

## When Mortal Become Saints: *Awliya* ' Allah According To Syeikh Abd. Al-Qadir Al-Mandili

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### Abstract

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As the plural of *wali* (saint), *awliya* ' comes from the root word *al-Walayah* (sainthood) which refers to a very exceptional rank given by Allah to His beloved servants. However, various misconceptions regarding *awliya* ' have occurred rampantly among Muslim societies, even ended as polytheism. This phenomenon attracted Syeikh Abd. Al-Qadir, a very committed scholar of Mandailing descent to purify this creed. Al-Mandili was born in 1910 and honoured with a teaching position in the al-Haram Grand Mosque of Mecca. He had written 24 books in various discipline of Islamic studies such as Islamic creed, jurisprudence, *hadeeth*, politics, education, law and morals. Through three of his works, *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf* (A Shield For Those Who Are Commissioned Or Faith Knot According To The *Salaf*), *Penawar Bagi Hati* (A Cure For The Heart) and *Anak Kunci Syurga* (The Key To Heaven), this article analyzes the concept of *awliya* ' according to Al-Mandili's perspective. He concluded that *al-Walayah* (sainthood) of Allah can only be achieved by mortals through a healthy mixture of *iman* (faith), *taqwa* (piety), *mahabbah* (love) and *ittiba* ' (following the tradition of the Prophet).

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### 1. Introduction

The origin of *al-Walayah* is closeness to Allah. The *awliya* ' of Allah are those who are obedient and perform the good deeds which bring them closer to Allah. However some of the Muslims seem to have a misunderstanding about who the *awliya* ' actually are. Most of that which the general Muslims regard as an attribute of the *wali* are actually contrary to that which is in the *Quran* and *hadith*. Most of these are in fact based on false claims.

Various misconceptions, legends and myths regarding *awliya'* are widespread in the Muslim societies all over the world. Tons of names given to *awliya'* such as *Nuqaba'*, *Awliya' Nujaba'*, *Awliya' Abdal*, *Awliya' Al-Rajabiyyun*, *Awliya' Al-Akhyar*, *Awliya' Al-Awtad*, *Awliya' Al-Hawariyyun* and *Awliya' Qutub* or *al-Ghawth*. Alas, none of these names were extracted from authentic narrations according to Dimasqiyah (2015). In the Malay world, *awliya'* are elevated to the status of demigods, known as *Keramat*. The unseen world is revealed to them so they might come to knowledge on every secret and unseen matters. Furthermore, the traits of every creation are also revealed to them. They live both in the seen and unseen world wrote Al-Qaradawi (2006). All these superiority and miracles mentioned are claimed as the consequence of Allah's satisfaction and blessings towards *awliya'*.

Witnessing these misconceptions, Syekh Abd. Al-Qadir Al-Mandili (1910-1965) strived to purify the Malay beliefs regarding *awliya'* with all his heart and soul. Through three of his works namely *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf* (A Shield For Those Who Are Commissioned Or Faith Knot According To The *Salaf*), *Penawar Bagi Hati* (A Cure For The Heart) and *Anak Kunci Syurga* (The Key To Heaven), this prolific scholar managed to outline a clear guide in understanding the concept of *awliya'*.

This article is divided into five subtopics, starting with the introduction for the topic in hand. The second subtopic will discuss about the concept of Allah's *awliya'* according to the Islamic creed. The third subtopic summarizes the life of Abd. Al-Qadir Al-Mandili. Next, the fourth subtopic elaborates Al-Mandili's perspective regarding *awliya'*. The last subtopic is a conclusion of the whole article and a bibliography ends this article.

## 2. *Awliya'* According To Islamic Creed

As the plural of *wali*, *awliya'* comes from the root word of *al-walayah*. Linguistically, Al-Fairuz Abadi (1999) defines a *wali* as someone who is close, nearby or a rain following a rain. It also means someone who love, true and is helpful of others. Ibn Abi Al-'Izz (2005) stated that the word *wali* is the opposite of enmity. Through these definitions, we can conclude that the origin of *al-walayah* is closeness to Allah and the enmity is being far away from the path of Allah.

From Islamic creed point of view, the definition of *awliya'* can never drift away from the Quran: "(Allah's *awliya'* are) those who believe and they are always in fear of Allah (Yunus: 63). No one can be a *wali* of Allah unless he has the characteristics of faith and piety, since Allah has made faith and piety a pre-condition for His *al-Walayah* or sainthood. According to Ibnu Kathir (2005), through this verse, Allah had given a clear definition that *awliya'* are those who believe and fear Allah. Hence, every Muslim who fear Allah are *awliya'*. Al-Tahawi supported the same idea. IbnAbi Al-'Izz(2005) specifies this definition by saying that *awliya'* are those who love Allah dearly, act upon matters that He loves and always seek ways to get themselves closer to Allah by practising things that He approves. Hence, we could well comprehend that the *awliya's* characteristics started out from faith and piety, and this is the only path to attain the high status of Islamic sainthood according to Ibn Taimiyyah (1985).

The word *awliya'* and its derivations occurred in the Quran for at least 90 times. Allah has explained in His Book and in the Sunnah of His Messenger that He has *awliya'* among the people and that satan also has their *awliya'*. In the Quran, fifty four places referred to as *awliya'* of Allah and thirty six places

referred to as *awliya* ' of satan. The Quran divided *al-Walayah* into five categories. Two of them are associated with Allah and the rest are connected to *awliya* ' of satan. *Al-Walayah Al-'Uzma* (greatest sainthood) means the help and protection of Allah for those who believe (Al-Baqarah: 257). On the other hand, *Al-Walayah Muhammad* (sainthood of Muhammad) refers to the help and protection of Prophet Muhammad to the believers (Al-Ahzab:33). These are the two types of sainthood that are promised to receive rightful help and protection.

As for sainthood of satan, it is nothing but false and humiliation. The first type for this categories *Walayah al-Mukmin al-Kuffar*. It consist of the sainthood of the non-believers, and it is prohibited to take non-believers as helpers (Ali-Imran:28). Next, is sainthood of a wrongdoer to another (Al-Jathiyah:19). The third is sainthood of satan and taghut upon the wrongdoers (Al-Baqarah:257). In realizing that there are people associated as allies of Allah the Merciful, as well as people known as allies of satan, it is essential for us to differentiate between these groups by understanding well the criterion described by Allah in His Book and also from the tradition of His Prophet.

There are conditions need to be fulfilled in achieving sainthood status. The first and foremost condition is that one has to be pious and strong in belief. *Awliya* ' of Allah are those who firmly believe in the six pillars of faith, i.e. belief in Allah, angels, divine books, messengers, Judgment Day and predestination. They also followed and adhered strictly to the Quran and traditions of Muhammad as this is the only means of knowing what is true and what is not. Ibn Taimiyyah (1985) claim *Awliya* ' must also be sane persons who had reached their puberty.

Due to the conditions above-mentioned, verily the signs of the *awliya* ' of Allah and the *awliya* ' of satan has been made clear by Allah. Both parties may be known by their actions. Nevertheless, it is not possible for anyone to be extremely certain that a particular individual is one of the *awliya* ' of Allah as achieving true faith and piety are matters of the heart that are hidden. Without any denial, it is impossible for any human being to find out what lies in it. Hence, it is permissible to think that someone is likely to be among the *awliya* ' of Allah due to his piety and faith, but it is impossible to be certain.

The *awliya* ' of Allah had different priorities in accordance with their level of faith. The sainthood of a messenger is higher than a prophet. Among the messengers, '*Ulul Azmi* were those who attained the highest status, and among the '*Ulul Azmi*, prophet Muhammad was the highest in status. As within the nation of Muhammad, the highest of sainthood is attained by Abu Bakar, followed by Umar, Uthman and Ali, and the rest are organized accordingly to the levels of the companion and other believers stated Dimasyqiyah (2015).

They are three levels of *al-Walayah* according to the Quran (Al-Fatir:32). The first level is called *al-Sabiqun bi al-Khayrat* or *al-Muqarrabin*, and they are the people who compete against each other in practicing deeds that are loved by Allah. They stay well out of zones that are prohibited by Allah, the forbidden and the *makruh* (dislikes). The midlevel is called *Al-Muqtasid*, and they are the people who obliged the must and avoid only the forbidden. These group did not perform the recommended, and they are still involved in the dislikes as well. The lowest level is *Al-Zhalimu li Nafsih* (despotic upon themselves). They are monotheist but are still doing wrong against Allah. However, the wrong deeds

they are performing did not make them counted as non-believers nor do they stay permanently in Hell, wrote Al-Hakami (2015).

From the stages above-mentioned, it clearly indicates that *awliya'* are not infallible as the prophets. It is not a condition for them to be protected from mistakes and errors. Thus, we can conclude that it is quite possible that some knowledge of the Islamic law may be hidden from any of them, just as it is possible for any of them to be confused about some matters in Islam. Since it is possible for any *awliya'* to make mistake, it can never be obligatory upon every Muslim to believe in everything any one of them says except it is in agreement with the Prophet's message.

### 3. Al-Mandili, A South-East Asian Scholar Of Mecca

He was born in the year 1910 AD in the village of Singgalang Padangsidempuan, South of Tapanuli, North of Sumatera. According to Awang (2008); The young al-Mandili received his early education in Dutch Primary School until he reached standard five. In 1924, when he was 14 years old, he migrated to Kedah with the intention of pursuing religious knowledge from the classic system of *pondok* (hut) learning.

Al-Mandili was introduced to *Jawi* writing and reading in Pondok Panjang Rong located a stone-throw away from Tobiari, Pendang. Among the teachers that had a hand in his educational journey was Tuan Guru Haji Bakar. Soon after, he enrolled in Pondok Air Hitam for him to further his studies in Arabic grammar and syntax, such as learning *Al-Matn Al-Ajrummyah*, *al-Mutammimah* and *Matn Alfiyah Ibn Malik*. Under the hands of prominent masters, such as Tuan Haji Idris Bin Lebai Yusuf and Lebai Dukun, Al-Mandili started to master Arabic grammar. Al-Mandili then further his study in Pondok Gajah Mati, Pendang, focusing more on religious knowledge. He took the advantage of living within this study center studying under a prominent religious figure in Kedah, Haji Wan Ibrahim bin Haji Wan Abdul Qadir, famously known as Pak Chu Him Gajah Mati. Al-Mandili dedicated ten years of his life in this *pondok*, not only studying rather he was given the trust to teach his own classes.

In the year 1936 AD, Al-Mandili travelled to Mecca furthering his quest for knowledge. This was the final stage of his life as a seeker of knowledge. Continuing his role as a seeker, he was incredibly diligent in studying under famous scholars of Mecca. Among his teachers was Wan Ismail bin Wan 'Abd. Al-Qadir, popularly known as Pak Da Ail Patani, who was the brother of Pak Chu Him. Ghani (2013) listed apart from Pak Da Ail, Al-Mandili had also studied under Syeikh Ali Al-Maliki, Syeikh Hasan Muhammad Al-Mashat, Syeikh Muhammad Al-'Arabi bin Al-Tabani bin Al-Hussein Al-Wahidi Al-Maghribi, Syeikh Sayid Al-'Alawi bin Abbas Al-Maliki, as well as Syeikh Muhammad Ahyad. Due to piety and in-depth knowledge, Al-Mandili had been given the mandate to lecture in the al-Haram Grand Mosque, a position not easily attainable to just anyone.

Other than being active in religious classes, Al-Mandili also spent most of his time writing. A grand total of 24 books had been written by al-Mandili in divine creed, jurisprudence, politics, *hadeeth*, education, law and morals. Through his priceless works in various disciplines, Al-Mandili had vastly contributed to the Islamic world especially within the classical *pondok* system of the Malay Archipelago. Awang (2008) claim till this day, these books are still being studied and revered in the *pondoks* of Kedah, Kelantan and Patani.

#### 4. *Awliya'* Of Allah According To Al-Mandili

In analyzing Al-Mandili's perspective on the *awliya'* of Allah, three of his works were referred to in this article namely *Perisai Bagi Sekalian Mukallaf Atau Simpulan Iman Atas Mazhab Salaf*, *Penawar Bagi Hati* and *Anak Kunci Syurga*. From this point onwards, the title of these books will be shortened and known as *Perisai*, *Penawar* and *Anak Kunci*. Apart from discussing Islamic creed, the three titles above are also the most popular work of Al-Mandili among the seekers of knowledge. Besides being reprinted over and over by a number of publication houses namely Jahabersa, Al-Hidayah and PTS Publishing, these books were also transliterated into Roman alphabetical writings.

In giving the very definition of a *wali*, Al-Mandili (2012b) in *Perisai* explained:

“Firstly a *wali* is he who knows Allah and His attributes according to the middle path, stayed in obedience and refrain from wrongdoing”.

Through this statement, Al-Mandili had strongly refuted the belief among some *sufi* adherents that *awliya'* are different from human being. He highlighted that a *wali* is no more than a mere human being which is not obliged to possess supernatural abilities. The difference lies only in the aspect of knowing Allah. They always strive to please Allah by complying with all His commands and prohibitions. Hence, by referring to the Quran in surah Yunus verse 62 and 63, as well as surah Al-Baqarah verse 257, Al-Mandili (2013) in *Anak Kunci* translated and explained the meaning of a *wali* as a lover: “And that every believers a lover of Allah just as Allah is the Lover of all of them”.

From the above-mentioned Quranic verses, it has vividly demonstrated that the *awliya'* of Allah are those who believe in Him and give Him their full loyalty. Thus, they love all that Allah loves, hate what Allah hates, are pleased with what Allah pleased with, and despise what Allah despises. They enjoin what Allah enjoins, forbid what He forbids, given to those whom Allah loves for them to be given, and withhold from those whom Allah loves not to receive.

In explaining the type of love knotted between the people who love Allah, Al-Mandili further explain that the very existence of love towards Allah within a human soul itself is a praise worthy characteristic in Islamic law. Similarly the Quran says (Al-Baqarah: 165):

“But those who believe are stronger in love for Allah”.

The word love in this verse carries the meaning of inclination of the heart towards objects that the heart loves. It is the direct opposite of hate or a wild-heart according to Al-Mandili (2012a). Therefore, Al-Mandili (2012b) in *Perisai* stated:

“And a *wali* is the opposite of enmity”.

The love of the believers towards Allah and His messenger is a must, just as it is a pre-requisite of faith. It is among the greatest love of all. Whatever kind of love formed in the soul of a believer begun from the love towards Allah. Al-Mandili (2012a) expressed this great love in his words:

“And do comprehend that the individual that knows Allah, and he does not love other than Allah, hence his love towards others is caused by his love towards Allah, for the cause that at times one love the child of his lover, or the family of his lover, or the servant of his lover, in fact everyone who is connected to his lover is loved by him”.

There are various forms or signs that one is loving His Creator, among them is when one prioritizes what Allah loves instead of what is fancied by his desire. He accepts the fact that he is going to meet

Allah according to the predestination set by Him. He hates worldly matters that will keep him busy from reminding himself of Allah who he loves so much according to Al-Mandili (2012a).

Next, Al-Mandili (2012b) elaborates the forms of Allah's love towards His servants, which consist half of His mercy towards all of His servants. Loving and compassionate towards one another is an essential requirement for all creations. However in contrary for Allah, He does not require the love of His servants. Al-Mandili quoted surah Al-Isra' verse 111: "Nor He is low to have a protector"

Human are in need of Allah's love, while the same can never be uttered against Allah. Focusing on the stages of *awliya'*, Al-Mandili formulated a simple comprehensible principle. Whoever that obeys Allah and follow the Quran accordingly, then he is noble in the eye of Allah. The difference among the *awliya'* are nothing more than their amount of fear towards Allah. Al-Mandili (2012b) said:

"...that a noble believer is a believer who obeys Allah and follows the Quran more, and at the same time he is a person who fears Allah".

He quoted the Quran from surah Al-Hujurat verse 13:

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has *At-Taqwa* (piety). Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware"

Al-Mandili's explanation clearly indicates that he rejected false claims that said *awliya'* are no longer subjected to Islamic law. In fact it is a blatant extremism to say that they are free to commit sins towards Allah.

As an enlightenment to the public, Al-Mandili explained that the status of a *wali*, no matter how colossal it is, can never be similar to the station of prophets. This statement is a refutation towards some *sufis* who claimed that sainthood is even higher than prophethood. Al-Mandili (2012b) said in *Perisai*:

"...and the writer indicates with this words against *ijtihadiyyah* and all who are ignorant claiming themselves to be members of *tasawwuf*, that they said a *wali* is of higher status than prophets..."

In strengthening the difference between *awliya'* and prophets, Al-Mandili stated that all scholars who hold on to the truth had always call the people to be steadfast to Islamic law. A *mukallaf* or a person who is commissioned are obliged to obey Allah's commandments either they are *awliya's* or kings. Al-Mandili (2012b) said:

"They contradict the scholars and the people who are consistent in fearing Allah, that they always advised towards knowledge and following the Islamic law, thus is an obligation from Allah that every *mukallaf* to follow each and every order from Allah, since He already informed us: "We sent no Messenger, but to be obeyed by Allah's Leave" (surah Al-Nisa: 64)".

No matter who a person might be, forever still he is a servant of Allah. Hence, it is forbidden for a *mukallaf* to go against the teaching of the Messenger. Al-Mandili(2012b) said:

"...not to go against his teaching and wronged his law, He said: "Say (O Muhammad to mankind): "If you (really) love Allah then follow me (i.e. accept Islamic Monotheism, follow the Qur'an and the Sunnah), Allah will love you and forgive you of your sins. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (surah Ali-Imran:31)

Hence, it can be concluded that one who went against the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet will never be enlisted as a wali of Allah.

Al-Mandili strongly affirm that the only way one can attain sainthood is by following the Sunnah of the Prophet. No matter how noble a wali could be, he should always adhere to the teaching of the Messenger. Only then, he will achieve Allah's love and mercy. From the moment Muhammad bin Abdullah was appointed the last Prophet, Allah made him the criterion between His allies and His enemies. None are the allies of Allah except one who believes in Muhammad and in that which he was sent and follows it openly and in secret. Whoever claims love of Allah and alliances with Allah but does not follow the Prophet is not one of the allies of Allah. Without doubt, he is one of the allies of Satan.

Those who went against the Prophet's teaching, be it for the cause of upholding his view over the prophet or following his desire, he is in fact, deemed as a boastful individual, rejecting the truth. Al-Mandili (2012b) said:

“And Abu Usman Al-Naisaburi said: whoever makes the Sunnah of the Prophet a command upon himself then he is speaking in knowledge that benefits, and whoever who made his desire and whims a command upon himself then he is speaking with the tongue of heresy while they say: One would never abandon the Sunnah of the Prophet except for vanity that exists in their hearts”.

Al-Mandili then refers to the Quran in surah Al-An'am verse 124:

“And when there comes to them a sign (from Allah) they say: "We shall not believe until we receive the like of that which the Messengers of Allah had received." Allah knows best with whom to place His Message. Humiliation and disgrace from Allah and a severe torment will overtake the criminals (polytheists, sinners, etc.) for that which they used to plot”.

The quantity of acts of worship can never benefit a person without following the Prophet's teaching, and Muslims can never match a prophet in terms of knowledge, deeds or status. Whatever stage the person reaches in terms of asceticism, devotion and knowledge, but without belief in the entire message brought by the Prophet, it can never make him a believer nor an *awliya'* of Allah. The falsehood of these claims had been answered by Al-Mandili (2012b):

“And a lot of them who thought that for the cause of their acts of worship that they may reach the status of the prophets, even without following the acts that were practiced by the prophets. The real so some of them who thought that they are nobler than the prophets. Some even claimed that the prophets and messengers learned from past saints, while claiming that he himself is the seal of all saints. Indeed these claims replicated the claim by Pharaoh that he is God the Highest. In fact, Pharaoh knew Allah more than they did. He admitted there was a supreme being who creates and that they are creations. They even claimed that sainthood are even higher than prophet hood. They could not be any more wrong”.

## 5. Conclusion

According to Al-Mandili, *awliya'* are ordinary human being that recognize Allah and love Him. They were obligated to obey Allah accordingly to the teaching of the Prophet. Only by that according to Al-Mandili, saint hood can be achieved. Al-Mandili characterized the believers as lovers of Allah,

and Allah is the Lover of all believers. Among the sign of love towards Allah is when one prioritizes what Allah loves instead of what is fancied by his desire. *Awliya'* are neither infallible nor possess supernatural ability. The best of *awliya'* are those who fear Allah the most. However, Al-Mandili concluded that *awliya'* could never overcome the status of the prophets, as claimed by some sufi adherents. No matter how much acts of worship performed by a *wali*, it can never surpass the level of prophets.

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