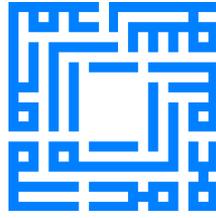




Rank of Qutub and Ghawth Explained



Rank of Qutub and Ghawth Explained
by the Sage of Arabia, Imam Sayyid 'Abdallah ibn 'Alawi al-Haddad;
Translation by Dr Mustafa Badawi

“Poleship,” writes the Imam (‘Abdullah bin ‘Alawi al-Haddad), “means lordship. This is why the term Pole is used analogically for whoever possesses lordship over the men of a particular spiritual station or state. There is thus a “Pole of the People of Contentment” (*Qutb al Radin*), and so on. The “Possessor of the Degree of Supreme Veracity” is called *al-Qutb al-Ghawth* to avoid any confusion arising from an analogical use of the term *Qutb*. To elaborate further would require us to mention the inward states of the men of the “Circle of Sainthood” (*Da’irat al-Wilaya*), their characteristics, the differences within each rank, and other such things the full knowledge of which belongs by right only to the *Qutb*, the *Ghawth*, who encompasses all their ranks and whose rank and state comprehend every single one of theirs. As for other saints, they know about those who are of equal or lesser ranks. They are aware of those above them, but have no full knowledge of them. On the whole, these are questions which can be answered satisfactorily only by contemplative vision and unveiling.”

The Circle of Sainthood that the Imam mentions is that conference of saints described in the *hadith* transmitted by Imam Abu-Nu’aym in *Hilyat’al-Awliya’*, which states that there are, at any one time, three hundred saints on earth whose hearts resemble that of Adam, forty resembling Moses, seven Abraham, five Gabriel, three Michael, and one Seraphiel (Israfil).” Al-Yafe’I quotes this *hadith* in *rawd al-Rayahin* then remarks that, the one who resembles the heart of Seraphiel is the *Qutb* and *Ghawth* and “his position among saints is that of the point at the center of the circle. By him the good functioning of the world is sustained.” These passages were quoted by Imam al-Haddad in answer to a question concerning the Pole. He adds, “As for the *Qutb*, the *Ghawth*, he is one in each time. He is the all-comprehensive *Fard*, and is known among the People as the viceregent (*Khalifa*), and the Perfect Man (*al-Insan al-Kamil*). Also attributed to him are the titles of *Sahib al-Siddiqiyya al-Kubra wal-Wilaya al-‘Uzma* (The Possessor of the Degree of Supreme Veracity and Greatest Sainthood).” He also said in answer to another question, “He is a beloved slave around whom everything revolves. His sign is that he is awe-inspiring, feared by the tyrants and the sons of this world but loved by every believer. His sign is also that he has no inclination whatsoever to choose other than God, and his mind is never disturbed by whatever is happening in the universe; were he to see the earth in full blossom, then look again to find that everything has disappeared, his thoughts would remain unperturbed in the certain knowledge that none other than God has made and destroyed it.”

In a well known poem, Imam al-Haddad describes the Pole as a master whose qualities are humility, reverence, circumspection, piety, and detachment from created things. His behavior is *shari'a*, his spiritual state is *haqiqa*, and his rank is slavehood or '*Ubuda*. He is benevolent and compassionate towards all creatures and looks after all things with gentleness. His sea is supplied from the Ocean of Oceans (meaning the light of the Prophet, may God's blessings and peace be upon him). When these verses were sung before him he said, "This is the description that comprehends the attributes of the Pole, so that those who read it will know that anyone not conforming to it is not a Pole." Similar descriptions can be read in his poems in praise of Shaykh 'Abdal-Qadir, al-Faqih al-Muqaddam, and al-'Aydarus, all of whom were undisputed masters of their times. And it is to these supreme masters that the Imam was likened by the Gnostics of his own time, one of whom said "Sayyid 'Abdallah possesses the attributes of the great ones such as Shaykh 'Abdal-Qadir al-Jilani and in him the secrets of the ancestors have become outwardly manifest." Another said that he possessed "sublime determination and a superior state comparable to that of Abu Yazid al-Bistami." He then urged the people not to allow the opportunity to slip past them saying, "Delight, therefore, O people of Hadramawt, in sitting with Sayyid 'Abdallah and in his having been raised amongst you, for he is God's *khalifa* on earth."

It has been said that the Pole were of three kinds, the Pole of Sciences, such as the Proof of Islam al-Ghazali, the Pole of Spiritual States, such as Abu Yazid al-Bistami, and the Pole of Spiritual Stations, such as Shaykh 'Abdal-Qadir. Imam Abul-'Abbas al-Mursi is also reported to have said, "Al-Junayd was the Pole of knowledge, Sahl the Pole of Stations, and Abu Yazid the Pole of States." This was confirmed by Imam al-Haddad when he said, "The one who excels in his own art and surpasses everyone else is the Pole of this art. It is said, for instance, that al-Ghazali was the Pole of Sciences, Sahl the Pole of stations, and so on." Sayyid Ahmad ibn Zayn al-Habashi stated that Imam al-Haddad was the supreme master of masters and that he had united in himself the attributes of all the previous saints, adding that this was seen by him in contemplative vision, meaning that it was no mere mental conclusion. This is why Imam al-Haddad said, "Our rank cannot be shouldered by a single man, and we shall have to divide it, before our death, among a number of people." The Imam was able to give further precisions concerning the Pole in brief statements given on many different occasions. He said, "The Pole must be a known man. If he does not qualify for outward renown he must deputize someone who does." And, "A woman may attain to the [spiritual] rank of the '*Abdal*, but she will not be one of them [in title]. A woman may be neither a Pole nor one of the '*Abdal*." And he suggested some limits to the absolutist statements about the Pole that one often hears. In one of his letters he writes, "Now as regards the fact that nothing reaches the people of the Circle except with the knowledge of the Pole, this is correct as concerns general secrets and that which relates to this function that they are entrusted with for the good of the world." And further on in the same letter, "As for your saying that the Pole's contemplative station is that of the Presence of the Name Allah and that he is therefore called 'Abd-Allah, God's Slave, this was stated by Shaykh ibn 'Arabi with lengthy elaborations. It is correct as far as he is concerned and we concede it to him. But this statement is limiting and too narrowly specific, and there is some ambiguity to it."

