



## BEGGING II. IN SUFI LITERATURE AND PRACTICE

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### ii. In Sufi Literature and Practice

Although some Koranic verses (notably 2:273 and 93:10) might be taken to imply the permissibility of begging, the weight of the Prophet's Sunna is against the practice, and Sufis have generally decried mendicancy as spiritually dangerous. According to Šehāb-al-Dīn Sohrawardī (p. 100), “the realized Sufi does not ask men for anything,” and K̄vāja ‘Abd-Allāh Anšārī (Meybodī, I, pp. 745-46) interpreted the praise of “those who do not importunately beg” in Koran, 2:273, as a prohibition of begging in all its forms. Nonetheless, Abū Najīb Sohrawardī (p. 161) remarked that certain shaikhs lived entirely from the proceeds of begging, and it was often conceded that begging might be proper under certain circumstances.

Foremost among those circumstances was extreme need (*fāqa* or *zarūra*). Bešr Ḥāfī listed as one of the three classes of *foqarā'* devotees who sought charity whenever the need for minimal sustenance overwhelmed them (Abū Najīb, p. 160; Makkī, II, p. 404; Sohrawardī, p. 99; Sarrāj, p. 47). This is said to have been the practice of Abū Sa'īd K̄arrāz and Ebrāhīm b. Adham. According to Hojvīrī (p. 468), their action was justifiable because trying to gain food by other means would distract the heart from its devotion. Even then it was important to accept only the smallest amount necessary and to expiate the questionable act of begging by an act of charity (Abū Najīb, p. 160). Begging was outwardly a



laying of one's needs before men instead of before God; the Sufi engaged in begging should therefore regard his benefactor as an agent (*wakīl*) of God, distributing His bounty. Hojvīrī (p. 469) mentions certain additional *ādāb* of begging such as not approaching women or tradesmen (*aṣḥāb-e aswāq*) and not affecting great piety in order to loosen men's pursestrings. Another circumstance that rendered begging permissible, even meritorious, was the neediness of one's fellows. The Prophet himself was said to have solicited charity for the sake of others, and among the early Sufis to follow his example was Memšād Dīnavarī (Abū Najīb, p. 160). Finally, begging was regarded as a useful means of mortification (*rīāzat*), especially for recent initiates to the Sufi path who had enjoyed high worldly status. Although firmly opposed to habitual begging, Jonayd imposed a year's mendicancy on Šebli to help him realize the worthlessness of his person (ʿAṭṭār, p. 616). Shaikh Abū Saʿīd b. Abi'l-Ḳayr likewise went begging for the sake of self-mortification, later remarking that it was the harshest thing his ego had ever experienced (Moḥammad b. Monawwar, pp. 34-55). Even Abū Ḥāmed Ġazālī (III, p. 73) approved of begging as a means of chastening the self.

Mendicancy appears to have become frequent in post-Mongol Iran. In the 8th/14th century, Ebn Baṭṭūṭa (p. 277) noted that the *foqarā'* at the *zāwīa* of Abū Dolaf Moḥammad in Lār would go begging for bread every day after the mid-afternoon prayer. More commonly, however, it was wandering dervishes or the *qalandar* type that were conspicuous for begging, a begging-bowl (*kaškūl*) being an essential part of their equipment. Such dervishes, loosely organized into the Ḳāksār order, remained a common feature of Iranian life until the early part of the twentieth century. They would pitch their tents in front of the homes of the rich and harass the occupants with loud blasts on their horns until they received enough charity to justify their moving (Browne, pp. 56-61; Najmī, p. 456). By contrast, the Ne'matallāhī order, the principal Sufi order in modern Iran, forbids its members to beg (Gramlich, p. 70).

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