

**An Appraisal of the Concept of Al-Kashf in Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl of Shaykh
Zakariyyā Al-Kandahlawī**

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Abstract

The scope and limitation of the knowledge of scholars are always manifested in their ability to put them down into written materials to serve as influence and legacies for the upcoming generations. Shaykh Zakariyya Al-Kandahlawi is one of the scholars of Islam whose cognitive dispositions remain a magnum opus and influential legacy. He was an author of various works which Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl, the book under study on is one of them. In this book, Shaykh Zakariyya Al-Kandahlawi discusses the concept of al-Kashf, one of the un-agreed upon concepts in Islam. Therefore, this paper aims at appraising the concept of al-Kashf discussed by Shaykh Zakariyya Al-Kandahlawi in Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl and to compare his position with other scholars. The methodology employed is analytical so as to analyse discussions of the author. The study revealed that Shaykh Zakariyya Al-Kandahlawi admitted the possibility of al-Kashf only when it is a divine favour of Allah to His servants due to his religious exercises and that it could be bestowed on anyone besides the Prophets of Allah. Therefore, the paper concluded that the objection that Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl include condemned practices of al-Kashf is a mere misconception and opposition to the book, the author as well as appraises the commendable acts of al-Kashf. This paper recommends further research on the other works of Shaykh Zakariyya Al-Kandahlawi on al-Kashf in other to consolidate his position on the concept.

Introduction

Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl is considered one of the most dignified books of Zakariyyā al-Kandahlawī and one of his famous works on Ḥadīth. Basically, the book is a combination of various Aḥādīth on different topics such as Ḥayātu-ṣ-Ṣaḥābah, Faḍā'ilu'l-Qur'ān, Faḍā'ilu-ṣ-Ṣalāh, Faḍā'ilu-dh-Dhikr, Faḍā'ilu-t-Tablīgh, Faḍā'ilu-r-Ramaḍān. The author made use of relevant verses to expatiate his discussion. It is indisputable that it is also a book of virtues that has changed many thousands of lives.¹ Basically, the book is a combination of various Aḥādīth on different topics such as stories of Prophet's Companions, virtues of the Glorious Qur'an, virtues of observance of prayer, virtues of remembrance of Allah, virtues of preaching, and virtues of fasting.² The name of the author is Muḥammad Zakariyyā bin Muḥammad Yaḥyā bin Muḥammad Isma'īl who originated from Kandhlah in the year 1898 C.E,³ grew up in

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Gangoh and Saharanpur⁴ and died in the year 1982 after a brief illness in al-Madinatu'l-Munawwarah.⁵

Kashf is a belief and practice that consist of apprehending beyond the veil of ordinary phenomena, whether by vision or experience, the meanings and realities that pertains to the unseen.⁶ According to Ali as quoted by Ibn Al-Jawzi (d. 597A.H) regarding the characteristics and descriptions of those who possess Kashf. They are the fewest in number, but the greatest in rank before Allah. Through them Allah preserves His proofs until they bequeath it to those like them before passing on and plant it firmly in their hearts...⁷

On the other hand, research recorded that the Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl of Shaykh Zakariyya Al-Kandahlawi is regarded as a book of innovation (bid'ah), polytheism (shirk), tales (kharāfāt) because of some practices ascribed to Ṣufis mentioned by him. Among the criticisms levelled against it is that it contains issues that are contrary to Tawḥīd such as the concept of divine manifestation of unseen things (Al-Kashf) and objections to miraculous stories of some saints of the Sūfī. For instance, a critic said: *"We find the word ascribing Kashf of seeing sins falling from the limbs of the person performing Wuḍū' to Imam Abu Ḥanīfah and that this type of claim is clear shirk and on top of that it is a lie on Imam Abū Ḥanīfah."*⁸

Therefore, based on the above, it is instructive to study the concept of al-Kashf and appraise the position of Shaykh Zakariyya al-Kandahlawī to the practice as enunciated in Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl in a way to give a recommendation based on his discussion. Thus, this paper is divided into sections. The first section presents a brief introduction to the paper and the author of the book; the second section reviews the conceptual meaning of al-Kashf to determine its legitimacy or otherwise in the Qur'an, Ḥadīth and scholars' submissions. Section three appraises the position of Zakariyyā al-Kandahlawī to al-Kashf as enunciated in Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl. The fourth section, however, is mainly for conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Meaning of Al-Kashf

The word al-Kashf is used to denote the divine manifestation of unseen things. It is an Arabic word which could be written either in al-Kashf الكشف or al-Mukāshafah المكاشفة.⁹ It is the privileged of inner knowledge that a Ṣūfī acquired through personal experience and direct vision of God and of which those who have not shared the same experience cannot acquire.¹⁰ It is apposite to note here that the word al-Kashf is a technical word to the Sufis. To them, it is an alternative meaning of knowledge which applies systematic theology, logic and speculative philosophy to study of the nature of God.¹¹ According to al-Ghazali, this word connotes the only means through which true and trustworthy knowledge can be attained and described it as "a light with which God floods the heart of the believer".¹² This is rather called Tajalli Manifestation.¹³

The basis on the concept of al-Kashf, according to the Sufis, is taken from two passages of the glorious Qur'an which read thus: the first passage is taken from Q50:22: "*Thou wast heedless of this; therefore, We have now removed from thee thy covering (veil), and so thy sight today is piercing* (Qur'an 50:22). The second verse goes below in Q53:58 as follows: "*Apart from Allah none can disclose (remove) it*" (Qur'an 55:58). This concept is also argued by them with the following Ḥadīth that:

Between Allah and creation are seventy thousand (70,000) veils. The nearest of creatures to Allah are Jibril, Mika'il and Israfil and verily between them and Him are four veils; a veil of fire, a veil of darkness, a veil of cloud and a veil of water.¹⁴

Undoubtedly, the above Ḥadīth shows that the Sufis believe that there are veils that obstruct human being from realizing the existence and power of Allah. But, with the value of some spiritual struggles of individual, these veils will disappear. According to the Sufi, this disappearance which becomes understanding of essence of God comes in stages based on the individual spiritual struggles. However, the meaning of al-Kashf remains controversial to Muslim scholars and in the learned circles because it calls to the ability to seeing the unseen and to know the unknowable.¹⁵ Of which, Muslims are bounded to believe in the unseen and that the ability to know the unknown and see the unseen should be restricted solely to Allah, and never to any human being. In fact, believing in the unseen is one of the attributes of the pious highlighted in the Glorious Qur'an. Nevertheless, at times, it is a divine favour from Almighty Allah for any of his servants based on some means to bestow them the ability to know the unknowable. These means could be divine causes and demonic causes.

As for the divine means, it includes the use of the Sacred Books, inspiration to the heart or hearing a voice speaking with him or through divine vision. Whereas the demonic means constitute the use of evil souls to seeks the assistance of the Jinn and Shaytan such as magic, divination or soothsaying, devilish vision, mischief. This is because the Shaytan could be listening to the conversation of the Angels in the heaven, and they would throw it to hearts of the allies among the mankind.¹⁶ This is evident from Q72:9: "*We used, indeed, to sit there in (hidden) stations, to (steal) a hearing; but any who listen now will find a flaming fire watching him in ambush*" (Qur'an 72:9). Thus, scholars have declared the devil's means in the above discussion to be null and void because it is a form of disbelieving in the articles of faith. Above all, it is agreed upon by scholars that whoever attains the favour of knowing the unknowing through some of the spiritual exercises and struggles should not be for the purpose of business or honour. However, some extremists among the Sufi go beyond the limit on the concept of al-Kashf. Some of their contradictions with the texts (Qur'an and Ḥadīth) are as follows:¹⁷

- i. Believing that al-Kashf is the truth and reality to the extent that if al-Kashf is absolutely contrary to clear statements of Allah and His Messenger, yet, al-Kashf is given preference.
- ii. Believing that al-Kashf is the perfect means or methods to acquiring knowledge and best stages to reality and because of that they neglect seeking of knowledge of Ḥadīth. In his own submission, Ad-Dārānī says: “when a man seeks for the knowledge of Ḥadīth, or marries, or travels for livelihood, he has put his trust to the world.” Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728A.H) debunks this extreme belief with Prophetic statement graded as Sahih, narrated by Aishah, recorded by Imam Muslim, Imam Tirmidhi, Imam Nasai and Imam Ahmad which reads: *“There were among the nations before you who were inspired, if there is any of such among my Ummah, then (it is) Umar”*
- iii. Believing that hidden meanings of the Qur’an and Ḥadīth that are unknown to scholars of Sharī’ah would be manifested to them because they receive inspiration from the Prophet both in their dream and wakefulness.
- iv. Believing that they possess some hidden knowledge which makes them relate fables, myths about the stories of the Prophets and that the paradise and Hell fire are visible for their sight of which if is possible for them to quench the hell fire with their spit of saliva. For instance, Abu Yazid among others said:

As for the paradise (Jannah), looking at it is Shirk (Polytheism) and Kufr (disbelief) because they are only looking at Allah alone. Thus, it can be said that the extremists among the Sufi has exaggerated the issue of al-Kashf and deviated from it and from the path of the pious predecessors, of which, the truth matter and the factual is that it must be in conformity with the Qur’an and Ḥadīth. Nevertheless, research shows that al-Kashf is possible for some of the servants of Allah. To the present researcher, it is a form of honour that Allah bestows upon His true servants and worshippers, that when they say something or give religious opinion, they find afterwards that what they said or did was in compliance with the truth. Therefore, some extracts of issues relating to al-Kashf will be presented from Faḍā’ilu’l-A’ māl in order to debate on whether the criticism is a total misconception or based on a constructive criticism.

Appraisal of Shaykh Zakariyya Al-Kandahlawi’s Position on Al-Kashf

Zakariyya presents the concept of al-Kashf when he was discussing the Ḥadīth which reads below:

Abu Muslim narrates. I went to see Abu Umāmah while he was in the masjid. I asked him if he had really heard the Prophet saying, When a person performs wudhu with right performance and then says his fardh salaah, Allah forgives him all the sins committed that day by his feet in

going towards evil, by his hands in doing evil, by his ears in listening to evil, by his eyes in looking at evil and by his heart in thinking of evil. He replied, By Allah, I have heard these words from the Holy Prophet again and again.¹⁸

Then, he said those endowed with the power of Kashf can even witness the sins being shed. To substantiate his submission, he quoted the incident of Abu Hanifah on seeing what is hidden. This incident goes thus: “*It is said of Abu Haneefah that he could tell from the water falling down from the limbs of the person performing wudhu as to which sins had been washed off therewith.*”¹⁹ Moreover, while explaining a verse in Q17:44 which read: “*There is none among the creation who does not hymn His glory but you understand not their hymning.*” Then, he quoted the various events to buttress the fact that other creations besides human beings and Jinn also remember Allah. He writes inter alia the following event as goes thus:

Once a bowl of food was presented to Rasulullah, who remarked that the food was hymning the glory of Allah. Somebody asked if he understood its hymning. He replied in the affirmative, and then he asked that it be taken to a certain person who also, when the cup was brought to him, heard it hymning the glory of Allah: In the same way, another person also heard it. Somebody requested that all those present should be allowed to hear it. Rasulullah said: If someone fails to hear it, others will think that he is a sinner.²⁰ After that, Zakariyya presents the concept of al-Kashf to mean a sort of revelation and that it is bestowed on the servants of Allah through their nearness to Him. This sort of revelation is known as al-Kashf which is bestowed on the Prophets, but the Sahabas also were able to attain it because of their company with and their nearness to Rasulullah²¹. In furtherance, Zakariyya showcases his stand on the issue of al-Kashf based on evidence. He says:

Hundreds of incidents can be cited as a proof thereof. Even the Sufis often develop this quality through their spiritual labour, as a result of which they are able to understand what the rocks and animals’ hymn and speak. But according to authentic scholars, proficiency in this line is not necessarily proof of one’s high spiritual attainment or nearness to Allah. Whoever labours and strives for this can develop it, respective of whether he attains nearness to Almighty Allah or not; therefore, the true religious authorities do not attach any importance to it. On the other hand, they regard it as harmful in the respect that the novice gets so much absorbed and involved into it that it acts as a hindrance to his spiritual progress.²²

It is instructive to state here that Zakariyya debunks the Sufi who often calls for developing themselves in spiritual struggles all in the interest of attaining nearness of Allah to receive and possess the status of divine manifestation of unseen things (al-Kashf). In the same vein, he reiterates the stand and position of scholars per excellence

that it is harmful to develop oneself in reaching the stage of knowing the unknown. He buttresses this position with the fact that it calls to seeing the sins and errors of other Muslims. This is contained in the following statement:

Moreover, the scholars avoid development of al-Kashf because it leads to the disclosure to them of the sins of others, which is against their liking.²³ It is obvious from the discussion so far that al-Kashf to Zakariyya is possible only when Allah bestows it to any of His servants due to their religious exercises. He also admits that it could be given to anyone besides the Prophets of Allah. At the same time, he debunks the claims of inner knowledge ('Ilmu'l-Baṭīn) or divine manifestation (Kashf). This above submission could be substantiated by the position of Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728A.H) as quoted below:

Shaykh Ibn Taymiyah was not a denier of Kashf and was not unaware of the importance of benefiting and Tahdīth from the Lordship, but what was objectionable for him was that some Sufis have made Kashf as a definitive (Qaṭcī) way of Idrāk while it is not Qaṭcī, and some blind following the philosophers declared Gnosticism as equal to the knowledge of Prophethood. His (Ibn Taymiyah) saying is that Kashf is among the categories of a spiritual Ijtihād, and as Ijtihād is not Qaṭcī from its consequences, likewise Kashf is equally prone to mistakes and errors, and the Qaṭciyah and certainty (Yaqīn) is only in Prophetic sciences.²⁴

In furtherance, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728A.H) amplifies the above understanding of on the concept of Ihdāth of Allah to His servants. He writes inter alia as follows:

The Muḥaddath, if he receives Ilhām and Ihdāth of Allah from one side from Allah, he should present it to the Book and the Sunnah as he is not infallible. As said by Abul Hasan Shāzilī: Infallibility is in what comes from the Book and Sunnah and infallibility is not in Kushūf and Ilhām.²⁵

To substantiate his opinion, he asserts the following:

Know that the absence of Khawāriq in knowledge and power (Qudrah) do not harm the Muslim in his religion, and the one who is not disclosed anything from unseen matters and nothing from Kawniyat are made Taskheer under him, this does not diminish his level in front of Allah.²⁶

The present researcher shares the same position with Zakariyya favour of the concept of al-Kashf whose submission of the concept is in tandem with other scholars. Thus, the research so far shows that:

- i. There is a vast difference between manifestation of unseen things and to have knowledge of the unseen.

- ii. As for the latter, it is only possessed by Allah, and this cannot be contested by any Muslim because it is a fundamental belief.
- iii. Moreover, in the case of the former, it is different and has taken place again and again from the time of the Companions to the present day.
- iv. Instances of these manifestations are numerous in the book of Ḥadīth and Sirah such as the visibility of the Angels to cĀishah, Ibn cAbbās among others. The manifestation of unseen given to cUmar is rendered as example below in Ḥadīth graded as Hasan:

Once in Madina, Umar sent an army for a battle of which he made a man known as Sariyah as commander. While he was giving sermon on the day of Jumucah, he said: O Sariyah! The mountain, O Sariyah! The mountain, O Sariyah! The mountain and they found that Sariyah has changed his position to the mountain at that same hour, of which, the distance of their journey is a month.²⁷

Hence, acts of al-Kashf are established concept in Islam of which refuting it is a clear ignorance of the highest order. It is therefore concluded that the objection that Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl include al-Kashf is a mere misconception and opposition to the book.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed that al-Kashf is a divine favour from Almighty Allah for any of his servants through some means to bestow them the ability to know the unknowable. It has also been observed that the means of attaining al-Kashf could be divine or demonic means. The paper has established that Shaykh Zakariyyā Al-Kandahlawi refuted any demonic means of attaining al-Kashf. It affirmed that Shaykh Zakariyyā Al-Kandahlawi debunked the Sūfī who often calls for developing themselves in spiritual struggles all in the interest of attaining nearness of Allah to receive the status al-Kashf and condemned boasting off of the knowledge. Thus, extracts of issues relating to al-Kashf presented from Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl show that the criticism is a total misconception of the concept of al-Kashf and opposition to the book, Faḍā'ilu'l-A'māl and therefore the position of Shaykh Zakariyya Al-Kandahlawi on the concept of al-Kashf is in tandem with other Sunni scholars.

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