

SAINTHOOD IN ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY: THE PATH TO BECOMING A VIRTUOUS PERSON, THE INSTITUTION OF THE *MURSHID*, AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the concept of walayah (sainthood) in Islamic spirituality across four interrelated dimensions: the path to becoming the virtuous human (the perfect human), the institution of spiritual guidance (murshidiyyah), the methodology of attaining sainthood, and the universality of spiritual perfection. Through a comprehensive analysis of Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions (hadiths), and classical Sufi literature, the study demonstrates that spiritual excellence is not an exclusive privilege reserved for exceptional individuals of the past, but rather a universal path open to all sincere seekers in every age. Employing textual hermeneutics and a historical-theological methodology, the research explores the process of purification of the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs) as the foundation of virtue, the continuity of spiritual mentorship from the Prophet to the present, and the practical steps required to join the ranks of the awliya (saints) of Allah. The key findings reveal that the journey of walayah (sainthood) begins with a single sincere wishing to reach Allah while still in this life, requires the guidance of an authentic spiritual master, advances through systematic dhikr practices (repetition of the name of Allah) that purify the nafs (soul), and culminates in the ascent of the ruh (spirit) through the seven heavenly floors toward the Divine Essence. By presenting an integrated framework that unites virtue ethics, spiritual mentorship, and mystical realization under a coherent theological paradigm, this research contributes to contemporary studies of Islamic spirituality, offering both theoretical depth and practical applicability for modern seekers of divine truth.

Keywords: Sainthood, Saintliness, Spiritual Mentorship, Murshid, Nafs (Soul)

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INTRODUCTION

In the Islamic spiritual tradition, the concept of *walayah* (sainthood) represents the highest dimension of human existence. The term *wali* literally means “friend” and refers to those who are the *awliya* (saints) of Allah. However, over time, various misunderstandings and elitist interpretations have developed around this concept. It has become a common belief that *walayah* is a station reserved exclusively for exceptional individuals of the past who displayed extraordinary miracles. Such a perception distances ordinary believers from the path of spiritual perfection and turns one of the most essential teachings of Islam into an elitist notion.

However, a careful examination of the Holy Qur’an and the Prophetic Sunnah clearly reveals that *walayah* is an accessible and egalitarian path. Verses 62–64 of Surah Yunus describe the *awliya* of Allah without imposing any ethnic, geographical, or historical limitation, presenting a universal criterion: “those who believe (being among the *amanu*) and are among the people of piety (*taqwa*) toward Allah.” Likewise, the sayings of the great Sufi masters emphasize that sainthood is ultimately a matter of sincere wish.

The purpose of this study is to examine the concept of *walayah* in Islamic spirituality in a multidimensional way, revealing both its theoretical foundations and practical paths. The research seeks to answer four main questions: First, what are the ontological and ethical foundations of becoming a virtuous human (the perfect human)? Second, how does the institution of *murshidiyyah* (spiritual guidance) function, and how is its historical continuity maintained? Third, what is the practical methodology for attaining *walayah*? Fourth, is *walayah* truly open to everyone, or is it reserved for a specific elite?

Methodologically, the study combines classical Islamic textual interpretation (exegesis and hadith commentary) with contemporary approaches to spiritual pedagogy. While Qur’anic verses and Prophetic hadiths are used as primary sources, both classical and modern Sufi literature serve as secondary references. The significance of the study lies in its presentation of dispersed knowledge on *walayah* (sainthood) within a systematic framework and in providing a practical roadmap for the contemporary reader.

Becoming a Virtuous Human: The Perfect Human (*al-Insān al-Kāmil*)

The Concept of the Perfect Human (*Insan al-Kamil*) and the Virtuous Human

In Sufi literature, the term *insān al-kāmil* (the perfect human) refers to the human being who has attained perfection (Cebecioğlu, 2009). Its Turkish equivalent, “the virtuous human,” describes a person whose heart is fully encompassed by virtues. This concept represents the pinnacle of Islamic anthropology and signifies the complete realization of the human being’s existential potential.

A critical question is whether human beings are born virtuous. Islamic anthropology provides a clear answer to this: no one is born virtuous (Qur’an: 95:5). At the beginning, the heart of the *nafs* is filled with *afat* (vices) —anger, hatred, envy, jealousy, rebellion, hostility,

addictions, greed, ignorance, and the like. These *afat* (vices) inevitably oppose the commands of Allah and incline toward committing what Allah has forbidden (Boran, 2025).

In contrast, the *ruh* (spirit) is filled with noble virtues—love, faith, serenity, obedience, generosity, 'ilm (knowledge), and other virtuous attributes. The human being is created in a state of tension between these two poles: the *afat* (vices) of the *nafs* (soul) and the virtues of the *ruh* (spirit). To be virtuous is possible only when the qualities of the *ruh* are implanted into the heart of the *nafs* under the name of virtue. This process is called the purification of the *nafs* (soul)—in other words, righteous deeds, the deeds that purify and reform the *nafs* (soul) (Eşrefoğlu, 2014).

Purification of the Soul and the Cleansing of the Heart

Everything begins with the wish to reach Allah. When we wish to reach Allah, Allah Almighty manifests upon us with His Name of the Merciful and immediately sets the process in motion. He removes the invisible veil (*hijaab an-mastoora*) over our eyes and the heaviness (*waqra*) upon our ears. He takes away the coverings (*ekinnah*) that prevent comprehension from our hearts and replaces them with a divine computer system providing cognition (*ikhbat*). In other words, Allah grants us discernments (*furqans*) —the ability to distinguish right from wrong—and through these discernments, He also covers our sins (Boran, 2025; Quran, 8:29; 30:31; 17:45-46; 22:54).

He performs a series of further operations within our hearts and, through the *dhikr* (repetition of the Name of Allah) we practice, makes us possess humility (*khushu*). Upon our request through the special prayer of need (*salaat-ul hajat*), as He shows us that our spiritual guide (*murshid*) and guides us to reach him (Boran, 2025). At this point, are we yet virtuous? No, we are not. We have not yet established a connection with virtue. When we reach the post of religious guide (*maqam of irshad*), we receive seven blessings from Allah. Our *nafs* then begin the process of purification. This marks the starting point of virtue. Our *ruh* departs from the body and sets out on its journey toward Allah; from then on, we are upon the *Sirat al-Mustaqim* (the straight path that leads to Allah). The physical body, too, is freed from being a servant to Satan (Boran, 2025).

When the process called the purification of the *nafs* begins, the person performs *dhikr* by saying “Allah, Allah, Allah.” The institution of virtue manifests when a light named virtue (*fadl*) comes and settles in our hearts. Allah Almighty wills that everyone be virtuous, and for this reason, He has made the *dhikr* obligatory. The existence of the purification of the *nafs* depends on only one cause: *dhikr*. Whether you perform *dhikr* aloud or silently, your *dhikr* will inevitably invite from Allah two groups of *nur* (light)— one called *salawat* and *rahma* (mercy), and the other called *salawat* and *fadl* (virtue). These two groups of light constitute the foundation of all virtue (Boran , 2025; Quran; 39:23).

This truth is explained in Surah An-Nur, verse 21: "O you who believe (who are âmenû, who wish their spirit to reach Allah before death), do not follow the footsteps of Satan! And whosoever follows the footsteps of Satan, then surely, he commands (every) abomination and evil (the denial and all that Allah has forbidden). And if it had not been for the Generosity and

Mercy of Allah unto you (if these lights had not be placed into the hearts of your souls), none of you could have ever cleansed his soul, but Allah cleanses the souls of whom He wills."

Stations (maqāmāt) of Virtue: Gradual Ascent

Reaching Allah is the first and foremost goal of becoming a virtuous human. When the nafs is purified through its seven stages, the ruh returns to and reaches Allah. At that point, the accumulation of fadl (virtue) within the nafs has just slightly exceeded fifty percent. After the surrender of the ruh, through the increase of dhikr, one attains the seven levels of sainthood (walayah). Virtue manifests in the final three stations, after transcending the posts of Fana (union with Allah), Baqa (everlastingness) (bestowed a golden throne in the presence of Allah), Zuhd (Dhikr more than half the day), and Muhsin Ones (good doers) (One who submits his physical body to Allah) (Boran, 2025)

The fifth post is the post of *Ulul albab* (those who have wisdom or good understanding). Those who possess continuous dhikr (remembrance of the Name of Allah) are the ones who have submitted their nafs to Allah. At this point, no afat (vices) remain in the heart of the nafs; fadl (virtues) fill it, one hundred percent. The nafs becomes adorned through seven levels—beautified and embellished with perfection (Boran, 2025).

The sixth post is the post of *Ikhlas* (To be a righteous servant). The nafs becomes pure and unmixed, adorned through fourteen levels—completely refined and beautified.

The seventh post is the post of *Salah* (righteousness). The essential element of virtue is that the heart of a person's nafs becomes adorned nineteen times. This is the point at which the perfected human is formed. The perfect human is a possessor of guidance (irshad). They are endowed with insight in every respect. They are the true possessors of virtue (Boran, 2025).

Therefore, virtue is a beauty that Allah grants us as a gift as the result of effort — a beauty known only to those who experience it. Are you asking about happiness? It is possible only through virtue. Only those who are virtuous are happy in proportion to their virtue. To live in happiness is to live in virtue.

The Institution of the Spiritual Guide (*Murshid*): The Continuity of Spiritual Guidance

The Tradition of the Spiritual Guide (*Murshid*) and Guidance (*Irshad*)

Every beautiful thing begins with the wish to reach Allah. Then, a need for a spiritual guide (murshid) inevitably surrounds the person. An inner desire arises so strongly that repentance and pledging allegiance to a spiritual guide (murshid) become the primary goal of the inner world. The special prayer of need (salaat-ul hajat) is performed, and Allah Almighty shows the spiritual guide (murshid). What is desired is to be united with Allah, to reach Him, to become one of His awliya (awliya), and through the wish to reach Allah, one ultimately attains the intended destination—the post of religious guide (irshad) (Boran, 2025).

This principle is explained in Surah Al Imran, verse 31: "Say: 'If you love Allah then take an allegiance to me, for Allah to love you and replace your sins with good. And Allah is

Oft-Forgiving (Replacing your sins into good), Most Merciful (Acting in His Name Rahim, Sending Light Rahmet)”. And in Surah Al-Ma’idah, verse 35, it is stated: "O you who believe (who wish their spirit to reach Allah and wish total submission to Him)! Be the owners of (the 2nd) takwa (piety) towards Allah and seek the Means that will make you reach Him. And and fight in His Way that you may have salvation."

When one kneels before the spiritual guide (murshid) appointed by Allah and repents, it is then discovered that everything gains meaning, and that behind the existence of all things and of the person themselves lies a hidden wisdom. Life, once a burden and a hardship, becomes something one deeply loves to live. All the commands of Allah turn into inexhaustible delights. It is then understood that Allah is the greatest Friend. Happiness is experienced in all its dimensions.

A Spiritual Guide (*Murshid*) in Every Era: Historical Continuity

The critical question is this: Is there a murshid in every era? The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the last of the prophets (nabis) (Al-Ahzab 40). No prophet will come after him. However, Allah Almighty has declared that the institution of religious guide (irshad) will continue until the Day of Resurrection. In every era, the imam of the era is the highest-ranking murshid. All prophets were the imams of their respective times. In the periods when there are no prophets, Allah Almighty appoints one among the messengers (rasuls) of the nations as the imam of that era (As-Sajdah 24).

The imam of the era is the one who delivers guidance (hidayah), while the messengers of the nations and the saint guides serve means to guidance (hidayah). Allah Almighty declares that He continuously sends His messengers to every nation in every era and that He does not punish a people without first sending a messenger to them. Surah Al-Mu’minun, 44: “Then We sent Our Messengers in succession.” Surah An-Nahl, 36: “And I swear, We have raised (brought to life, charged with a duty) in every nation a Messenger.” Surah Al-Isra, 15: “And We never tormented (punished) until We sent a Messenger.” Surah Ibrahim, 4: “And We did not send any Messenger but with the language of his people, so that he might explain to them clearly (by their own language).”

Fourteen centuries ago, what did the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) teach all his companions? The answer is given in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 151: “Thus We have sent among you a Messenger (a Prophet) from among you so that he may read (and explain) to you Our Verses and purify you (and eliminate all your vicer souls’ hearts) and teaches you the Book and Wisdom and teaches you that which you did not know (beyond Wisdom).”

Before us stands an institution of learning and practice. None of the Companions, when the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) passed to the Rahma (mercy) of the Most Merciful, said, “He was my only guide (murshid); I will not follow anyone else.” They first followed Abu Bakr, then Umar, then Uthman, and then Ali. They are called "al-Khulafa’ al-Rashidun" (the rightly guided caliphs), those endowed with the authority of hidaya (irshad). After the Companions came the tabi’un, who followed the Companions; and the generations after them followed the tabi’un.

The Methodology of Reaching a Spiritual Guide (*Murshid*)

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said regarding this matter: “After me, no prophets (nabis) will come. Prophethood has ended with me. But after me, caliphs and imams will come. Whoever obeys them has obeyed me, and whoever rebels against them has rebelled against me.” (Al-Bukhārī). “Those who will give life to your spirit will come; seek them out and find them. Whoever does not follow the imam of his time dies in a state of ignorance.” “Follow my Sunnah and the path of the Rashidun (righteous and guiding) Caliphs who will come after me.” (Abū Dāwūd, Melahim, 1.) “In every age, there will be among my ummah those who obey Allah and strive in goodness.” (Al-Albānī).

Not everyone who pledges allegiance to a murshid benefits from irshad. Benefiting from it depends on one’s wish to reach Allah. A person who wishes to reach Allah receives twelve favors and begins the dhikr. Through dhikr, the lights of rahma penetrate the heart and create khushu' (humility) (awe-khushu). Those who possess khushu' (humility) are granted the authority to ask Allah for their murshid through the special prayer of need (salaat-ul hajat). In Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 45, Allah says: "And seek (special) assistance (from Allah) with patience and Prayer (the Desire prayer)! And truly it (asking Allah about a Murshid/guide who will make them reach Allah with Desire prayer) is extremely hard except for the owners of reverence (2% of light of mercy accumulation in the soul’s heart through the praise of the Name of Allah)." And in verse 46: "(These owners of reverence are those) who are certain that they are going to meet with their Lord (while they are alive) and that they shall return to Him (after death as well)."

What is himma (blessing)? Islam means surrendering to Allah — the surrender of the ruh, the physical body, the nafs, and the *irada* (will) to Allah. In such a design, it becomes clear that there is a bridge between human beings and the goal they are meant to reach. That bridge is the murshid. The spiritual guide is the helping light, the aiding illumination, through whom Allah’s material and spiritual blessings reach the seeker — the one who takes a person from the point of nothingness, raises them toward Allah, enables them to reach Him, and perfects them in the degrees of maturity. Himmah (blessing) is a magnificent bestowal from Allah.

The Way to Attain Sainthood: The Practical Dimension

What Is the Concept of Sainthood (*Wilāyah*)?

“Wali” is a word that means “friend.” The word awliya is the plural form of wali, but in Turkish, it has come to be used as a singular term. The saints of Allah are called awliya. We say, “Rumi? He is a wali (saint). Hacı Bayram Veli is a wali (saint). Yunus is a wali.” Allah is waiting for us. All beauties are for us; all happiness is for us. Allah Almighty did not create us in vain. He has prepared us to receive every positive blessing that comes from Him. He is always with us. We must strive to feel His presence.

What one asks from Allah is only a choice — a choice in the path of Allah. And this is a choice on the path of happiness: to wish to reach Allah. Allah Almighty says: “With only a single wish, I will bring you to happiness. I am your Friend, and I will make you one of My

awliya. I will be pleased with you, and you will be pleased with Me.” How should one wish this? “O Almighty Allah! Just as there are so many of Your returned awliya—those who have returned their ruh to You—please let my ruh return to You before I die. Include me among Your awliya.” Whoever carries this wish sincerely in their heart has already reached the first stage of friendship with Allah (Boran, 2025).

Allah Almighty declares in Surah Yunus, verses 62–64: “Surely no fear comes upon the saints (awliya) of Allah nor do they grieve, do they? They are the believers (they became âmenû, who wished spirit to reach Allah before death) and became the owners of taqwa (piety). For them are glad tidings in the life of the present world and the Hereafter. No change can there be in the Words of Allah. This is indeed Fevzu’l Azîm (the Supreme Success).”

Testimonies of the Great Saints (*Awliyā*)

Throughout Islamic history, great awliya have emphasized that welayah (sainthood) is a matter of sincere wish. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “Whoever feels love for reaching Allah, Allah too loves to deliver him to Himself. And whoever dislikes reaching Allah, Allah also dislikes bringing him to Himself.” (Bukhari, Vol. 12, Hadith 2043).

Yunus Emre says: “*Welayah* (Sainthood) is a wish; for the one who wishes, it is a wedding feast. O Yunus, surrender your spirit to your Beloved (Allah); why do you still feed this body? The arrow of death will surely reach.” Imam al-Ghazali (PBUH) said: “Know the love of Allah as your only friend; let the purpose of your journey be to reach Him.” Khwaja Ahmad Yasawi said: “Those who wish to reach the Truth (Haqq) unceasingly remember Him by chanting Hu day and night with their very nafs.” ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani said: “The friends of the Haqq (Truth) have been at the very source of knowledge; they have reached their Lord.”

Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi said: “O you who raise your hands in prayer—who gave you the strength to ask, the hands to lift in du'a (supplication)? Abandon your own desires, and seek only Him! Let your only wish be Him.” Najm al-Din Kubra said: “Migration (hijrah) is the departure of the person from the homeland of the body toward the homeland of the spirits (ruh). The perfected one is he who has attained union with Allah.” Imam Rabbani said: “The ascent of the ruh to its original station is possible only through the death attained before dying. Blessed indeed are those who elevate their nafss to this degree while still alive.” Said Nursi said: “I am mortal; I do not desire what is mortal. I am weak; I do not desire what is weak. I have surrendered my ruh to the Most Merciful; I desire none other than Him.”

The Path Leading to Sainthood (Welayah): Practical Steps

Everything begins with the wish to reach Allah. Then, a person becomes surrounded by the need for a murshid. They perform the special prayer of need (*salat-ul hajat*) and ask Allah to show them their murshid. Allah surely shows the spiritual guide to them—provided that the person is worthy of it; that is, that they ask sincerely from the heart. At this stage, the distinction is not about the purity or impurity of people’s hearts, for in the beginning, everyone’s heart is utterly dark, filled entirely with afat (vices).

In Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 257, Allah Almighty declares that He is the Friend of those who wish to reach Him and that He brings them out of darkness into light: "Allah is the "Wali" (Protecting Friend) of those who believe (who are âmenû, those who wish spirit to reach Allah before death). He brings them (their souls' hearts) out of the darkness into the light..." The transition from darkness to light signifies the purification and cleansing of the nafs' afat.

The purification of the nafs begins with repentance and pledging allegiance to a murshid. In parallel with the purification of the nafs, the ruh ascends through the seven heavenly floors, reaches the Divine Essence of Allah, and becomes annihilated in Him. The person then becomes a returned wali (who returned his ruh to Allah). Here, the stages of ascension come to an end, and the stages of exaltation begin. As one continues dhikr, they advance through the posts of Fana fi'Allah (union with Allah), Baqa bi'Allah (state of permanent existence with Allah), Zuhd (Dhikr more than half the day), Muhsinun (One who submits his physical body to Allah), Ulul al-Albab (those who have wisdom or good understanding), Ikhlas (To be a righteous servant), and Salah (righteousness). Through this journey, the person ultimately surrenders their physical body, their nafs, and their irada (will) to Allah, and becomes one of the righteous (Boran, 2025).

The Universality of Sainthood: Can Everyone Become a Saint (Awliyā)?

Is Sainthood Open to Everyone? Common Misconceptions

Becoming a wali is often regarded in our time as something impossible. People say, "There used to be awliya hundreds of years ago—how could there be awliya in this age? It is not easy for anyone to become one." Yet Allah Almighty does not say so. In Surah Ash-Shura, verse 13, He declares: "Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills, and whoever returns (wishes to return the spirit during life) to Him, He will turn (return the spirit during life) to Himself."

Whoever wishes to reach Allah, Allah says, "The rest belongs to Me." He guarantees that He will cause that person's ruh to reach Himself. At the moment the ruh returns Him, that person becomes one of Allah's returned awliya. In Turkish, the word wali is expressed as returned, meaning "one who has reached." Returned where? To Allah. And what has returned? The ruh.

Qur'anic Perspective: Sainthood as an Obligation

It must be remembered that the Holy Qur'an makes the reaching of the ruh to Allah obligatory upon us twelve times. From the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to all the awliya, they have all invited people to wish to reach Allah. This shows that sainthood is not a special state reserved for a few chosen individuals but rather an obligatory goal prescribed for every believer.

The continuation of verse 13 in Surah Ash-Shura is highly significant: "Whoever turns to Allah, Allah will turn (return the rapirit during life) to Himself." This statement reveals that welayah is both democratic and meritocratic. Lineage, ancestry, ethnicity, geographic location, or social status play no role whatsoever. The only criterion is a sincere turning toward Allah.

Simplicity and Accessibility

Now it should be reflected upon: with just a single wish, Allah rewards you with eternal happiness in this world and in Paradise. Could there be a greater Friend? One must simply wish to reach Allah; the rest will be accomplished by that Great Friend Himself. Could anything be easier?

This simplicity is a hallmark of the universal message of Islam. Allah does not set burdensome or unattainable goals for His servants. On the contrary, He makes the simplest wish—a sincere desire of the heart—a gate leading to eternal happiness. This is both a manifestation of Allah’s *rahma* (mercy) and a testament to the universal accessibility of His religion.

The democratization of sainthood is the rejection of elitist interpretations. To become a wali, one does not need extraordinary intelligence, exceptional abilities, noble lineage, or the ability to perform miracles. Only three things are required: first, to wish to reach Allah sincerely; second, to repent and pledge allegiance to the murshid shown by Allah; and third, to engage in dhikr and experience the process of purification of the nafs. These three steps are within the reach of everyone.

Discussion: A Holistic Evaluation

The four dimensions examined in this study—becoming a virtuous person, the institution of the murshid, the path to sainthood, and the universality of sainthood—are in fact different aspects of a single truth. These dimensions demonstrate the holistic nature and inner coherence of Islamic spirituality.

As seen in the discussion on becoming a virtuous person, virtue is not an innate quality but a state acquired through the purification of the nafs. This demonstrates that Islam’s view of the human being is dynamic and developmental. No matter how unfavorable one’s condition may be, every person possesses the potential for transformation and spiritual growth. The means for realizing this potential is dhikr, the method is the purification of the nafs, and the guide is the murshid.

As shown in the discussion on the institution of the murshid, murshid in Islam has continued as an unbroken chain from the Prophet to the present day. This continuity is not accidental but part of a divine plan. In every era and among every nation, there have been Allah’s messengers and awliya. This is a manifestation of Allah’s *rahma* toward His servants—no one has ever been left without *hidaya* (guidance).

As understood in the discussion on the path to *welayah* (sainthood), this path is not complex but simple. It begins with a wish (the wish to reach Allah), continues with repentance (pledge of allegiance), and matures through dhikr. This simplicity is a manifestation of Allah’s *rahma* toward His servants. If the path to *welayah* were complicated and incomprehensible, only an intellectual elite could attain it. Yet because it is simple, people of all levels can reach it.

As emphasized in the discussion on the universality of *welayah*, this path is open to everyone. Time, place, race, language, gender, and social status are no barriers. The only condition is sincerity. This is one of the finest examples of the universal message of Islam. The religion is not confined to any particular group or era; it speaks to all humanity and to all times.

The meeting point of these four dimensions is the wish to reach Allah. This wish is the starting point of the entire journey. Without it, one can neither become a virtuous person, nor reach a *murshid*, nor become a *wali*. But if this wish exists, everything else is under Allah's guarantee. The promise in Surah Ash-Shura, verse 13, is clear: "Whoever turns to Allah, Allah will turn (return the spirit during life) to Himself."

In the contemporary context, the significance of this teaching becomes even greater. The spiritual crisis, loss of meaning, and existential emptiness experienced by modern humanity can be alleviated through the solutions offered by Islamic spirituality (Ayten, 2022). Becoming a virtuous person is not merely an individual achievement but also a social necessity. When societies are composed of virtuous individuals, peace and justice manifest.

Conclusion

This study has examined the concept of *welayah* (sainthood) in Islamic spirituality from a multidimensional perspective. Through a comprehensive analysis of the Qur'an, the Prophetic Hadiths, and the Sufi literary tradition, it has sought to answer the questions of what *welayah* is, how it is attained, and to whom it is open.

The key findings are as follows: First, becoming a virtuous person is not an innate quality but a state attained through the purification of the *nafs*. This process begins with *dhikr* and gradually ascends to the posts of *ulul al-albab* (those who have wisdom or good understanding), *ikhlas* (To be a righteous servant), and *salah* (righteousness) (Boran, 2025). Second, the institution of spiritual guidance (*murshidiyyah*) has continued uninterrupted from the Prophet to the present day, as Allah appoints guides for His servants in every era. Third, the path to *welayah* is simple and clear: the wish to reach Allah, allegiance to a *murshid*, and the practice of *dhikr*. Fourth, *welayah* is open to everyone — there are no social, ethnic, or geographical boundaries.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in presenting the dispersed knowledge on *welayah* within a systematic framework. Virtue ethics, spiritual mentorship, and mystical union have been integrated under a single coherent paradigm. This holistic perspective demonstrates that Islam is not a fragmented but an all-encompassing and unified religion.

From a practical perspective, the study provides a concrete roadmap for individuals engaged in spiritual pursuit. It emphasizes that *welayah* is not an unattainable ideal but an achievable goal. This point is especially significant for contemporary Muslims, many of whom believe that spiritual perfection is no longer possible in their time and therefore make little effort toward it. This study demonstrates that such a belief is mistaken and that *welayah* is attainable at all times and in all places.

Methodologically, the study integrates classical Islamic sources with modern academic approaches. This allows it to maintain respect for the traditional Islamic sciences while also addressing the contemporary reader. Qur'anic verses and Hadiths have been employed meticulously as primary sources, while the sayings of great Sufi masters have been presented as supporting testimonies.

In conclusion, this study has shown that welayah in Islam is not merely an individual spiritual attainment but also a social necessity. Virtuous individuals contribute not only to their own happiness but also to the peace and harmony of society. Therefore, the path of welayah is a responsibility incumbent upon every Muslim. Wishing to reach Allah, repenting and pledging allegiance to the murshid, and engaging in *dhikr* (repetition of the Name of Allah) are not merely personal choices but practices ordained as obligations in Islam. This journey, which begins with a single sincere wish, leads to happiness in both this world and the Hereafter. May Allah make us all among His returned *awliya* (who returned his *ruh* to Allah).

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