



Maqāmāt as a Path to Purify the Soul: Repentance (Taubat), Wara', Zuhud, Patience, and Tawakkal

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Abstract

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method by examining classical and contemporary Sufi literature. The data are analyzed descriptively and analytically to understand the meaning, position, and role of each maqām in shaping a Muslim's spirituality. The findings indicate that each maqām serves an interconnected function and cannot be separated from one another. Repentance forms the foundational stage of soul purification; wara' acts as a safeguard for the purity of the heart; zuhud frees the soul from worldly attachments; patience strengthens inner resilience in obedience and trials; while tawakkul cultivates inner peace through complete surrender to Allah SWT. This article affirms that maqāmāt are not exclusively relevant to Sufis but can be applied by all Muslims in their daily lives. Amid the challenges of modern life characterized by materialism and spiritual anxiety, the concept of maqāmāt offers a systematic spiritual framework for forming a Muslim personality that is morally upright, balanced, and oriented toward the values of the Hereafter.

Keywords: Islamic Spirituality, Maqāmāt, Soul Purification, Sufism.

PRELIMINARY

Sufism is an inner dimension of Islamic teachings that focuses on cultivating the heart, purifying the soul, and strengthening one's relationship with God. Within the Islamic scholarly tradition, Sufism is not positioned as a separate teaching from sharia, but rather as an effort to deepen and appreciate the values of faith and morals. Through Sufism, Islamic teachings are not only understood normatively and externally, but also internalized, thus forming a complete Muslim personality, both formally obedient and spiritually mature (Azra, 2018; Hidayat, 2019).

One of the important concepts in Sufism is the maqāmāt, the spiritual stages that a seeker must go through gradually and continuously. Maqāmāt describes the process of internalizing Islamic values through spiritual practice, controlling desires, and practicing good deeds in daily life. Each maqām serves as a foundation for the next maqām, so the spiritual journey in Sufism requires a long process and cannot be achieved instantly (Mulyadi, 2020; Umar, 2023).

The concept of maqāmāt emphasizes that a servant's closeness to Allah SWT is not merely the result of spiritual claims, but rather the fruit of a continuous inner struggle and a sincere commitment to self-improvement. In this regard, Sufism offers a systematic ethical and spiritual framework for cultivating the human soul. Maqāmāt serve as a spiritual roadmap that guides humans from a polluted state of mind to one that is calm, pure, and close to Allah SWT (Nasution, 2018; Anshari, 2017).

In the context of modern life, rife with materialism, competition, and worldly orientation, the discussion of maqāmāt (the maqāmāt) has become increasingly relevant. Many people experience inner restlessness, a lack of meaning, and spiritual crisis despite material prosperity. Through the concept of maqāmāt, Sufism offers a solution by redirecting human life's orientation toward Allah SWT and the values of the afterlife as the primary goal of life (Siregar, 2021; Yusuf, 2024).

Scholars of Sufism, both classical and contemporary, agree that the maqāmāt (the stages of the path) are not teachings exclusive to Sufi circles. Rather, the values they contain are universal and can be applied by every Muslim according to their capacity and life context. Principles such as repentance, wara' (forgiveness), asceticism, patience, and tawakkul (religious surrender) are the foundation for developing a Muslim character that is noble, balanced, and spiritually resilient (Umar, 2023; Azra, 2018).

Based on this explanation, this article aims to examine the concept of maqāmāt as a path to soul purification by highlighting five main stages: repentance, wara' (self-control), asceticism (zuhud), patience, and tawakkal (religious obedience). This discussion is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of maqāmāt and demonstrate its relevance in building a Muslim spiritual life amidst the challenges of the modern era (Mulyadi, 2020).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a literature review approach (Assingily, 2021), because the focus of the study lies in Maqāmāt as the Path to Soul Purification. The research data sources consist of secondary sources in the form of books, scientific journals, and relevant previous research. Data were collected through documentation methods by searching, reading, and recording important information from various related literature. Data analysis was carried out using content analysis and a hermeneutic-philosophical approach to understand the meaning and context of Maqāmāt in depth. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and critical reading to ensure consistency and accuracy of interpretation. Through this method, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of Maqāmāt as the Path to Soul Purification through several stages: Taubat, Wara', Zuhud, Sabar, and Tawakkal.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Maqamat in Sufism

Maqāmāt is the plural form of the word maqām, which literally means rank, position, or degree. In English literature, this term is often translated as stations or stages, indicating certain stages in the spiritual journey. Terminologically, in Sufism, maqāmāt is understood as the position of a servant before Allah SWT, which is obtained through a process of consistent worship, mujahadah, riyāḍah, and a continuous and unbroken spiritual relationship with Allah SWT (Ja'far, 2016).

In a more technical sense, maqāmāt can also be interpreted as a form of activity and maximum effort of a Sufi to improve his spiritual quality. This effort is realized through certain practices carried out continuously until a seeker receives guidance to move from one form of practice to another that is believed to have higher spiritual value in the sight of Allah SWT. Thus, each maqām is not achieved instantly, but through a long process that requires sincerity, discipline, and consistency (Anshari, 2017).

To attain spiritual perfection, a Sufi is required to undergo various systematic stages of spiritual development. These stages begin with spiritual exercises (riyāḍah), which then lead the seeker to certain stages on the journey toward Allah SWT. These stages are known in Sufism as maqams, or spiritual levels. Each maqam reflects the development of a worshipper's inner qualities and closeness to God.

From a Sufi perspective, the journey to Allah SWT is understood as a method of inner or emotional knowledge (dzauq). This knowledge differs from purely rational knowledge. A person, even if they have intellectual faith, will not necessarily attain true knowledge of Allah unless they embark on this spiritual journey. Therefore, Sufism distinguishes between rational-theoretical faith (al-īmān al-‘aqlī an-naẓarī) and faith based on feeling or inner experience (al-īmān ash-syu‘ūrī adz-dzauqī) (Yusuf, 2024).

Furthermore, maqam is understood as a relatively permanent spiritual quality within a servant. This is what distinguishes it from ḥāl, a temporary spiritual state that can come and go. Maqam can only be achieved through earnest effort and continuous practice, whereas hala is a gift from God that cannot always be directly attained.

Based on this understanding, it can be concluded that a seeker attains a maqam through a serious and long-term spiritual struggle. Each maqam requires the fulfillment of certain obligations and spiritual training, which must be carried out with patience and consistency before a seeker is worthy of advancing to the next level (Nasution, 2018).

Stages of Maqamat

1. Repentance (*taubat*)

In Indonesian, repentance is defined as an awareness and regret for a sin or wrongdoing, accompanied by a strong intention to improve one's attitude and behavior in the future. In the context of Sufism, repentance is not merely a momentary regret, but rather a spiritual process that requires profound inner change. Therefore, the station of repentance (*al-taubah*) is seen as the initial stage that every seeker must go through on their spiritual journey.

Sufis almost unanimously agree that repentance is the first stage in Sufism. Without passing this stage, a person is considered unprepared for the next spiritual stage. Repentance in Sufism is achieved through sincere worship, *mujahadah* (struggle against desires), and *riyāḍah* (spiritual practice). This process requires consistency and self-awareness so that repentance does not stop at words, but is truly reflected in daily attitudes and behavior.

Etymologically, the term repentance comes from the Arabic words *taba*–*yatūbu*–*taubatan*, meaning “return.” The meaning of “return” here indicates a servant’s return from the path of sin to obedience to Allah SWT. The Qur’an mentions the term repentance dozens of times in various forms, such as *taba*, *tuba*, *atabu*, *taubah*, *al-taba’un*, *al-tawwabin*, and others. Muhammad Fu’ad ‘Abd al-Bāqī explains that this diversity of forms demonstrates how central the concept of repentance is to Islamic teachings, both as a commandment of sharia and as a path to soul purification.

In a spiritual sense, repentance is understood as a conscious turning and returning to God, accompanied by a request for forgiveness for past sins. Repentance not only concerns outward transgressions but also encompasses inner sins, such as neglecting to remember God. Therefore, repentance in Sufism requires a high degree of inner sensitivity and self-awareness (Fadhilah, et al., 2025).

The Sufi scholar al-Husayn al-Maghazili distinguished two types of repentance. The first is *taubat al-inābah*, which is repentance born of fear of Allah and the threat of His punishment. The second is *taubat al-istijābah*, which is repentance driven by shame and an inner awareness of Allah's greatness and mercy. This distinction demonstrates that the quality of repentance is largely determined by one's inner motivation.

The station of repentance occupies the earliest position for both a seeker and a follower, although according to Islamic law, repentance is obligatory for every Muslim. The fundamental difference between repentance in the general Islamic sense and the station of repentance in Sufism lies in the depth of their meanings. The repentance of laypeople is usually related to external sins, while the repentance of the *Khawāṣ*, including Sufis, encompasses the heart's negligence in remembering God. In Sufism, the perfection of repentance is achieved when a person reaches the station of *al-taubatu min taubatih*, namely repentance upon one's own awareness and even awareness of the repentance one performs, as the most subtle form of soul purification.

2. Wara’

The word *warak* comes from the Arabic *wara'a-yari'u-wara'an*, which literally means to be careful and vigilant. In the Great Indonesian Dictionary, *warak* is defined as an attitude of obedience and devotion to God. This definition demonstrates that *warak* is not merely outward caution, but rather an inner attitude born of spiritual awareness and devotion to God.

In the Sufism tradition, *warak* is characterized by high caution in attitudes and actions. A sane person always protects himself from doubtful actions, both in matters of worship and *muamalah*. Even though the term *warak* is not mentioned explicitly in the Qur'an, its value and spirit is very strong and is spread in many verses that command caution, piety and self-protection from unclear matters. Apart from that, there are many hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad saw. which firmly emphasizes the importance of *warak* in the life of a Muslim.

One of the hadiths often cited in discussions of *warak* is narrated by Ibn Majah. In the hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) advised Abu Hurairah to be a person of *warak*, as this attitude will lead one to become a superior servant. The Prophet also linked *warak* with contentment, social morals, and self-control, such as loving others as oneself, maintaining good relationships with

neighbors, and limiting laughter, as excessive laughter can deaden the heart. This hadith demonstrates that warak is not only related to a vertical relationship with God but also has implications for the quality of social relationships and purity of the heart (Suryadi, 2022).

For Sufis, warak is defined as the act of abandoning anything of unclear legal status, whether related to food, clothing, or various other life matters. Warak serves as a form of self-preservation to prevent the heart from being tainted by doubtful matters, which, while not expressly forbidden, have the potential to lead to spiritual neglect. Thus, warak serves as an inner barrier that safeguards the purity of a seeker's soul.

In Sufism, warak occupies a gradual position as the second stage after repentance. This position demonstrates that after a seeker cleanses himself from sin through repentance, the next step is to guard himself against falling back into things that undermine the purity of the heart. Warak serves as the initial means of releasing attachments to the world and developing a deeper spiritual awareness.

Thus, warak not only serves to foster an Islamic mentality but also serves as the first step in the process of purifying the heart from worldly attachments. The attitude of warak helps a seeker develop a sensitive conscience, refine his soul, and prepare him for the next spiritual level on the Sufi path.

3. Asceticism (*Zuhud*)

The word *zuhud* comes from the Arabic words *zahada*–*yazhudu*–*zuhdan*, meaning to distance oneself, to have no desire, and to be uninterested in something. In Indonesian, *zuhud* is defined as an attitude of abandoning the world or living an ascetic life. Conceptually, *zuhud* does not mean completely rejecting the world, but rather freeing the heart from dependence on and excessive love for material things.

In the Qur'an, the term *zuhud* is not mentioned directly, but the form *al-zāhidīn* appears once in Surah Yusuf [12]: 20, which describes an attitude of disinterest in worldly values. Nevertheless, many verses of the Qur'an substantially point to the meaning of *zuhud*, especially verses that emphasize the priority of the afterlife over worldly life. The Qur'an's emphasis on the transience of this world and the eternity of the afterlife serves as the theological foundation for the attitude of *zuhud* in Islam (Siregar, 2021).

According to Sufis, the world and all its material pleasures are often a source of spiritual neglect and a gateway to sin. Excessive attachment to the world can lead humans to various forms of sin and neglect the true purpose of creation. Therefore, Sufis view asceticism as an effort to cleanse the heart from worldly domination so that the soul remains directed towards Allah SWT.

This view is reflected in the advice of various early Sufi figures, one of whom is Hasan al-Basri. He described the world as a bridge to be crossed, not to be settled or built upon. In another expression, Hasan al-Basri likened the world to a snake that appears soft to the touch but harbors deadly poison. This metaphor emphasizes the world's illusory allure, potentially endangering one's spiritual life if not handled carefully (Miswar, 2016).

The asceticism described by the Sufis is a crucial stage that a prospective Sufi must undergo. Historically, the emergence of asceticism cannot be separated from the socio-political realities of early Islam. A stark gap emerged between groups of people who chose a simple life and those in power who lived in luxury and tended to violate moral values. This situation gave rise to a spiritual movement emphasizing simplicity and the rejection of worldly luxuries.

Several historical records indicate that during certain periods, some rulers lived in excessive luxury. Mu'awiyah, for example, is often depicted as living a lifestyle reminiscent of Roman and Persian kings. His son, Yazid, is known throughout history as someone who was close to alcohol. Similarly, during the Abbasid period, Caliph al-Amīn, son of Harun al-Rashid, was known for having a personality far from spiritual purity, even drawing criticism from his own family. This phenomenon further strengthened the asceticism of Sufis as a form of moral and spiritual critique of the hedonism of power.

4. Patient

The word "patience" comes from the Arabic *shabara-yashbiru-shabran*, which means to bind, restrain oneself, and remain steadfast in the face of legal prohibitions and sorrow. In the Quran, the word "patience" is mentioned 103 times in various forms, demonstrating how central the concept of patience is to Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, in Indonesian, "patience" is defined as endurance in the face of trials, restraint, calmness, and restraint in action.

From a Sufi perspective, patience is not simply a passive acceptance of circumstances, but rather an inner strength that controls the urges of passion and emotion. Al-Ghazali explained that patience can be viewed from two main aspects. First, patience as restraint against the demands of passion and anger, known as *ash-shabr an-nafs* (patience of the soul). Second, patience in enduring physical suffering, such as illness or pain, known as *ash-shabr al-badani* (patience of the body). These two forms of patience complement each other in shaping a Muslim's spiritual personality.

According to Al-Ghazali, spiritual patience is essential in various aspects of life. For example, it helps control appetite, sexual desire, and other excessive urges. Without spiritual patience, one can easily fall into excessive behavior and disrupt spiritual balance. Therefore, patience serves as an inner fortress that protects humans from the domination of lust.

Al-Ghazali also viewed patience as a unique quality unique to humans. This mental attitude is not possessed by animals, which are completely controlled by instinct, nor is it possessed by angels, who are naturally obedient without being driven by desire. Thus, patience is a characteristic of humanity, demonstrating the human ability to choose, control oneself, and consciously pursue the spiritual path (Miswar, 2017).

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali divided patience into three levels. First, patience to remain steadfast and consistent in carrying out Allah's commands. Second, patience to avoid and refrain from actions forbidden by Him. Third, patience to face and endure various trials and tests ordained by Allah. This division demonstrates that patience encompasses all dimensions of a believer's life, including obedience, self-control, and acceptance of fate.

Among Sufis, patience is understood as a total adherence to Allah's commands, avoiding all His prohibitions, and accepting every test and ordeal with full awareness and sincerity. With patience, a seeker not only perseveres on his spiritual journey but also grows into a spiritually mature person and becomes closer to Allah.

5. Tawakkal

Tawakkal comes from the word *wakālah* which means *at-tafwīd* (surrender oneself completely) and *al-i'timād* (rely or trust). In Arabic usage, expressions such as *wakkala amrahu ilā fulānin* mean that someone hands over their affairs or property to another party to take care of. Etymologically, tawakkal shows an attitude of total reliance on a party trusted as a representative.

In the context of faith, tawakkal (religious trust) signifies a servant's complete reliance on Allah SWT, the All-Representing, All-Just, and All-Knowing of all matters. Tawakkal is not simply a simple surrender of oneself, but rather an inner conviction that all outcomes and provisions are in God's will after a person has made the utmost effort. Therefore, tawakkal plays a crucial role in fostering peace of mind and spiritual stability.

Abu Turab an-Nakhsyabi, as quoted by Abu Nashr as-Sarraj, explained that tawakkal is a spiritual attitude that is specifically related to worship. In tawakkal, a servant's heart only depends on and relates to Allah SWT, without placing excessive hope on creatures. This attitude gives birth to deep inner calm and a sense of security that comes from belief in Allah.

Furthermore, tawakkal is reflected in the attitude of accepting all God's provisions with grace. When a servant receives a blessing, he is grateful for it as a gift from Allah. On the other hand, when he doesn't get what he expects, he remains patient and happy with the fate that has been determined. In this way, tawakkal forms a person who is not easily shaken by circumstances, because his heart is firmly dependent on Allah SWT. as the main support in all aspects of life (Rizal, M. 2020).

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the maqāmāt are spiritual stages in Sufism that serve as a path to soul purification and personality development for a Muslim. Maqāmāt are not achieved instantly, but through earnest effort, spiritual practice (riyāḍah), and a continuous commitment to worship and self-control. Each maqām reflects the improvement of a servant's inner quality and closeness to Allah SWT, so that the spiritual journey in Sufism is gradual and systematic.

The five main stages examined in this article—repentance, wara', asceticism, patience, and tawakkal—are closely related and complementary. Repentance serves as the initial foundation for soul purification by guiding a seeker to consciously and deeply return to God. Wara' serves as a spiritual prudence that safeguards the purity of the heart from doubtful matters. Asceticism frees the soul from excessive attachment to the world, thus directing life's orientation toward the values of the afterlife. Patience strengthens inner steadfastness in obedience, self-control, and acceptance of trials, while tawakkal fosters inner peace through complete surrender to God Almighty after making every effort.

This study also confirms that the maqāmāt are not exclusive to Sufis, but are relevant for every Muslim to apply according to their life context. The values contained in the maqāmāt contribute directly to the formation of noble morals, balance between the physical and spiritual life, and spiritual resilience amidst the challenges of modern life. Thus, the concept of maqāmāt can be viewed as an actual ethical and spiritual framework in guiding humans towards spiritual perfection and closeness to Allah SWT.

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