "*Sair*".

⁸ *Ihyā'* had never been translated into Malay/Indonesian language before al-Falimbānī started it as in the form of *Siyar*. Al-Falimbānī was the first to embark on the full translation of *Ihyā'* (or *Lubāb Ihyā'*) in the Malay history. Nowadays, the whole four-volume *Ihyā'* was translated into various languages with several editions. There is difference of opinion as to whether al-Falimbānī.

⁹ Abdalfatah Haron, on the other hand, claims that there is a summarized version of al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā'* written by al-Ghazālī's himself bearing the title, not *Lubāb*, but *al-Murshid al-amīn ilā mau'izat al-mu'minīn min Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Abdalfatah Haron, 'Kitab Siyar al-Salikin oleh Abdul Samad al-Falimbani Mengelirukan', 1073, in *International Seminar on Islamic Thoughts Proceedings*, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 7-9th December 2004.

¹⁰ *Lubāb* is also known as *Mukhtasar Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* as al-Falimbānī himself mentions it on page 3 of the *Siyar*. According to 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, it was printed on the margin of *Nuzhāt al-nazārin*, Cairo 1308/1890, 1328/1910. In 1410/1990, the *Mukhtasar* was published by Mu'assasat al-kutub al-thaqāfiya. The publisher prides itself that unlike other abridgment, the *Mukhtasar* is an abridgement of *Ihyā'* written by al-Ghazālī, the author himself. There is a dispute however, whether *Lubāb* is a work written by al-Ghazālī himself or by his brother Ahmad al-Ghazālī. While scholars, like Badawī, Bouyges and Brockelmann believe that *Lubāb/Mukhtasār* was the work of al-Ghazālī's brother, Ahmad al-Ghazālī, see 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, *Mu'allafāt al-Ghazālī*, 114; Maurice Bouyges, *Essai de Chronologie des oeuvres de al-ghazali (Algazel)*, 135; Brockelmann, GAL, Supp. I: 539-540.

The format and contents of the four-volume al-Falimbānī's *Siyar* is quite similar to those of al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā'*, rather than the *Lubāb* or *Mukhtasar*, where it is divided into forty major 'books' (*kitāb*).¹¹ To suggest that *Siyar* is an exact translation of *Ihyā'* as its cover title apparently portrays, is not quite right. It is rather, as observed by Voorhoeve, a free translation of *Ihyā'*,¹² which 'was inspired by and based on' the works of al-Ghazālī, but with considerable modifications and additional inputs.¹³ Al-Falimbānī himself admits that he has made some 'addenda' to the translation culled from other sources for the benefits of the non-Arabic readers. He says:

“*Aku terjemahkan kitab ini dengan bahasa Jawi dan aku tambah dengan beberapa faedah...*”,¹⁴

Al-Falimbānī's *Siyar* therefore is not a direct translation as it had often been spread. Nonetheless, the spirit of *Ihyā'* are faithfully reproduced. Al-Ghazālī's works therefore serve as the foundation of al-Falimbānī's teachings.

Differences in the arrangement and selection of topics between al-Ghazālī's *Mukhtasār* and al-Falimbānī's *Siyar* are also noticeable. For instance, unlike al-Ghazālī who chose 'knowledge' (*kitāb al-'ilm*), as his First Chapter (*al-bab al-awwal*), al-Falimbānī prefers to place 'knowledge' in the Introduction (*al-muqaddimah*) while al-Falimbānī's first chapter is on the Creed (*al-'itiqād*). Though the flow of the work is ultimately not much different from that of al-Ghazālī's, it begs one to ponder why al-Falimbānī chose to differ from al-Ghazālī

¹¹ First volume is about *usūl al-dīn* and worship, second is ethics and morality (*akhlāq*), third is the destructive traits (*muhlikāt*) and the final one is on the constructive virtues (*munjiyāt*). Each volume consists of ten chapters similar to the arrangement in *Ihyā'*.

¹² *EI2*, 1:92.

¹³ El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, 62.

¹⁴ *Siyar*, 1:3.

in this context, albeit slightly, while it could have been much easier for him to just follow exactly the arrangement had already done by al-Ghazālī. Why did he place the ‘concept of knowledge’ as part of the Introduction rather than a separate Chapter as al-Ghazālī had done? While for some people, this might have no significant indication, or perhaps a mere stylistic approach, but if one were to ponder the milieu where al-Falimbānī was living, one could easily understand why the arrangement was as such.

A plausible explanation perhaps that al-Falimbānī was trying to show his discussion on knowledge is just a prelude to more serious discussion of the work that to follow, and the first and most important of all is on the ‘*aqīdah*’ aspect. If one has got his creed right, then one would be fine and could benefit from the knowledge that al-Falimbānī is about to teach in the following chapters. This is basically what al-Falimbānī was trying to say to his readers. Hence, ‘*aqīdah*’ is placed as Chapter One. At the same time he tries to exert his authority on the readers that his ‘*aqīdah*’ is perfectly sound and whatever proceeds afterward in this work is in conformity with the classical Asha‘arī theology. This is crucial, in the context of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Malay world when the society could still vividly recall and feel the aftermath of the polemics of ‘*aqīdah*’ between the adherents of the *wujūdiyyah* of al-Fansūrī and the *wujūdiyyah* of al-Rānīrī.

At the outset of his two famous works, *Siyar* and *Hidāyat*, al-Falimbānī clearly acknowledges that these works were translated and adapted from al-Ghazālī’s *Lubāb Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*¹⁵ and *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah*¹⁶ respectively, for the benefits of people who could not read Arabic. Hence, one can expect that al-

¹⁵ *Siyar*, 1:3.

¹⁶ *Hidāyat*, 1: 9-11; *Siyar*, 1: 9.

Falimbānī's teachings are not much different from those of al-Ghazālī. If one were to look for 'original' ideas of al-Falimbānī in these works, then one could rarely find them. What is more important for al-Falimbānī is the spread of al-Ghazālī's teachings and eventually realisation of the Ṣūfī teachings.¹⁷ Though al-Falimbānī might not be considered as an original thinker at par with great Ṣūfī scholars such as Ibn 'Arabī or Jāmī, Jīlī or Suhrawardī, yet Al-Falimbānī's works are no doubt remain influential in the Malay Archipelago. One of the reasons is that al-Falimbānī was the first scholar to systematically introduce al-Ghazālī in the Malay world in the Malay language and manage to simplify the teachings of Al-Ghazālī.¹⁸

In the two books mentioned, al-Falimbānī clearly displays that he is an ardent adherent of al-Ghazālī's teachings in all main branches of Islamic sciences namely, 'aqīdah (creed), *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *tasawwuf* (Sufism).¹⁹ In terms of 'aqīdah, al-Falimbānī is an Ash'arite following the way of al-Ghazālī as laid down in the latter's *Kitāb Qawā'id al-'Aqa'id of Ihyā'*.²⁰ In *fiqh*, he is a Shāfi'ite, adopting the *fiqh* as expounded by al-Ghazālī in his *Ihyā'* starting from the 'mysteries of purity' (*asrār al-tahārah*) until *hajj* and issues related to it; also other ethical (*adab*) and jurisperdent aspects pertaining to dealing with the Qur'ān, marriage, transactions and others.²¹

¹⁷ *Siyar*, 1:3.

¹⁸ Shaghir, "Syekh Abdus-Samad al-Falimbānī", *Dian*, Bil.100, Ogos 1977, 98-99.

¹⁹ If we take *tasawwuf* to include also ethical dimension of Islam (*adab*), then it begins from the section on 'etiquette of reading al-Qur'ān' until the end of volume four, *Siyar*, 1:176 until 4:267. In *Hidāyat*, its first volume is where al-Falimbānī mostly discusses *fiqh* issues.

²⁰ 'Aqīdah matters are discussed in the beginning of *Siyar*, I: 21-35. It comes under the chapter "al-Bāb al-awwal fi al-'itiqād" the *Siyar*. We have now translated it into English for the first time, see the Appendix I.

²¹ *Siyar*, vol. 1:35-176. There is no clear-cut demarcation made by al-Falimbānī on which part comes under *fiqh* and *tasawwuf*. We may roughly say that the *fiqh* section begins from the section on the 'mysteries of purity' (*asrār al-tahārah*) and ends shortly after the section on 'farewell

We shall not delve into detail on these two branches of Islamic sciences as the scope of this work is primarily to study the spiritual teachings of al-Falimbānī. As we have proven earlier, al-Falimbānī is clearly Ghazālian in most aspects, nonetheless, he differs with the latter quite significantly when it comes to the ontological realm. He chose the teachings of Shaykh Qāsim al-Halabī²² and al-Burhanpūrī²³ which lean towards the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in explaining certain parts of al-Ghazālī’s teachings.²⁴ Al-Ghazālī himself is never known to be an advocate of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, and for that reason he was less controversial compared to Ibn ‘Arabī and other so-called ‘intoxicated’ Ṣūfīs. The attempt made by al-Falimbānī at trying to synthesize between the doctrine of *wujūdiyyah* of ‘Seven Stages’ with the mainstream orthodox Sunni Islam by way of al-Ghazālī’s teachings seems to work well.²⁵ In doing so, al-Falimbānī has successfully ‘neutralised’ the teachings of his predecessors, mainly al-Fansūrī and al-Sumatrānī, whose proponents were once labelled by certain quarters of the Malays as deviant and heretic – during the time of al-Ranīrī – by reverting them to the vein of mainstream orthodox Sunni Islam.²⁶

circumambulation’ (*tawaf widā’*). The succeeding sections thereafter are more on the ethics (*adab*) and *tasawwuf*.

²² He is the author of *Siyar al-sulūk ilā malik al-mulūk. Siyar al-sulūk*, according to Quzwain, is mentioned by Van Ronkel in his *Supp. Cat Arab Mass. Bat. Soc.*, 156, no. CCCIX and is available at the National Library of Indonesia, Jakarta (Quzwain, *Mengenal*, 66 note 24). P. Voorhoeve, on the other hand, in his *Handlist of Arabic manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and other collections in The Netherlands, Leiden 1980* catalogue mentions an incomplete manuscript with a similar title, ‘*al-Sair wa Sulūk ilā Mālik al-Mulūk*’ bearing the name of the author as Qasīm b. Salāh ad-Dīn al-Khānī (d.1109/1697), G.II,344, Microfilm copy of Ms.KBG 427 Arab f.1-44v, Supp Cat. Batav no.270. Al-Falimbānī is believed to have taken the name of one of his works *Siyar al-sālikīn* after inspired by al-Halabī’s *Siyar al-Suluk*, see Dr. Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah, *Pemikiran Islam di Malaysia: Sejarah dan Aliran* (1997), pp. 72-73.

²³ He is the author of *Tuhfat al-Mursalāh ilā Rūh al-Nabīy*. The book was translated from Arabic and Javanese by A.H. Johns and published under the title ‘*The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet*’. This book will be quoted most of the time in this work and abbreviated as *Tuhfat*.

²⁴ This section is on *tawhīd* and *tawakkul*.

²⁵ Azra, *Networks*, 130.

²⁶ Azra, *Networks*, 130.

Without denying the profound influence of al-Ghazālī on al-Falimbānī, it is not quite right to say al-Falimbānī’s thought had been solely triggered and moulded by al-Ghazālī’s works alone. For, in fact al-Ghazālī’s teachings only serve as a superstructure, upon which al-Falimbānī’s thought was primarily based. He also blends al-Ghazālī’s teachings with those of other Ṣūfī masters such as Abū Tālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996),²⁷ ‘Abd al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 561/1166), Ibn ‘Ata Allah al-Iskandarī (d. 708/1309), as well as his own spiritual master, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Sammān (d. 1190/1776), to mention but a few.²⁸ He uses the works of these scholars to further strengthen the mainstream teachings of al-Ghazālī. Al-Falimbānī also follows closely the teachings of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 767/1366) as appeared in the latter’s work, *al-Insān al-Kāmil* (the Universal Man).²⁹ Jīlī is known for systematizing Ibn ‘Arabī’s *waḥdat al-wujūd*. It is not certain, however, whether the idea of the Universal Man as adopted by al-Falimbānī in his doctrine of Seven Stages was taken directly from al-Jīlī’s work or via al-Burhanpūrī’s *Tuhfat*.

Al-Falimbānī surely has woven together successfully a series of extracts from various authors to illustrate certain key doctrines of Sufism as found in the form of *Siyar*. Hence, al-Falimbānī is not just a ‘translator’ as he is popularly known but also a ‘commentator’ of al-Ghazālī’s works. This, however, does not

²⁷ It has been argued that al-Ghazālī ‘copied extensively’ al-Makkī’s *Qūt al-Qulūb* in his *Ihyā*, see Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision*, 25.

²⁸ A list of scholars mentioned in his works is given in section ‘Influence of Scholars’ in Chapter 2.

²⁹ *Siyar*, 4:106. The concept of ‘Universal Man’ or sometimes translated as ‘Perfect Man’ is originated from ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 827/1424), a foremost systematizer and one of the greatest exponents of the work of Ibn ‘Arabī. His book, *The Perfect Man*, is an explanation of Ibn Arabī’s teachings on the structure of reality and human perfection and is held to be one of the masterpieces in the Sufi literature. The full title of al-Jīlī’s work is *al-Insān al-Kāmil fī Ma‘rifat al-Awākhir wa al-Awā’il*. An extracts of the book was translated by Titus Burckhardt, *Universal Man*.

negate al-Falimbānī's contribution in introducing al-Ghazālī's teachings in the Malay world as we shall see.

There are also many discussions found in the *Mukhtasār* that are excluded by al-Falimbānī all together, for example 'on the explanation of knowledge that brings no benefit'. Al-Ghazālī mentions in *Ihyā'* on knowledge pertains to magic, fortune-telling, astrology and philosophy which are not praiseworthy (*ghayr al-mahmūdah*), but this section is not found in al-Falimbānī's *Siyar*.³⁰ Perhaps, al-Falimbānī did not see it as important topics to be brought into discussion for the Malay society then.

4.3 About *Siyar al-Sālikīn* and *Hidāyat al-Sālikīn*

Siyar and *Hidāyat* constitute the main teachings of al-Falimbānī. The focus of *Siyar* however, is similar to that of al-Ghazālī's *Ihya'* where it ranges from the concept of knowledge, and issues related to learning and teachings such as their merits, student-teacher ethical conducts (*adab*), the distinction between true scholars who are the 'heirs of the Prophets' as opposed to 'false' scholars;³¹ the creed or doctrinal foundations which are fundamental of Islamic belief;³² on ritual worships such as purification, prayers, fasting and pilgrimage.³³

Al-Falimbānī, unlike other jurists, discusses these ritual acts of worship not limited only to external (*zāhir*) or physical exercise, its validity or nullification - which is often represented by the term Shari'ah, but also in the form

³⁰ 'Fī bayān an jamī' al-'ulūm laysat mahmūdah: ya'nī bi dhālika al-sihr, wa al-talāsim, wa al-nujūm wa al-falsafa wa mā shābaha' (Al-Ghazālī, *Mukhtasār*, 23).

³¹ *Siyar*, 1:3-21; *Hidāyat*, 1-8.

³² *Siyar*, 1:21- 34; *Hidāyat*, 8- 11.

³³ *Siyar*, 1:35-123; *Hidāyat*, 11-102.

of internal (*bātin*) psychological obedience. Just as al-Ghazālī, the discussions come in the forms of ‘secrets’ (*asrār*) of each of the acts. Hence, al-Ghazālī and al-Falimbānī, unlike the *wujūdiyyah* Ṣūfīs, are regarded as among those Ṣūfīs who laid great emphasis not just on the esoteric but also exoteric aspects of Islam. They are the ‘neo-Sufīs’ as often referred to by Azra, to refer to the new type of Ṣūfīs who try to reconcile between the two aspects of Islam mentioned above.³⁴

In the second volume of *Siyar*, al-Falimbānī concentrates on the Ṣūfī ethics beginning from etiquette concerning food and drink, marriage, economic transactions, property acquisition, the concept of companionship for the sake of God, temporary isolation (*al-‘uzlah*), dispensations in Shari‘ah for selected cases, ‘Sufī concert’ (*samā‘*), the obligation of commanding good and forbidding evil, the traits of the Prophet and various kinds of noble virtues exemplified by the Prophet.³⁵

Al-Falimbānī begins his third volume of *Siyar* with a discussion on the mysteries of the spiritual heart (*qalb*), soul (*rūh*), intellect (*‘aql*) and lower self (*nafs*) and their relation to *latifa rabbaniyyah*.³⁶ Also discussed here is the spiritual exercise (*riyādat al-nafs*) and spiritual warfare (*mujāhadah*) in freeing the self from all evil traits through subjugating the ‘soul inclines towards evil’ (*nafs al-ammārat bī al-sū‘*) to divine commands and purifying the heart from its diseases. For al-Falimbānī, only those undertaking the strict discipline of Sufism and travel on the spiritual path are capable of weeding these diseases out of one’s soul, and eventually purifying it. He categorically mentions this when highlighting on the

³⁴ Azra, *Networks*, 107.

³⁵ *Siyar*, 2:1-248.

³⁶ *Siyar*, 3:2-17.

merits and excellence of Sufism.³⁷ Al-Falimbānī ends this chapter by elucidating on various spiritual diseases (*al-akhlāq al-madhmumah*), its types, danger and how to cure it. They include jealousy, anger, enmity, ostentation, love for wealth, love for personal glory, pride and self admiration and others as also can be found in al-Ghazālī's works, namely *Ihyā'* and *Bidāyat*.³⁸

In the final volume of *Siyar*, al-Falimbānī concerns with spiritual virtues (*al-akhlāq al-mahmudah*) which a spiritual traveller (*sālik*) should embellish himself with all these virtues. These include repentance (*al-tawbah*); patience and gratitude (*sabr wa shukr*); hope and fear (*rajā' wa khawf*); spiritual poverty (*faqr*); abstinence (*zuhd*); reliance of God (*tawakkul*); realisation of the spirit of Unity (*tawhīd*); love of God (*mahabbah*) and welcoming of the decree (*qadr*) of God (*ridā'*); sincerity and truthfulness (*ikhlas wa sidq*); spiritual vigilance and introspection (*murāqabah wa muhasabah*) and finally remembrance of death (*dhikr al-mawt*) and the issues related to it.³⁹

As for *Hidāyat*, the work was completed by al-Falimbānī on 5th Muharram 1192/1778 in Mecca. This work as said before is a translation of with adaptation from al-Ghazālī's *Bidāyat al-hidāyah*. There is quite a few Malay manuscripts use the title *Bidāyat* and not *Hidāyat* as it should have been.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, according to Shaghir, only one printed edition that at present use the title *Bidāyat* to refer to al-Falimbānī's *Hidāyat*.⁴¹ The first edition of *Hidāyat* was printed in Egypt under the editing supervision of another local Malay scholar,

³⁷ *Siyar*, 3:33.

³⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol.3, 311.

³⁹ *Siyar*, 4: 1-267; *Hidāyat*, 102-149.

⁴⁰ Such manuscripts bearing the title *Bidāyat* are, to cite a few of them, MI 170, MI 277, MI 334 of Islamic Museum Library of Islamic Centre, Kuala Lumpur. While those with *Hidāyat* as their titles are MS 13, MS184, MS190, MS240 and others of National Library Kuala Lumpur.

⁴¹ Shaghir, *Hidāyat*, 1.

Ahmad al-Fatānī sometime in 1288/1871, almost after a century of its completion. It was the first Malay work printed in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt. Since then, various editions of *Hidāyat* were published including those by the printing houses in Mecca.

Based on al-Falimbānī's curriculum of studies,⁴² *Hidāyat*, just as *Bidāyat* of al-Ghazālī falls under the text meant for the beginners (*mubtadi'*) travelling in the spiritual path. The arrangement is also not much different from the *Bidāyat* albeit more sources from other scholars were drawn in al-Falimbānī's *Hidāyat* as compared to *Bidāyat*. After the Introduction (*muqaddimah*), the work consists of two sections on knowledge and benefit of seeking knowledge. It follows after that seven chapters (*bāb*). The first one being the chapter on ritual worships; the second one is the chapter on the external obedience (*al-ta'at al-zāhirah*) third chapter is on external disobedience; the fourth on internal disobedience; fifth chapter on internal obedience or virtues; chapter sixth on remembrance of God (*dhikr*) and the final chapter is on various etiquettes.

The influence of *Hidāyat* in the Malay world is so great to the extent that the nineteenth Achenese scholar, Jamal al-Dīn bin 'Abd Allah al-Ashī (d.1262/1845) in his work *I'lām al-Muttaqīn* recommends whoever still could not comprehend any ideas found in his work should refer to *Hidāyat* of al-Falimbānī for further clarifications. Also, the much-celebrated Malaysian icon of Malay literature and thinker, Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad or popularly known as 'Za'ba' (d.

⁴² Bruinessen has listed names of books recommended by al-Falimbānī based on each level of students understanding, see his *Kitab Kuning*, 66-87.

1973) used to refer to *Hidāyat* when he composed his work on *Ilmu Mengarang Melayu*.⁴³

4.4 On Epistemology

In *Siyar*, al-Falimbānī divides the section on knowledge into four parts (*fasl*), on the value of knowledge and seeking for and teaching it; on the proprieties (*ādab*) of student and teacher; on the evils of certain knowledge and the distinguishing features of learned men of the Hereafter and the false teachers and finally knowledge of *fard ‘ayn* (individual obligation) vis-à-vis *fard kifāyah* (collective obligation).⁴⁴ This division appears to be Ghazalian and based on *Kitāb al-‘ilm of Ihyā’*.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, al-Falimbānī has also added many references from other Sufī masters not previously mentioned in *Ihyā’*.⁴⁶ Further, it seems that not all sub-sections in al-Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’* were replicated by al-Falimbānī into *Siyar*. A lengthy discussion on blameworthy knowledge, for example, was omitted by al-Falimbānī.⁴⁷ Likewise, al-Falimbānī has left out almost all anecdotes mentioned in *Ihyā’*. It is not clear why he did this, but we could speculate that perhaps he wanted to include only those important points of al-Ghazālī’s teachings.

Al-Falimbānī views knowledge as ‘light’ (*nūr*) which is a gift from God who imparts it into one’s heart. He cites the sayings of the Prophet’s companion, Ibn Mas‘ūd: ‘Knowledge is not in relation to how much you

⁴³ Shaghir, *Hidāyat*, 6-7.

⁴⁴ *Siyar*, 1:9.

⁴⁵ *Kitāb al-‘ilm, Ihyā’* 1:4-156. For further analysis on Al-Ghazālī’s conception of knowledge, one can refer to Che Zarrina Sa’ari (2007), *Al-Ghazālī and Intuition: An Analysis, Translation and Text of al-Risālah al-Laduniyyah*, and also Osman Bakar (1992), *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study of Islamic Philosophies of Science*, 155-219.

⁴⁶ We have elaborated this in Chapter Two.

⁴⁷ Faris, *The Book*, 73.

memorize and then narrate, but rather, the light that God cast into your heart'.⁴⁸ The same is found in al-Ghazālī's works, such as *al-Munqidh* for example. Al-Ghazālī in *al-Munqidh* further adds with the saying of the Prophet, 'God Most High created men in darkness, then sprinkled on them some of His light.'⁴⁹ The same light was responsible for delivering al-Ghazālī from his spiritual crisis, not rational proofs or arguments.⁵⁰ It is man's mirror of this external world ('*ālam al-mulk*) which is capable of reflecting images of the invisible world ('*ālam al-malakūt*). The cleaner and purer the heart, the better the images would be. One's heart would be pure if he has no sin, or continuously purifies his self from the sins he had committed. Otherwise, knowledge could not reach his heart, as Imam al-Shāfi'i (d. 204/820) said: "knowledge is light and it will not be granted to a sinner ('*āsī*')."⁵¹

Al-Falimbānī therefore believes that one should continuously purify oneself and rigorously acquire all beneficial knowledge mentioned in the Qur'ān and *hadīth*. He sees that the objective of seeking knowledge is in order for one to attain 'piety' (*taqwā*) since only those with knowledge that fear God as He himself declares it: "Those truly fear God, among His Servants, who have knowledge".⁵²

It is interesting to note for al-Falimbānī, this *taqwā* is achieved by means of spiritual experience until one reaches *ma'rifah*. *Taqwā*, *ma'rifah* and '*insān kāmil*' (the Perfect Man) are the terms used by al-Falimbānī very often interchangeably, as

⁴⁸ *Siyar*, 1:8-13.

⁴⁹ McCarthy, *Deliverance from Error*, 58. McCarthy in the note 46, p.105 of the same cites Zamakhsharī's *Kashshāf*: "God, after having created the thinking beings, men and jinn, in the darkness of the corporeal nature and of the evil passions, cast into their soul the light of true knowledge and of salvation."

⁵⁰ Osman, *Classification*, 159.

⁵¹ Al-Za'bā, *Dīwān al-Shāfi'i*, 54.

⁵² *Siyar*, 1:4; *Hidāyat*, 4; Qur. 35:28.

we shall see later to reflect the highest degrees of man's spiritual station profound achievement.

The concept of knowledge as conceived by al-Falimbānī is therefore in the context of spiritual education beginning from the nature of man, his relation with God including ontology, spiritual cosmology and the spiritual ethical virtues until the realisation of true knowledge or *ma'rifah*.⁵³ This approach is clearly and purely Ghazalian and as far as we know none of al-Falimbānī's predecessors has spoken in this manner.

Before al-Falimbānī goes further, he discusses the merits of learning and teaching by citing various verses of the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions just as al-Ghazālī did in his *Ihyā'*.⁵⁴ He gives his insight on the Prophetic tradition that a scholar (*ālim*) is superior to a worshipper (*ābid*).⁵⁵ This is to dispel the misconception of the general public that a worshipper is someone who has no knowledge but only blindly worships God, while a scholar in contrast, is a possessor of knowledge. Al-Falimbānī, however, does not agree with this understanding and argues that it is incorrect to regard a worshipper as someone without knowledge since if he had no proper knowledge, then all his actions of worship would be void and unacceptable. Such a man, according to al-Falimbānī, is not fit to be called a worshipper (*ābid*) but rather an ignorant (*jāhil*). Al-Falimbānī proposes a view that a worshipper as someone who is in possession of at least sufficient knowledge of basic rulings with regard to the act of worship that he

⁵³ El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, 61.

⁵⁴ Among them are Qur. 58:11, Qur. 39:9, Qur. 29:43; Qur. 3:18, Qur. 16:43, Qur. 9:122, Qur. 35:28 and others. The prophetic traditions are such as "*al-'ulamā' warathat al-anbiyā'*", and "*al-'alim āmīn Allah fī al-ard'*" and many others, *Siyar* 1:3-21.

⁵⁵ *Siyar*, vol.1:5; A Prophetic tradition reported by al-Tirmidhī and graded as fair (*hasan*) by al-'Irāqī; *Masābih*, 1:14.

wanted to perform. Nonetheless, his knowledge is limited only to the exoteric knowledge of rulings (*ahkām* or *Sharī‘ah*) but without any mastery of esoteric knowledge, in contrast to a scholar (*‘ālim*) who has possessed comprehensive knowledge of both exoteric and esoteric and mastery of the spiritual path (*tarīqah*) as well as knowledge of Reality (*haqīqah*).⁵⁶

4.4.1 Classification of knowledge

Al-Falimbānī also touches on the classification of knowledge. There are various ways or perspectives on how knowledge is classified, based on the individual scholars.⁵⁷ Al-Ghazālī, for example, in his *Kitāb al-‘Ilm of Ihyā’* and *al-Risālat al-Ladunīyah* has made at least four different systems of classification.⁵⁸ In its broadest sense, knowledge in Islamic tradition – at least according to al-Ghazālī – can be divided into two types: knowledge that ‘not consistent with the Shari‘ah’ (*ghayr shar‘iyyah*) or non-religious knowledge and Shari‘ah (*shar‘iyyah*) or religious knowledge.⁵⁹ Al-Ghazālī, however, does not confine knowledge to religious and non-religious only, but also other sub-categories depending on the perspective one views it. The divisions can be surmised as follows:⁶⁰ (a) theory

⁵⁶ *Siyar* 1: 5.

⁵⁷ Osman Bakar, for examples, discusses classification of knowledge based on three scholars, al-Farābī, al-Ghazālī and Qutb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, see his *Classification*.

⁵⁸ Further discussion, see al-Ghazālī’s *Kitāb al-‘ilm of his Ihyā’*, translated into English by Nabih Amin Faris, *The Book of Knowledge*; al-Ghazālī, “al-Risālat al-ladunniya”. Relevant parts also can be found in his two other works, namely *Kitāb Jawāhir al-Qur’an* and the *Mizān al-‘amal*. See the translation by Muhammad Abul Quasem, *The Jewels of the Qur’an: Al-Ghazālī’s theory, a translation, with an introduction and annotation of al Ghazālī’s Kitāb Jawāhir al-Qur’an*.

⁵⁹ Here al-Ghazālī uses the term *ghayr shar‘īyah* instead of *‘aqliyah* to refer to rational or acquired knowledge, see his *The Book of Knowledge*, 36; also *al-Risālat al-ladunīyah*, 63; while Ibn Khaldūn uses the term *naqliyah* to refer to revealed or religious knowledge instead of *shari‘iyah*, see Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘Ibār*, 1:786-789.

⁶⁰ Osman, *Classification*, 203-226.

vis-à-vis practical sciences⁶¹ (b) presential (*hudūrī*) vis-à-vis sought (*husūlī*)⁶² (c) religious (*shar‘iyyah*) vis-à-vis rational (*ghayr shar‘īyah/aqliyah*)⁶³ and (d) *fard ‘ayn* vis-à-vis *fard kifāyah*.⁶⁴

Al-Falimbānī, however, does not adopt al-Ghazālī’s systematic classifications of knowledge fully. He follows al-Ghazālī’s classification insofar *fard‘ayn* (individual obligation) and *fardkifāyah* (collective obligation) knowledge are concerned.⁶⁵ As for the other classifications, al-Falimbānī seems have not touched on them at all.

Al-Falimbānī says that with respect to obligation in seeking knowledge, if the knowledge is related to one’s fulfilment of his obligation towards God in this world, then the knowledge is regarded as individual duty (*fard ‘ayn*) while other knowledge is called communal duty (*fard kifāyah*).⁶⁶ Al-Falimbānī believes that the command of the Prophet to seek knowledge for each and every Muslim in his tradition ‘seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim’⁶⁷ actually refer to the knowledge of *fard ‘ayn*. The knowledge of *fard ‘ayn* composes of three main branches of Islamic sciences: theology (‘*ilm usūl al-dīn*’),⁶⁸ jurisprudence (‘*ilm fiqh*’)⁶⁹ and finally *tasawwūf*.⁷⁰ These are also termed by al-Falimbānī as

⁶¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mizān al-‘amal*, 36-37, 112-13; *Maqāsid al-falāsifah*, 134.

⁶² Al-Ghazālī, *Risālat al-laduniyah*, 63; M.A. Sherif, 8.

⁶³ Al-Ghazālī, *The Book of knowledge*, 36.

⁶⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’*, 1:16-17.

⁶⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *The Book of Knowledge*, sec. II, 30-72.

⁶⁶ *Siyar*, 1:9-10. *Fard kifāyah* knowledge is like knowledge of medicines, mathematics, and languages (*Siyar*, 3:149).

⁶⁷ Prophetic tradition: *talabu al-‘ilmi faridatun ‘ala kulli muslimīn* “Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim”. It is narrated by Ahmad in *al-‘Ilal*. Its chain is weak, however. On its weakness, al-Nawāwī (676/1277) said, it is weak with regard to its chain although it is authentic in meaning; while al-Mizzī (742/1341) judged it as fair (*hasan*) in *al-Tuhfat*.

⁶⁸ Which al-Falimbānī also terms as knowledge of *creed, usūl al-dīn*, or ‘*aqīdah*’.

⁶⁹ Al-Falimbānī also terms this branch of knowledge as ‘*furu’*’ or ‘*ilm shari‘at*’.

⁷⁰ There are various names he uses when speaking about *tasawwuf* knowledge such as ‘*ilm batin*’ (esoteric knowledge), ‘*ilm sulūk*’ (knowledge of spiritual travelling), ‘*ilm tariqah*’ (knowledge of the

‘praiseworthy knowledge’ (*mahmudah*) and ‘beneficial knowledge’ (*al-‘ilm al-nāfi‘*) which are of two kinds: (a) knowledge of the *Sharī‘ah*⁷¹ and (b) unveiling knowledge (*mukāshafah*). The former is further divided into two parts: external (*zāhir*) and internal (*bātīn*). The external are all the three branches of Islamic sciences while the internal are knowledge of *tarīqah* and knowledge of *haqīqah*.⁷²

Only *fard ‘ayn* knowledge is regarded as praiseworthy knowledge (*mahmūdah*) and should be sought by each and every single Muslim in line with the commandment of the Messenger, while other knowledge subject to the objective or intention of seeking it. If the objective is in order to get closer to God (*taqarrub ilā Allāh*), then it is praiseworthy (*mahmūdah*) while if it is intended for harm, self-glorification and others then it is blameworthy (*madhmūmah*).

As for the least level of *fard ‘ayn* knowledge one is obliged to seek, al-Falimbāni says as far as *‘ilm usūl al-dīn* is concerned, it is incumbent upon each and every Muslim to learn at least the two fundamental doctrines: firstly, of God’s Divine Attributes, His Divine Actions and Names. In studying this, al-Falimbānī cautions the seeker not to rely much on one’s own rational thought in understanding it since one would not be able to completely comprehend God’s attributes, His Names and Divine Actions.⁷³ Secondly, one should devote his time on studying more on the concept of Prophethood of the Last Messenger and of all the previous messengers and believe in their Prophethood.⁷⁴ Al-Falimbānī limits theological explanation found in al-Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’* as the minimum

Way), *‘ilm haqīqah* (knowledge of the Reality), and *‘ilm ma‘rifah* (gnostic knowledge), *Siyar*, 1:7,10, passim.

⁷¹ *Sharī‘āt* composes of three branches of Islamic sciences: *usūl al-dīn*, *fiqh* and *tasawwūf*.

⁷² *Siyar*, 3:176. It is also known as *‘ilm sulūk* or *‘ilm tāriqah*.

⁷³ *Siyar*, 3: 93.

⁷⁴ *Siyar*, 1:19.

standard one should know with regard to knowledge of ‘*aqīdah*. Any excess of it would fall under optional or collective duty, *fard kifāyah*, and one would not be accounted for in the Hereafter. He even cautions travellers in the spiritual path of God not to spend much of his time in the knowledge of theology beyond necessary and required upon him as *fard ‘ayn* since it has no real benefit in it.

As for the knowledge of *fiqh*, the least one should possess is sufficiently enough for one to know matters of daily ritual worship such as purification of oneself, prayers, fasting, alms-giving, pilgrimage when one is capable to do so, as well as knowing things that would invalidate the above acts.⁷⁵ To learn more than that is optional, and not recommended for a spiritual traveller since his priority is to complete learning the third branch of *fard ‘ayn* knowledge, namely *tasawwuf*.⁷⁶

As for the internal knowledge, it is the knowledge of Sufism. The least one should know is to have sufficient knowledge of what are the praiseworthy and blameworthy traits, of how to cleanse the heart and how to implement the good traits in one’s daily life. This is the least one is required to acquire.

Al-Falimbānī, however, does not encourage the spiritual traveller to embark on studying all branches of knowledge. He feels this will be of no benefit to him. This reminds us of al-Ghazālī’s division of three stages of limitation in the acquisition of knowledge. First is the primary limitation (*iqtisār*), second moderation (*iqtisād*) and finally thoroughness (*istiqsā’*).⁷⁷ Nonetheless, spending

⁷⁵ *Siyar*, 1:19.

⁷⁶ This is what according to al-Falimbānī, al-Ghazālī has said in his *Bidāyat al-hidāyah* when he mentions that “a teacher should stop his student from learning knowledge of *fard kifāyah* until he has completed studying the knowledge of *fard ‘ayn*”.

⁷⁷ For details see Al-Ghazālī, *The Book of Knowledge*, 100.

one's time on studying Sufism is never too much for al-Falimbānī. On the contrary, it is better than spending one's time superfluously in other Islamic sciences.⁷⁸ Since Sufism, as expounded by al-Ghazālī in his *Ihyā'* or al-Falimbānī's *Siyar*, already contains other branches of Islamic sciences as well, one who studied these works wholly, for al-Falimbānī, would generally be considered as having completed one's *fard 'ayn* requirement.⁷⁹

Finally on the second category of knowledge is the 'unveiling knowledge (*'ilm mukāshafah*). Here, al-Falimbānī employs the term *'ilm ladunnī* synonymously with al-Ghazālī's *'ilm mukāshafah*.⁸⁰ For the Sufīs, this knowledge is traced back to the Prophet's cousin 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib (d. 40/661) in the seven centuries who was believed to have been vouchsafed such knowledge of esoteric things (*ma'ānī*).⁸¹ It is the knowledge originated directly from God, described as light (*nūr*) imparted by God into the pure hearts of His Prophets and Saints until they are capable of knowing Him with certainty (*ma'rifat Allāh*) as in al-Falimbānī's own words:

[...] it is unveiled by the Almighty God their hearts with *'ilm mukāshafah* and *'ilm ladunniy*, which is the light cast into the hearts of His prophets and saints with a true *ma'rifa* of God [...]⁸²

Al-Falimbānī does not pursue to explain other divisions of knowledge as outlined by al-Ghazālī apart from *fard 'ayn* and *fard kifāyah*. However, he

⁷⁸ *Siyar*, 1:17.

⁷⁹ *Siyar*, 1:20.

⁸⁰ The term *ladunni* is taken from the Qur'ān, Surah al-Kahf (The Cave) verse 65 which says "then they found one of Our slaves, unto whom We had bestowed mercy from Us, and whom We had taught knowledge from Us", see Qur'ān, 18: 65.

⁸¹ Al-Sarrāj, *al-Lumā'*, 281; cf. Trimmingham, *Sufi*, 136, n.2.

⁸² *Siyar*, 3:138.

elaborates more on ‘beneficial knowledge’ (*al-‘ilm al-nāfi‘*) parallel with *fard ‘ayn* and *fardkifāyah*, as also discussed by al-Ghazālī his *Bidāyat*.⁸³

Beneficial or useful knowledge is not in the sense of knowledge that is not in the sense of utilitarian or ‘ability to be used for a practical purpose’⁸⁴ or meet the need of job market or industries as one might have expected of today’s knowledge. But rather, beneficial knowledge, for al-Falimbānī, is the knowledge than can increase one’s awe and fear of God; increase in the worship of God, reduce the love for this world and make one always alert of oneself on the ploys of the devils. It is the knowledge of the religion and the Hereafter.⁸⁵ Al-Falimbānī clearly follows al-Ghazālī who says the same in his *Bidāyat*, where the latter defines beneficial knowledge as the following:

...knowledge which makes you ‘grow’ in fear of God, and increases in awareness of your own faults, and in knowledge of the service of your Lord; it decreases your desire for this world and increases your desire for the life to come; it opens your eyes to the defects in your conduct so that you guard against them; it makes you aware of the wiles and deceptions of the devil, and how he imposes on evil scholars (*‘ulamā*) until he exposes them to the hate and wrath of God Most High, in that they trade this world at the price of religion and make their knowledge a means of gaining wealth from the powers that be and of eating up [unjustly] the wealth of trust-endowments for the poor and orphans;...⁸⁶

In relation to that al-Falimbānī outlines a list of books⁸⁷ which according to him contains the ‘beneficial knowledge’ for fulfilling one’s obligation of *fard*

⁸³ *Siyar*, 1:7. Al-Falimbānī must have taken this from al-Ghazālī’s *Bidāyat al-hidayah* see Al-Ghazālī, *Bidāyat al-hidāyah*, 62. It was translated by Mashhad al-Allaf, *The Beginning of Guidance*, 8. See also *Hidāyat*, 1:12.

⁸⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “useful”.

⁸⁵ *Hidāyat*, 1:12; cf. al-Ghazālī, *Bidāyat*, 29.

⁸⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Bidāyat*, 29.

⁸⁷ There are many books recommended by al-Falimbānī based on the student’s level of understanding, a list of which has already been mentioned in the Chapter Two; cf. Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning*, 66-87.

‘*ayn*. These are the books authored by al-Ghazālī⁸⁸ primarily and other Sufī masters, mainly Abū Tālib al-Makkī (d.386/996),⁸⁹ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 562/1166),⁹⁰ Ibn ‘Abbād of Rhonda (d. 793/1390),⁹¹ and Sayyid ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Alawī al-Haddād (d. 1132/1720).⁹²

Al-Falimbānī affirms that all these books of *tasawwuf* contain the most beneficial knowledge because one can also learn other branches of Islamic sciences.⁹³ He further claims that knowledge of *tasawwuf* is the knowledge that is actually referred to by the Prophet as ‘beneficial knowledge’ The reason, is as said before, since for someone embarking on *tasawwuf*, he must have also studied and completed all other branches of Islamic sciences considered as *fard ‘ayn* knowledge.⁹⁴ *Tasawwuf* for al-Falimbānī is, in a sense, not a mere beneficial knowledge, but also the most superior knowledge than any other knowledge since it leads you to know your God ultimately. He bases this contention on al-Ghazālī’s *Jawāhīr* where al-Ghazālī states that the knowledge of *tasawwuf* is the highest form of all knowledge since it leads man to knowing God, the Absolute

⁸⁸ Apart from *Ihyā’* are books like *Minhāj al-‘Abidin*, *Bidāyat al-hidāyah*, *Al-Arba‘īn al-usūl al-dīn*.

⁸⁹ In fact al-Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’* is said to be inspired, if not copied, from the work of al-Makkī’s *Qūt al-Qulūb*. One of the important studies of al-Makkī works is by Wan Mohd Azam bin Mohd Amin who presented a doctoral dissertation to the University of Edinburgh in 1991 for a thesis entitled, *An evaluation of the Qūt Al-qulūb of al-Makkī with an annotated translation of his Kitāb al-Tawbah*.

⁹⁰ The book al-Falimbānī repeatedly mentions is *al-Ghunyah li-tālibī tariq al-haqq*. The book has been translated fully in a set of five volumes by by Muhtar Holland, *Sufficient Provision for Seekers of the Path of Truth*.

⁹¹ Ibn ‘Abbād of Rhonda (1332-1390) is a fourteen-century Spanish-born Sufi master who wrote a commentary of Ibn ‘Atā Allah’s *Kitāb al-Hikām*. Al-Falimbānī highly praises Ibn ‘Abbād’s commentary of *Hikām* and considers it as one of among useful books to read, *Siyar*, 1:6.

⁹² One of the books authored by al-Haddād that al-Falimbānī cites is *Kitāb al-‘ilmīyah wa usūl al-hikmiyyah*.

⁹³ “...segala kitab ilmu tasauf semuanya itu yaitulah ilmu yang memberi manfaat kerana kitab tasauf itu telah terkandung di dalamnya ilmu usuluddin dan ilmu fekah yang fardhu ain...*Siyar*, 1:9;

⁹⁴ Al-Ghazālī mentions that the scholars disagreed as to what branch of knowledge man is obliged to seek and as a result they split up to twenty group, see al-Ghazālī, *The Book of knowledge*, 30.

Reality. Likewise, the Spanish Sufi master, Ibn ‘Abbad, (d. 793/1390) whom al-Falimbānī often cites in his work also speaks in the same vein where the former regards the beneficial knowledge mentioned repeatedly in the Qur’ān and the tradition is the knowledge that imparts in the person’s heart fear and awe towards the Almighty God and His Majesty.⁹⁵ It is therefore unsurprising that since Sufism is the most meritorious form of knowledge according to al-Falimbānī, as well as other Sufīs, naturally then they feel the Sufīs are the most perfect kind of personalities of all. Al-Ghazālī in this connection says:

The Sufīs are those who uniquely follow the way to God, their mode of life is the best of all, their way the most direct ways, and their ethic the purest.⁹⁶

As regards to the spiritual education, one can gather that al-Falimbānī view it in the form of an integration of five aspects namely: the concept of knowledge and education, the nature of God, the nature of the Universe, the nature of man and the embellishment of oneself with spiritual virtues and good character (*akhlāq al- mahmudah*). This means al-Falimbānī’s spiritual education encompasses the emphasis on epistemology, metaphysics, cosmology, spiritual psychology and spiritual ethics. This is clearly Ghazalian as enshrined in his *Ihyā’*. The introduction of al-Ghazālī’s integrated approach to Islam by al-Falimbānī must have been a new phenomenon in the context of Malay Archipelago, which had been predominantly embracing the ‘*wujūdiyyah* Islam’, in a sort, for several centuries prior to him.

⁹⁵ *Siyar*, 6; “Only those who fear God from among his servants, who have knowledge”, (Qur’an. 35:28).

⁹⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 94.

Al-Falimbānī envisages that at the end of one’s spiritual education or ‘spiritual journey’ – the term used by him— one would ‘know’ who he really is, ‘who’ God is and what the Universe is in reality.⁹⁷ This, in reality is what all the Sufī masters teach, that is to realise the Prophetic saying: ‘*man ‘arafa nafsahu faqad ‘arafa rabbahu*’ (He who knows himself, knows his Lord).⁹⁸ Upon knowing ‘who’ he is in reality and then the ultimate aim of seeking knowledge which is beyond the cosmological and psychological perspective but rather to be in the Divine Presence (*hadrah*), knowing God, gnosis (*ma‘rifah*) is achievable.⁹⁹

4.4.2 Aims of Spiritual Education

The aim of spiritual education, according to al-Falimbānī, is the realisation of true knowledge or *ma‘rifah*.¹⁰⁰ *Ma‘rifah* is ‘knowledge of God whereby He is known to all His prophets and saints. It cannot be acquired by ordinary means, but is the result of Divine Guidance’.¹⁰¹ It is an experiential knowledge. In epistemological hierarchical order, it is the highest form of knowledge attainable – with the grace of God— after the revelation (*wahy*) which is exclusively bestowed on the Prophets.¹⁰² Sometimes it is also termed as ‘*irfān* or ‘illumination’ or knowledge of the Reality (*haqīqah*).¹⁰³ Al-Falimbānī uses *ma‘rifah* knowledge and *haqīqah* knowledge interchangeably, though the latter implies a higher degree.

⁹⁷ El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, 61.

⁹⁸ *Siyar*, 3:5.

⁹⁹ *Siyar*, 3: 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Siyar*, 3:4; El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, 60.

¹⁰¹ Al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf*, 16.

¹⁰² Al-Taftāzānī, *al-Nasafī*, 27.

¹⁰³ R.Arnaldez, “*Ma‘rifah*”, in *EI2*.

Maʿrifah is often understood as a kind of direct experience bestowed by God on His Saints, adepts or whomsoever He wished, usually after one having undergone rigorous spiritual exercise and strict discipline in purifying his soul.¹⁰⁴ Al-Ghazālī in his *al-Munqidh* describes it as ‘something that can be attained, not by study, but rather by fruitional experience and the state of ecstasy and the “exchange of qualities”’.¹⁰⁵ It is an “honour” (*sharaf*) and privilege (*fadhilāh*) from God to those who strive towards getting closer to Him (*taqarrub*).¹⁰⁶ The spiritual veils of the one who has attained the station of the intimate (*muqarrabīn*) will then be removed from him by God, and he will be subsequently capable of seeing things as they are in reality (*haqīqat al-ashyāʾ kamā hiyā*) through God.

Maʿrifah is also viewed not just the highest form of knowledge attainable by a *sālik*, but is also said as ‘an absolute knowledge and perfection of belief’ according to the Ashaʿarite.¹⁰⁷ It is a process of ‘realisation of true knowledge’ where the most certain (*yaqīn*) form of the knowledge ‘*haqq al-yaqīn*’ and verification (*tahqīq*) of the truth revealed in the Qurʾān and *hadīth* is realised. It is the Sufī doctrine that ‘light of intuition’ (*kashf*) is superior to reason and the key to certainty.¹⁰⁸ If revelation (*wahy*) is the highest form of knowledge, then *maʿrifah* is the highest form of verification and the most certain and reliable form of comprehending and verifying the knowledge. Al-Ghazālī in many places of his works affirms that *maʿrifah* is superior to all other forms to truth, including the philosophers, theologians and Batinites.¹⁰⁹ At the level of *maʿrifah*, it is not only

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir*, 30-31.

¹⁰⁵ McCarthy, *Path*, 52.

¹⁰⁶ *Siyar*, 3:4.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Taftāzānī, *al-Nasafī*, xxiv, 27.

¹⁰⁸ Osman, *Classification*, 160.

¹⁰⁹ See his *Munqidh* for example; cf. Osman, *Classification*, 159.

the abolition of one's consciousness of the self as the level of the soul, but also 'an absence of self at the level of the heart and the spirit'.¹¹⁰

The importance of *ma'rifah* for a spiritual traveller is clearly illustrated by al-Falimbāni in his famous 'parable of coconut'. He says that *fiqh* is similitude to the outer part of a coconut; Sufism at its level of *tarīqah* is the core of the coconut while at the level of 'unveiling' (*mukāshafah*), or *ma'rifah* or *haqīqah* is the essence of coconut, which is its milk or its oil.¹¹¹ This similitude is al-Falimbāni's sharp observations based on the local environment. A similar parable is also popular in Sufī symbol which likens it to a walnut of which the shell is like the *Shari'ah*, the kernel is the *tarīqah* and 'the oil which is invisible yet everywhere present is the *haqīqah*'.¹¹²

The Sufīs believe that knowledge of God in the sense of *ma'rifah* is not attainable through intellectual contemplation since it is beyond the reach of rational or logical faculty. Since God is neither a sensible thing which the physical organ could grasp, nor imaginary being that imaginative faculty could capture, but rather He is the Absolute Being known only at the level of spiritual realm when He bestows His light (*nūr*) on whomsoever He wishes. He is in fact both Absolute Being and Knowledge.¹¹³ In the process of attaining *ma'rifah*, a *sālik* would undergo a rigorous spiritual exercise against his lower self where in the process, all the blameworthy traits would be eliminated from his *nafs*.¹¹⁴ Only then the *sālik* is capable of receiving the direct knowledge from God, if He wishes

¹¹⁰ EI2, s.v. "ma'rifa".

¹¹¹ *Siyar* 1:11.

¹¹² Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, 124.

¹¹³ El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, 66.

¹¹⁴ *Siyar*, 3:16; Abdel-Kadier, *al-Junayd*, 96.

to grant one. This al-Falimbānī's concept of spiritual knowledge is again Ghazalian.

Al-Ghazālī also speaks of the same idea when he said that once the heart is completely purified, only then the 'door of the heart' is open to the world of dominion (*'ālam al-malakūt*) and the person is capable of receiving knowledge directly from God through 'unveiling', or *'ilm al-mukāshafah* or *'ilm ladunnī*.¹¹⁵ The spiritual heart can be pure or otherwise darken. It can have angelic or satanic characteristics depending on its states. It is capable of inspiring in two ways: to do good things (obedience) or to do evil things (disobedience). One must guard one's heart to be continuously in the state of obedience through remembering God. The task to be in perpetual remembrance of God (*dhikr*) is strenuous unless one trains oneself, and seriously exerts strict discipline unto oneself until it becomes part of one's natural habit. In *tasawwuf*, this training is called *riyadat al-nafs*.¹¹⁶ It is a spiritual struggle between the good and evil force in one's soul, whereby each force tries to win over the other.

In the Qur'ān, Khidr is a classic example of someone who was bestowed by God with this kind of knowledge, the knowledge of realities as they are (*haqīqat al-ashyā' kamā hiya*) and their secrets. The possession of knowledge by Khidr is a proof that an ordinary person with pure heart – not necessarily a prophet¹¹⁷ —by

¹¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī is of the opinion that in the epistemology of Islam, *ma'rifah* is the highest form of source of knowledge after revelation (*wahy*). This is in line with the creed of al-Nasāfī as expounded by al-Taftazani, see al-Nasafi, 27. While *ma'rifah* normally happens to a saint, *wahy* is to the Prophets, al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir*, 30-31.

¹¹⁶ Al-Ghazālī speaks at length on this in chapter twenty two and twenty three of his *Ihyā'*, see T.J. Winter, trans., *Al-Ghazālī On Disciplining the Soul: Kitāb Riyādat al-nafs & on Breaking the Two Desires: Kitāb Kasr al-shahwatayn*.

¹¹⁷ There are many debates surrounding Khidr who he was in reality. Was he mere an ordinary person or one of the many prophets? Some scholars however believe that he might be one of the Prophets, though not included among the twenty five whom a Muslim is obliged to believe see A.J. Wensick, s.v. "al-Khidir", *EI2*, 4:902-905; Irfan Omar, "Khidr in Islamic Tradition", 279-291.

the grace of God, is capable of achieving knowledge almost comparable to the knowledge of the Prophets. The conversation between Khidr to Moses as recorded in Surah al-Kahf verses 65-82 illustrates this.

Likewise, another example is as in the case of Prophet Solomon and his companion where the latter was capable of transferring the throne of Queen Sheba from one place to another place of far distance. God describes him as a possessor of the knowledge of the Scripture. The Qur'ān records the incident as follows:

Said one who had knowledge of the Book: "I will bring it to Thee within the twinkling of an eye!" then when (Solomon) saw it placed firmly before him, He said: "This is by the Grace of My Lord!- to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful! and if any is grateful, truly His gratitude is (A gain) for His own soul; but if any is ungrateful, truly My Lord is free of all needs, Supreme In honour!"¹¹⁸

When the spiritual traveller has perfected his *ma'rifah*, he is said to have been transformed into a Perfect Man (*insān kāmil*), a doctrine which al-Falimbānī must have taken it from al-Jīlī. Al-Falimbani says:

... dan sesungguhnya telah kami beri kemuliaan akan anak Adam itu dan apabila sempurna makrifat insan itu akan segala martabat yang tersebut dahulu itu maka yaitu dinamakan akan dia sempurna *insan kamil* dan yaitu maqam anbiya' dan awliya'...¹¹⁹

The most perfect form of Perfect Man is represented by the holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Qur'ān, 27:40.

¹¹⁹ *Siyar*, 4:106; cf. William C. Chittick, "The Perfect Man as the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jāmī".

¹²⁰ *Siyar*, 4:106.

On a whole, spiritual education is ultimately to inculcate in man sincerity (*ikhhlās*) and to cure him from hypocrisy and to revert him to his *fitrah* or Adamic state. In other words it is to make man achieve ‘integration in all the depth and breadth of his being and life’.¹²¹

4.5 On Creed

As we have mentioned before *ma‘rifah* is also viewed not just the highest form of knowledge attainable by a *sālik*, but is also said as ‘an absolute knowledge and perfection of belief’ according to the Asha‘arite.¹²² Being an Asha‘arite, al-Falimbānī, however, has not explained at length on the doctrinal aspects of Islam or creed, but rather replicating what al-Ghazālī has said in *Ihyā’* in the second chapter on *al-‘itiqād*. Those are matters concerning God and His Divine Attributes, Essence and Actions; Prophethood; eschatology and others.¹²³ He takes it almost verbatim from al-Ghazālī’s *Kitāb al-‘Aqā‘id* of *Ihyā’*, with very slight differences and modifications here and there. We know from this section of *Siyar* that al-Falimbānī is clearly an Asha‘arite, following almost verbatim the style of presentation of al-Ghazālī.¹²⁴

It is quite surprising however, why al-Falimbānī had not elaborated this section of ‘*aqā‘id*’ as he did with other sections on *tasawwuf* and even on *fiqh*. Perhaps, he felt it was already sufficient – as far as one’s *fard ‘ayn* requirement is concerned— to merely replicate what al-Ghazālī had written in *Ihyā’* without any need of further reference to other sources. Probably also, he wanted to affirm the readers of his position that his creed is none other but the creed of the ‘*Hujjat*

¹²¹ El-Muhammady, *Akademika*, 65.

¹²² Al-Taftāzānī, *al-Nasafī*, xxiv, 27.

¹²³ *Siyar*, 1:21-35. This section comes immediately after his discussion on knowledge in *Siyar*.

¹²⁴ *Siyar*, 1:21-35.

al-Islām’, no less, and whatever proceeds after this chapter conform with the creed of one of the greatest Asha‘arite theologians. Bearing in mind that this is a pertinent issue since al-Falimbānī lived in an era where killings and book-burnings took place for being accused of ‘heretics’ as had previously befallen the *wujūdiyyah* of al-Fansūrī and his adherents. Though he has not explained this creed at length as one might have expected, yet, he draws much attention to the creed when discussing the spiritual journey and the stages of spiritual psychology in relation to its travel towards the Absolute Reality.

4.6 Conclusion

This section tries to present al-Falimbānī’s concept of knowledge and spiritual education. We have demonstrated here al-Falimbānī’s epistemology theory which is basically taken from al-Ghazālī. But at the same, he has incorporated other Sufī scholars’ views and in this context al-Jīlī’s Perfect Man seems to dominate his conception as the aim of spiritual education, apart from attaining gnosis which is a standard target for the Ṣūfīs in general.

We have also briefly demonstrated that al-Falimbānī follows al-Ghazālī in terms of creed. This makes him an Asha‘arite. Though we do not go into depth of this topic of creed since it not the focus of this Chapter, yet one can look at his *Siyar* to notice that al-Falimbānī’s replicate al-Ghazālī’s *Kitāb al-‘Aqā’id*.¹²⁵ The importance of bringing the issue of creed here is to show that what al-Falimbānī demonstrates in the later chapter on Seven Stages of Being is not a matter of creed, but rather a spiritual experience at the level of gnosis.

¹²⁵ *Siyar*, 1:21-34.