

# The Revival of Spiritual Chivalry

## الفتوة

إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزَدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى

*Surely they (the Companions of the Cave) are chivalrous, they believe in their Lord so we increased them in guidance (18:13)*

### Chivalry

In Islāmic and šūfī history, futuwwah or chivalry is connotative to generosity, bravery, horsemanship and courage.<sup>1</sup> The science of chivalry is identified by two words, futuwwah and Maru'ah but futuwwah is generally the most commonly used, though other masters give the two distinctions saying that Marū'ah is a conduit to futūwwah. Futuwwah takes its name from the noun 'fata' which means youth and connotes someone as vigorous and youthful, regardless of the individual's age. This is proven when the Messenger (saw) appointed a youth of 18 years old to be the General of the Army even though leaders of his companions were in his ranks. The wisdom of this is the Messenger (saw) is showing us that when the youth knows his Lord it is a tremendous matter and it is the most honorable act to Allāh when youth turns to Him. In one tradition<sup>2</sup>:

إن الله تعالى يباهي بالشباب العابد الملائكة، يقول: انظروا إلى عبدي، ترك شهوته من أجلي

*Surely Allāh boasts about the devoted youth to the Angels say, "Look at my servant, he abandons his desires for my sake.*

<sup>1</sup> This science found its way to Europe when the crusaders were defeated by šalāhu d-Dīn and returned home. They learned these traits from their encounters with the Muslim.

<sup>2</sup> Tradition here means a type of saying that is at some levels attributed to the Messenger (saw) through a chain of transmission.

It also means to bring about a new legal judgment that has not existed before; a fatwa. But this wasn't an institutional approach when the establishment of political Islamic states came into existence. In the initial history of Islām, the meaning of fatwa in 'Irāq and Persia, was strictly linked and limited to Sufism. The earliest proof is Ḥasan al-Basrī, who was termed the name, 'Sayyid al-Fitan'-The Leader of Chivalry and some say it was Ja'far aš-Šādiq ;. Like ibn al-Qayyim noted, "We find that the masters of Sufism were known for the station of chivalry."<sup>3</sup>

Prophet Ibrāhīm is identified among the chivalrous when Allāh mentioned him (as):

قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا فَتًى يَذُكُرُهُمْ يُقَالُ لَهُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ  
(21:60)

In this story, his virtuous display of chivalry was destroying the structures of the idols worshippers, just in the same way that the act of bravery for the šūfī is to destroy the idol of the self. The ultimate aim of every šūfī with futuwah is focused on the self; to purify it and cleanse it, generally to eliminate the self of blameworthy traits and then to embellish it with praiseworthy traits to become his nature. Each method of the šūfī was determined by taste and style of the murshid-guide. Basically futuwah holds many meanings but can be summed up as what al-Qāshānī noted in his commentary Manāzil as-Sā'irīn:

*It is a name for the heart that is cleansed  
from the attributes of the lower-self*

As al-Muḥāsabī would put it:

That you don't see for yourself any virtue or right (over others) and it has three points:

1. Abandoning argumentations, forgiving faults of others and forgiving those who harmed you.
2. To bring the one close to you who distance himself from you, to honor the one who harms you and to forgive the one who wrongs you.
3. When on the path of wayfaring, to leave using the faculties intellect to understand the way<sup>4</sup>. For the one who does this cannot claim chivalry.

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<sup>3</sup> Madāj as-Sālikīn.

<sup>4</sup> What is meant here is that the student is not to question the master-the murshid if he sees and action that he doesn't understand. Rather it is better to say to oneself, I may not understand because I don't the

Summoning the above, it also has been characterized as 'īthar', selflessness or 'Nikrān adh-Dhat', denying the self. These actions are the core in which natural virtues revolve around. The masters make this a condition for one to be surnamed 'al-fata', or chivalrous.

The symbols of chivalry, as acknowledged are; Prophet Ādam (as), Ibrāhīm (as) and Prophet Muḥammad (saw)<sup>5</sup>. The ones after them (as) are our liege lords 'Ali<sup>6</sup> and Salmān of Persia (ra)<sup>7</sup>, who are the leaders of futuwah after the Prophets (as). Also some later historical figures are

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knowledge to understand." Like in the story of Moses and al-Khidr (as). This is one of the many rules of conduct between the wayfarer and the master. For a more concise explanation of this type of relationship read, by Shaykh Hisham Qabbani (qAs).

<sup>5</sup> In the Battle of Uhud the Messenger ﷺ was saying, 'I am chivalrous one, the son of the chivalrous one (meaning Ibrāhīm) and the brother of the chivalrous one (meaning 'Alī (ra)).

<sup>6</sup> In fact 'Alī (ra) is not only the figure-head of chivalry, he is the gate every type of Islamic sciences when the Messenger Muḥammad (saw) mentioned about him (ra):

أنا مدينة العلم، وعلي بابها، فمن أراد العلم فليأت الباب

*I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its gate. So the one who wants knowledge, let him enter the gate.*

It is also mentioned that he is the gate of heavenly wisdom when the Messenger (saw) said:

أنا دار الحكمة، وعلي بابها

*I am the house of wisdom and 'Ali is it's gate*

'Ali (ra) himself confirmed this when sat on the pulpit and said:

سلوني قبل أن تفقدوني، ولن تسألوا بعدي مثلي

*Ask me anything you wish before I am lost to you. For none shall be able to ask after me the likes of myself.*

Essentially, the household of the Messenger (saw) were the retainers of all Islamic sciences when the time the empire was expanding and luxuries that the new nation were not exposed to before plunged the new nation into corruption. The inheritors of the sciences, though were not blood related to the Messenger (saw), were considered among his family because of their esteem rank. This is what the Messenger proved when he (saw) said of Salmān of Persia (ra):

سلمان منا أهل البيت

*Salmān is from us, the people of the house*

And he (saw) said of Bilāl, the first caller to prayer and the keeper of the treasures of the Messenger (saw)

بلال منا آل البيت

**Bilāl is from us, the people of the house.**

<sup>7</sup> Salmān al-Fārsī | or Salmān of Persia. Al-Fārsī though means The Persian but al-Fārsī is from the word farasu which means horse which is the word which al-furūsiyyah-chilvarous knighthood is derived. Thus Salmān | was the one who suggested to the Messenger ﷺ digging a ditch around Medīnah to counter the advancement of the invaders.

noted exemplars of futuwah like Šalāh ad-Dīn al-Ayyūbī<sup>8</sup>, al-Amīr 'abd-Qādir of Algeria<sup>9</sup> and Shaykh Shamwil of Daghestan.<sup>10</sup>

The Messenger, Prophet Muḥammad ultimately, is the apex and the paradigm of futuwah this is proven by his display manners of mercy and patience that he endured with the Meccans in the initial stages of his mission. In fact, futuwah is rooted in maners. The scholars of futuwah say, "Excellence points to character, to abstain from causing harm and to behave in good manner with the one who has harmed you. When you increase in character, you increase in belief because belief is to have good manners which lead to every good..." This is why Muḥammad (saw) is the apex and the paradigm of futuwah because Allāh said of him (saw):

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

*Surely you are a tremendous nature (68:4)<sup>11</sup>*

## The Tremendous Nature and Spiritual Tinting

Manners was the way Allāh describes the Messenger (saw) over all the characters that he displayed, like his

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<sup>8</sup> Šalāh ad-Dīn is renowned in both the Muslim and Christian worlds for leadership and military prowess tempered by his chivalry and merciful nature, during his war against the Crusaders. When Šalāh ad-Din re-took Jerusalem, following the example of when the Messenger (saw) conquered Mecca, took no revenge on the Christian inhabitants. Saladin's relationship with Richard was one of chivalrous mutual respect as well as military rivalry; both were celebrated in the courtly romances that developed in Northern Europe. When Richard was wounded, Saladin offered the services of his personal physician. At Arsuf, when Richard lost his horse, Saladin sent him two replacements. Saladin also sent him fresh fruit with snow, to keep his drinks cold. All of which is an example of Futuwah or Islamic Chivalry.

<sup>9</sup> **Abd al-Qādir al-** in **Jazā'iri**, Algerian Islamic scholar, Sufi, political and military leader who led a struggle against the French invasion in the mid-nineteenth century, for which he is seen by the Algerians as their national hero. During the battles with the French he showed himself a born leader of men, a great soldier, a capable administrator, a persuasive orator, a chivalrous opponent. His fervent faith in the doctrines of Islam was unquestioned. When he was to retire in Damascus he helped to repress the outbreak and saved large numbers of Christians.

<sup>10</sup> Notably after the Christian return from the crusades, they had adopted within their ranks many sciences of Futuwah.

<sup>11</sup> The Wife of the Messenger (saw) said of him:

كان خلقه القرآن

*His manner was the Qur'ān*

The scholars explain the reality of this is because he was persistent with its respects, commands, prohibition and good traits. He exemplifies all what Allāh mentioned in his book on the honorable manners of the prophets and the awliya.

amazing intellect, military expertise or political leadership and many examples that would take volumes to mention. But of all these lofty qualities, Allāh praised him with his manners with the verse mentioned above. This is why the Messenger (saw) said:

### بعثت لأتمم مكارم الأخلاق

*I was sent to perfect noble character*

The masters of this science say, "The difference of the levels of futuwah and maru'ah is that maru'ah is universal and futuwah is one of the many aspects of maru'ah. They explain that while maru'ah has a very distinct meaning as though every noble character is heaped in maru'ah, futuwah is but a branch of it. They say the meaning of maru'ah is the following:

*If you speak, speak with resolve. If you are silent, be silent with insight. If you give, give generously. If you abstain something, do it with wisdom. If you get angry, make it for the sake of Allāh.<sup>12</sup> If you are pleased, be pleased with Allāh. To act in the correct attitude in every situation is maru'ah.*

They asked, "What is disrespect? And a master said, "When the generous stands at the door of the ignoble and he turns him away."

When mentioned earlier that The Messenger (saw) said:

### بعثت لأتمم مكارم الأخلاق

*I was sent to perfect noble character*

The perfection character has a specific meaning in that the self is formed of a lofty nature to have a desire for perfection. So when one links it origin, his creator it is though he has been dyed in the character perfection. Mans natural disposition (al-Fiṭrah) to lean towards perfection is proven by his love for good, justice and mercy which are attributes of Allāh. So when one follows the will of what he was created he obtains this reality on which it called, "al-Fiṭrah al-Āliyyah or Lofty Constitution. Allāh says:

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<sup>12</sup> i.e. Be angry for Allāh and not based on your own ego.

## صبغة الله ومن أحسن من الله صبغة ونحن له عابدون

*The baptizism of Allāh and who is better to baptize than Allāh and we worship him. (2:138)*

This verse is explained that baptism is the natural way which Allāh originated man to be. Thus he is returning to his origin.<sup>13</sup>

### The sayings of Futuwwah:

The first attribute of chivalry is to turn away from the fault of others. It is to behave for the sake of Allāh. Someone asked, "what is the position of a believer who behaves in a good way towards people and they abuse him? It was said, "By Allāh, is he behaved to them in a good manner it is just false hope. But if he didn't it for the sake of Allāh he would never be affected by their abuse. If you wish to obtain the mercy of Allāh it doesn't matter if he thanks you or not for your service. If your sincerity is of a high level, you will not be affected by rejection and if they thank you, you should say, "Jazākāllāh or May Allāh reward you" and if they thank you not say , "I did this for the sake of Allāh, and Allāh is enough for me, what grace is he as a Trustee."

If you do a good action it is obligatory for you to forget it as if it wasn't done at all. But if some good was done to you, then it is obligatory for you not to forget it. This is very much so superior character because there are people if they do a good action they never cease in mentioning it and they exaggerate about it and he will see no one higher than himself. But listen to the words of the Messenger (saw) when he said:

### ومن لم يشكر الناس لم يشكر الله

*The one who is not man, doesn't thank Allāh*

It is not Futūwwah to hide when others seek assistance because the one who seeks your assistance it was Allāh who drove him to you. Because when Allāh loves his servant, he makes the needs of man to come in his direction. So when they pursue you this is a favor from Allāh.

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<sup>13</sup> More on Tremendous Nature and Spiritual Tinting in the small treatises, *The Mirror of the Shaykh*.  
Coming soon.

Al-Fuḷayl bin 'Iyāl said, "al-Futūwwah or chivalry is to pardon the faults of brothers".

Some say:

- "Al-Futūwwah is good character."
- "Al-Futūwwah is to cover when harmed and to give freely"
- "Al-Futūwwah is to follow the prophetic norms."
- "Al-Futūwwah is the virtue in what follows the prophetic norms in that you don't see yourself having to do with it."
- "Al-Futūwwah is not to hide when others seek your help"
- "Al-Futūwwah is to manifest blessing and covering (hiding) affliction."
- "Al-Futūwwah is not to do an action that is in need of being excuse of."
- "Al-Futūwwah is to serve people at the extent of your ability."
- "Al-Futūwwah is to be generous to people with your character."
- "al-Futūwwah is not to leave any chance for you self to have ranks between people"
- "Al-Futūwwah is not attesting your virtues"
- "Al-Futūwwah is that you don't see any rights for yourself"
- "Al-Futūwwah is to attest that your short comings and faults is what extinguishes your virtue"
- "Al-Futūwwah is to give the rights to others in expense of yours."
- "Al-Futūwwah is the rights of others to you are a great importance and your rights in compared with theirs are minimum."

In conclusion to the above al-Futūwwah is to preserve the heart for Allāh and to accept what comes from him. If you are like this, then you can act naturally with people while in form and body but you don't succumb to their bad habits or sink to their levels. For a person like this it is obligatory to live with normal people and mix with them. But at the same time, he advices them, guides them and face them in the correction direction. He is far of from what makes them fall from grace even though he is with them. All the while he takes their hands and walks with them to Allāh.

Forbearance:

حُذِّ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ

To act in forbearance to creation is as close as being a prophet because forbearance is the best action of conduct and the highest level of restraint. To hold one's tongue is the highest of these because one word could demoralize a person, even for life. One story when a master was walking with his students and something dropped from his pocket and the student laughed and the master said, "What has made you laugh? The student felt very ashamed and the master looked at his pocket and saw what had fallen out and said, "O Allāh may you always make him happy and put in his heart happiness."

In order to sustain forbearance one must possess the qualities of; softness, gentle, merciful, an open heart, being merciful and forbearing with man, being liberal with your forbearance and not strict on them which will extend from your softness. The *din* is all *adab* and all of *adab* is modesty and *adab* is not to crave after someone's possession or to harm anyone. More importantly, forbearance is to have patience and is the opposite of anger.

## Humbleness

*The servants of Allah who walk humbly on the earth*  
(25:63)

Walking humbly doesn't mean to walk sluggishly or in a meager manner, this would contradict the prophetic norm because those who witness the manners of the Messenger ﷺ walking, it was as if he was descending from a mountain. How they explain 'to walk humbly', is not to allow dilemma or distraction overtake them, nor any worry abuse him. Their endeavors are significant; their path is wide enough for all. So they walk the earth humbly meditating on what they were created, from and where they are going and their meditation on their mission in life.

وَإِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ الْجَاهِلُونَ قَالُوا سَلَامًا

*...And when the ignorant argue with them they say, 'peace'*  
(25:63)

The Messenger ﷺ spoke to all, the drunkard, those who didn't believe, the idol worshipper without confrontation initiating from him and he endured their insults but never gave insults in return.