

Niyâzî-i Mısrî's Concept of Murshid and its Development based on the Theory of Insân Kâmil*

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Introduction

Niyâzî-i Mısrî (d.1105/1694) was a great Sūfî poet of the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century. In this era, the Sūfîs and Tāriqas flourished, and, at the same time, the Sūfîs were affected by the anti-Sūfî movement known as the “Kadıẓâdeli movement.” Mısrî also fell victim to the movement and was exiled. Although the Islamic fundamentalism-oriented stream at that time made him punished, he is definitely the representative Sūfî master of the Ottoman Sūfî; and his Dîvân is still known today as a masterpiece of Ottoman Tasawwuf literature. Beside poetry works, he wrote several prose works; the most important one is “*the Tables of Wisdom*” (*Mawâ'id al-ʿIrḫān*), which was written during his last days in exile. Mısrî is not only known as a great Sūfî poet but also as a thinker of the School of Ibn al-ʿArabî (d. 638/1240). He accepted the theory of the Oneness of Being (*Waḥda al-Wujūd*) propounded by Ibn al-ʿArabî. Firstly, I would like to summarize Mısrî's world-view based on it.

1. Niyâzî-i Mısrî and the Theory of the Oneness of Being (*Waḥda al-Wujūd*)

Treatise of the Unity of Existence (Risâle-i Vahdet-i Vücûd) is also called the *Book of Oneness (Vahdetnâme)* or *The Gift for Lovers (Tuhfetü'l-Uşşâk)*.¹ It was written in Ottoman Turkish and is an important piece of work where Mısrî described his ideas based on the theory of the Oneness of Being with quotations from the Qur'ân and some Ḥadīths.

In this treatise, he mentioned a famous Ḥadīth: “A believer is the mirror of a believer” (*al-mu'min mir'ât al-mu'min*).² This Ḥadīth implies that a man has to learn from the behavior of other men, and so he must follow the good deeds of others and not their bad deeds. Although this is the generally accepted meaning of the Ḥadīth, Mısrî explained it as follows:

* This article is based on the oral presentation with the same title, given at the “The First International Symposium of Kenan Rifai Center for Sufi Studies, Kyoto University Islamic Studies and the Study of Sufism in Academia: Rethinking Methodologies, Including, The Closing Conference of the Project The Bridge of Two Easts: Education Programme for Sufi Culture”, Kyoto, 2017.

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1 Öztekin believed that this work is a commentary on Ibn al-ʿArabî's work with the same title, but Ceyhan denied her judgment (Semih Ceyhan, “Niyâzî-i Mısrî'nin Tuhfetü'l-Uşşâk Adlı Eserinde Mârifet,” *Elmalî'da İlmî ve İrfânî Eğitim Gelenegimiz*, ed. Ahmet Ögke, Antalya: Akdeniz Kültür ve İletişim Kulübü Derneği, 2012, p. 80). I used a different manuscript from the one Öztekin mentioned, but Ceyhan referred to it as a supplement: Niyâzî-i Mısrî, *Risâle-i Vahdet-i Vücûd*, İstanbul: Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi: MS: Hacı Mahmud Edendi 3299, 97b-115b.

2 It is quoted in the 49th verse of the Chapter Âdâb from *Sunan* written by Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889).

Now, the name of the human is believer (mü'min), and the name of the Truth (Ḥaḳḳ) is also the Guardian of Faith (Mü'min). The human being is the mirror of the Entirely Merciful (Raḥmān). When he is dedicated the Entirely Merciful, he (the mirror) shows the Truth to the Truth and you may see yourself [there] if you see a mirror.³

Mısrî regarded the first believer (mü'min) as human beings but the other one (Mü'min), which is one of 99 Names of Allah, as the Truth (Ḥaḳḳ) in the text. We can find the reason why he viewed human beings to be the mirror of God by referring to his writings:

Now, my Glorious one, take us, the origin of the world and human being is the Truth (Ḥaḳḳ). Look [as follows]: only the Truth exists, even before there was the world and human beings. All the manifested beings got manifested from the Truth. He (Allāh) watches Himself within Himself.⁴

In this way, Mısrî states that human beings are essentially the same as God (Ḥaḳḳ) according to his views based on the theory of the Oneness of Being. According to Mısrî's writing, human beings, who became the mirror of God, are men who reach the ideal state for human beings and the goal for Sūfī disciples. According to Mısrî, to know is to reach oneness,⁵ and he explained the three steps to attain knowledge and reach the goal⁶:

1. Faith of people (îmân-ı 'avâm)

In this level, a man should have the knowledge ('ilim) that God (Tanrı), prophet, the Qur'ân, heaven, and hell are true and should engage in worship (şalat and niyâz) by faith in them.

2. Faith of high-orders (îmân-ı ḥaş)

In this level, a man witnesses the essence and attributes of God (Tanrı) but should not find spirit (rûh) and soul (nefis) as one and needs to fear Sharī'a.

3. Faith of high-orders among high-orders (îmân-ı ḥaşu'l- ḥaş)

In this level, all creatures show up as an attribute of the Creator (Bârî). They know that nothing exists except for God (Ḥaḳḳ).

These three steps match the three levels of certainty (yaqîn): the knowledge of certainty ('ilm al-yaqîn), the vision of certainty ('ayn al-yaqîn), and the Truth of certainty (Haqq al-yaqîn). The person who realizes the oneness of being will reach the stage of the Perfected Man (Insân

3 Mısrî, *Risâle-i Vahdet-i Vücûd*, 112a.

4 *Ibid.*, 114a.

5 *Ibid.*, 97b.

6 *Ibid.*, 98b–99a.

Kâmil). Let us now consider this: What is necessary for human beings to reach this goal?

2. Significance of Murshid for Accomplishment of the Mystical Path (Sayr wa Sulûk)

In the book of “*the Tables of Wisdom*” written in Arabic, Mısrî used the example of the sun and darkness to explain the features of a true believer:

The sun is similar to a believer (mu'min) who truly realizes God (Allāh) and professes the unity of God. He sees everything as it really is, finds and watches light, which is God's wisdom (‘irfān), unity (tawhīd), faith (īmān) and witnessing (‘iyān), in all of things.⁷

In this part, Mısrî suggested that true believer (mu'min) is has the virtue of positive thinking (ḥusn al-ẓann), and everything he sees is always shining by his illumination of true knowledge like the sun shines light on everything. A true believer is similar to the sun whereas the ignorant is similar to darkness, who always sees the darkness in everything due to his/her own darkness. In addition, Mısrî explained the path to become a true believer like the sun:

It [the attribute] comes true for a person only by purifying his inner heart (bi-taṣfiyat al-bāṭin) accomplished by teaching of a spiritual guide, who is perfected [himself] and makes the others perfect (bi-tarbiyat murshid kâmil mukammil).⁸

He explained the importance of a spiritual guide (murshid) for becoming a true believer, which is “the mirror of God,” the level of “high-orders among high-orders (ḥâşu'l-ḥâş)” and “the Perfected Man” on the goal of mystical path (sayr wa sulûk). One of Mısrî's famous hymns (ilāhî) is as follows:

Mürşid gerekdür bildüre Ḥaqq'ı saña Ḥaqq'al-yaqîn
Mürşid olmayanların bidükleri gümân imiş
Her mürşide dil virme kim yolunu şarpa uğratar
Mürşid kâmil olanın gâyet yolu âsân imiş⁹

For the Truth (Ḥaqq) known as the Truth of certainty (Ḥaqq al-yaqîn), murshid is necessary.

7 Niyâzî-i Mısrî, *Mawâ'id al-'İrfân: İrfân Sofraları*, ed. Süleyman Ateş, Malatya: İnönü Üniversitesi Matbaası, 2014, p. 169.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

9 Kenan Erdoğan, *Niyazi-i Mısrî: Hayatı, Edebi Kişiliği, Eserleri ve Divanı (Tenkitli Metin)*, Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1998, p. 98.

Knowledge of people without their murshid is nothing more than conjecture.
Never give your heart to all of who names himself your murshid.
They lead you to difficult path.
The way of the perfected murshid is much easier.

As explained above, the concept of murshid has significant meaning in Mısrî's discussions of the Perfected Man. There is the theoretical meanings of the Perfected Man, and also the practical meanings of it as the goal of the mystical path. He emphasized that only murshid, who is perfected (kâmil) and those who can make the others perfect (mukammil) can provide guidance for people trying to reach the high level.

Conclusion: What is the Figure of Murshid for Mısrî?

There is one evidence which signifies the importance of murshid for Mısrî, and we can find it in his memories of his master, Shaykh Ümmî Sinân (d. 1067/1657). Mısrî has been wandering around many places in Anatolia and the Arabic world seeking a true murshid, finally he encountered Ümmî Sinân, who is from Elmalı city of southwestern Anatolia. Mısrî became his disciple (murîd) when he was about 30 years old. He had been under the tutelage of Ümmî Sinân for 9 years, and after that, he achieved his mystical path.

It describes the time when Ümmî Sinân encouraged Mısrî as his disciple¹⁰; Sheykh wanted Mısrî to preach and advise people in his last days in Elmalı, but Mısrî could not speak a word. At the time, Shaykh said, "Mısrî sir(efendi), don't stop like that and never go silent, speak!" Eventually, Mısrî succeeded in preaching through his murshid's encouragement and he wrote a poem based on this experience:

Eylesün Allâh çok tahıyyâtı
Aña kim viridi ilm-i gââyâtı
Gizli sulţandır sırr-ı Sübhan'dur
Mürşid-i cândır hep makâlâtı¹¹

May God pray for giving long life to him (my murhid), he gave [me] the utmost knowledge (ilm-i gââyât).

He is the secreted ruler (sultan) and secret of who is above any imperfection or false description. All of his speaking exists as the soul of murshid.

10 References about this story can be found in "*Vâkıat-ı Hazret-i Mısrî*" written by Mustafa Rakım Efendi (d. 1163/1750) and "*Tuḥfetü'l-Aşrî fî Menâkıbı'l-Mısrî*" written by Mustafa Lûtfî Efendi (d. 1321/1903) (Kenan Erdoğan, "Şiir-Efsane-Menkıbe İlişkisi ve Niyâzî-i Mısrî'nin Menkıbelerine Göre Bazı Şiirlerinin Hikâyesi," *Sosyal Bilimler* 1, 2003, p. 47).

11 Erdoğan, *op. cit.*, 1998, p. 226.

Through his vivid expressions, we can sense that Shaykh is close to Mısrî's heart and he seems to be the Perfected Man. This poem shows that Mısrî's memories of his murshid provide the basis for his views on the characteristics of murshid with respect to the Perfected Man.

Mısrî developed the concept of the Perfected Man based on his theoretical world-view of the Oneness of Being. On the other hand, his view on the Perfected Man is closely related to the levels of knowledge or mystical path for reaching unity with God (tawhîd) with a practical approach. Its character is the same as that of a true believer (mu'min) and the goal of faith (îmân). In addition, Mısrî suggested that murshid is necessary to become the Perfected Man, and people can attain the virtues of a true believer (mu'min) like the sun by guidance of murshid who is perfected and perfects others. As explained above, his personal memories with his Shaykh is the basis of his thought. We can find Mısrî's own experiences with his murshid might have an effect on the theory of the Perfected Man; it is not only theoretical but also practical.

References

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