



## AWLIĀ'

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**AWLIĀ'** (more fully, *awliā' allāh*, the “friends of God”), a term commonly translated in European languages as “saints” or the equivalent. The term, of which the singular is *walī*, derives from Qur’ān 10:62: “Verily the friends of God—there is no fear upon them, neither shall they grieve.” It occurs also in a number of *aḥādīṭ qodsīya*, such as “whoever harms a friend (*walī*) of Mine, I declare war against him” (Zayn-al-din Ḥaddādī, *al-Eṭḥāfāt al-sanīya*, Cairo, 1388/1968, p. 166) and “My friends are beneath my domes; none knows them but I” (B. Forūzānfar, *Aḥādīṭ-e maṭnawī*, Tehran, 1348 Š./1969, p. 52). These scriptural texts (*noṣūṣ*) have provided the basis for Sufi writing and speculation on the nature of the *walī* and the quality (*welāya*) that he possesses.

An early definition of the *walī* was that supplied by Abu’l-Qāsem Qoṣayrī (d. 467/1074-75): “The word *walī* has two meanings. The first is passive, and designates the one whose affairs are totally directed by God Almighty . . . . He does not entrust himself with his affairs for a single moment; rather God Almighty assumes their administration. The second meaning is active and emphatic, and designates the one who takes it on himself to worship God and obey Him: his worship is continual and uninterrupted by sin. Both meanings must be present in the *walī* for him truly to be a *walī*” (*al-Resāla al-qoṣayrīya*, ed. ‘Abd-al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. Šarīf, Cairo, 1385/1965-66, pp. 519-20). This definition was incorporated by Šarīf Jorjānī (d. 817/1414) in his celebrated *Ketāb al-ta’rīfāt* (Beirut, 1969, p. 275) and repeated, with some elaboration, by ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 897/1492) in the prologue to *Nafaḥāt*



*al-ons* (pp. 5-6).

An alternative definition, stressing the concept of friendship inherent in the word *walī*, was given by Najm-al-dīn Dāya in his commentary on Qur'ān 10-62: "The *awlīā'* are the lovers of God and the enemies of their souls. For *welāya* is the knowledge of God and the knowledge of one's own soul; knowledge of God means looking upon Him with the gaze of love, and knowledge of the soul means looking upon it with the gaze of enmity, once the veils constituted by the states and attributes of the soul are removed" (*al-Ta'wīlāt al-najmīya*, quoted in Esmā'īl Ḥaqqī Borūsawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, Istanbul, 1389/1970, IV, p. 58). The notion of "closeness" has also been discerned as part of the meaning of the word *walī*: "The *walī* means "he who is close"; the meaning of *awlīā' allāh* is, then, the elect among the believers, so designated because of their spiritual proximity to God Almighty" (Abu'l-So'ūd Efendī, quoted in *Rūḥ al-bayān* IV, p. 58).

A particular problem in the definition of the *walī* and his attributes has been the relationship between him and the prophet (*nabī*). It appears that in the 3rd/9th century, the notion arose that the *walī* is superior to the prophet. Abū Bakr Ḳarrāz (d. 286/899) wrote a brief treatise in refutation of this belief (*Kašf al-bayān*, contained in *Rasā'el*, ed. Q. Sāmarrā'ī, Baghdad, 1967), and was followed soon after by Ḥakīm Termeḍī (d. between 295/907 and 310/922), who wrote the most important single treatise on *welāya*, *Ketāb katm al-awlīā'* (ed. 'O. Yaḥyā, Beirut, 1965). In addition to affirming the superiority of prophethood to *welāya*, Termeḍī set forth the various categories of *awlīā'*, propounded the idea of a "seal of the saints," corresponding to the seal of the prophets, and made a division of *welāya* into *welāya 'amma* (embracing the totality of the believers) and *welāya kāṣṣa* (pertaining exclusively to the spiritual elect).

This division of *welāya* into "general" and "particular" is reminiscent of certain Shi'ite formulations deriving from the particular status accorded to the imams, and the claim has been made that it is an unacknowledged borrowing from Shi'ism. Corbin speaks, indeed, of "the paradox of a *welāya* deprived of imamology" (see his discussion of Termeḍī in *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, Paris, 1964, pp. 273-75). It has been pointed out, however, that Termeḍī's sole points of reference are the Qur'ān and mystical experience; there is no Shi'ite flavor to his writing (Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, Beirut, 1970, p. 241). Termeḍī was, in any event, the author of a brief but harsh polemic against the Shi'ites, which would seem to exclude



the likelihood of influence (Ahmed Subhi Furat, “al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmizī ve al-Radd ‘alā’l-Rāfiẓa adlı risalesi,” *Şarkiyat Mecmuası* VI, 1966, pp. 23-35).

The relationship of the *walī* and the *nabī* also form an important theme in the writings of Ebn al-‘Arabī. According to him, while the prophet is indeed superior to the *walī*, he is himself a *walī* in addition to being prophet, and the *walī*-dimension of his being is superior to the *nabī*-dimension (A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din Ibnul ‘Arabi*, Lahore, 1964, pp. 95ff.). This view was confirmed and elaborated by one who in other respects rejected Ebn al-Arabī’s doctrines, Shaikh Aḥmad Serhendī (d. 1033/1624) (see Y. Friedmann, *Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī*, Montreal, 1971, chap. 4: “Prophecy and Sainthood”).

Another problem connected with *welāya* is the “knowability” or “unknowability” of the *walī*. Abū ‘Abdallāh Sālemī said that the *awlīā’* are recognizable by “their gentleness of speech, their good character, their pleasant demeanor, their generosity, their refraining from all objection, their acceptance of whatever excuse be proffered them, and their compassion to all men, the good and the bad alike” (Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, p. 121). More generally, the *awlīā’* are deemed knowable by the inspiration (*elhām*) they receive, the charismatic deeds (*karāmāt*) they perform, and the quality of protected (*maḥfūz*) they possess, these three corresponding to the revelation (*waḥy*), miracles (*mo’jezāt*) and sinlessness (*eşma*) of the prophets. Others hold that the *awlīā’*, as the friends of God, are hidden by the veil of their intimacy with Him. A complete discussion of the question is to be found in the introduction to Y. Nabḥānī’s, *Jāme’ karāmārat al-awlīā’*, Cairo, 1381/1962, I, pp. 27-48.

Finally, it may be noted that Sufī writers of Shi’ite allegiance draw a distinction between “solar *welāya*” and “lunar *welāya*,” the former belongs to the imams, and the latter, its reflection, to the pole (*qoṭb*) that stands at the head of each Shi’ite Sufī order (R. Gramlich, “Pol und Scheich im heutigen Derwischtum der Schia,” in *Le shi’isme imamite*, Paris, 1970, p. 175).

See also [Abdāl](#).



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