

# Hamka's neo-sufism in the context modern society

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## Abstract

This article purposes to analyze and discuss the Hamka's neo-Sufism idea. It is related and contextualized to various problems that emerge in modern society, especially capitalistic industrialization, and hedonistic culture. This article states that Hamka's neo-Sufism aims to find true happiness and transcendence (*ma'rifatullah*). Through the practice of Hamka's neo-Sufism, it will protect a Muslim from all temptations for the interests of the accumulation of wealth and the pleasures of worldly life. Neo-Sufism persistently strengthens the spiritual quality of a Muslim, making one always aware of when dealing with changing life contexts.

**Keywords:** Hamka; neo-Sufism; Sufism; modern society; true happiness

## Introduction

Already well-known in the Indonesian Islamic thought scene, Prof. Dr. Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka) is seen as an expert in the field of modern Islamic esotericism (Taylor 2017). His work, entitled "Tasawuf Modern", is a *magnum opus* that contributes enlightenment to connoisseurs of Sufism. Through this important book, he introduces a different point of view, regarding the "path to the expanse of divine pleasure" (Ajunied 2017). The characteristic that distinguishes it from the treasures of most Sufism is the high appreciation of sharia and worldly life. For him, these two dimensions can be used as a medium to climb a higher spiritual ladder.

Through a deep intellectual odyssey, Hamka offers a new formulation of Sufism. Key terms such as *syariat*, *hakikat* and *makrifat*, as well as *zuhud*, gain new meanings that inspire not only among followers of the "tarekat" (Stjernholm 2009), but also the general public, especially those who live in urban areas (Rubaidi 2018). This new model of Sufism is considered quite accommodating to the times. Not only that, but it has also become a trend of religious behavior in modern society that is even compatible with industrial culture. Hamka's Sufism tends to be accepted by the public and more fluidly attracts the interest of people with various backgrounds and social statuses.

Many scholars are fascinated by Hamka's "intellectual alms". Muhammad Damami (2000), for example, refers to the concept of Hamka's Sufism as "positive Sufism" (*tasawuf positif*). It means that Sufism can be used as an inspiration to see Islam as a religion that is calm, beautiful and happy. Other scholars have commented that the work of this Sufi intellectual is of an ethical genre (Firdausi 2018). Modern Sufism is considered as a popular representation of "Akhlaqi Sufism" which developed in Nusantara. Even today, leading scholars such as Nurcholish Madjid (1995: 91), Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (2007: 16; 218), call him one of the pioneers of neo-Sufism, namely a new Sufism that is contrary to Islamic mysticism in the past (Howell 2012).

If there is a keyword that describes the distinctive taste of Hamka's Sufism, it is high optimism. The author of the novel "Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wick" (The Sinking of the Van Der Wick Ship) was able to capture a creative vision of the bright future of religion and religious communities. Imaginary inspiration regarding *izzu al-Islam wa al-Muslimin* has brilliantly raised the enthusiasm of the audience. Through his works, various problems on the dark side of religion can be gradually resolved. Fatalism, inferiority complex, acute obscurity, heresy, superstition, *shirk* and so on, Hamka tries to find solutions.

This is Hamka's contribution, if only summarized through the impressions that appear on the surface. Moreover, the philosophical meanings of the dimension of "Islamic esotericism" (Assad 2017) that have been constructed by this prominent poet have not been fully disclosed to the public. It is necessary to have deep inner understandings, explained and interpreted more clearly. It is important for readers to understand, what exactly is the orientation of Hamka's Sufism. As an author, it is clear he has certain goals (Ibrahim, Kadir and Majid 2012), both for himself, as well as everything that is about to be introduced to others. Since we are talking about "Islamic spiritualism orientation" then that will be the limit for our further discussion.

Azizah Rahmad and Abdul Salam Muhamad Shukri wrote an article entitled "Hamka's *Tasauf Modern: An Outlook on Happiness*" (Rahmad and Shukri 2018). This work is very relevant to the idea of happiness according to Hamka. Nevertheless, this article only describes how Hamka understands happiness, without further interpretation and contextualization of the context of contemporary society's life. In addition, this work does not use a neo-Sufism framework in understanding Hamka. Meanwhile, Wibowo and Luqman Hakim published "The Concept of Happiness According to Hamka in Tafsir al-Azhar" (Wibowo dan Hakim 2013). This work limits its studies only to the work of Tafsir al-Azhar and makes Hamka's works in the field of Sufism as a secondary source. In addition, the meaning of happiness, which is used as an object of study, is examined from the point of view of psychology. Meanwhile, Khairudin Aljunied authored "Reorienting Sufism: Hamka and Islamic Mysticism in the Malay World." (Aljunied 2016). This work analyzes analytically the context of modern society's life which Hamka's ideas and practices of Sufism are directed to respond it. According to him, Hamka offers fresh and inspiring arguments about Sufism. Nevertheless, this study is not too deep in discussing the meaning of happiness. In addition, although this study presents a discussion of in-depth social and historical contextualization, it seems that it has not yet reached the problem of hermeneutical exploration of various manuscripts by Hamka.

By relying on various recent studies on Hamka and the idea of happiness, this article wishes to fill in the various gaps in existing studies. This article aims to discuss Hamka's neo-Sufism ideas when dealing with various problems that arise in modern society, especially those related to capitalistic industrialization and hedonistic culture. This article arguably states that Hamka's neo-Sufism aims to find true happiness and transcendence (*ma'rifatullah*). Through the practice of Hamka's neo-Sufism, it will protect a servant from all temptations for the interests of the accumulation of wealth and the pleasures of worldly life. Neo-Sufism persistently enhances the spiritual quality of a servant, making him always relevant when dealing with changing life contexts.

## **Hamka and the Discourse of Sufism**

Existentially, humans are faced with the historical reality that they are alien figures (Gödelek 2007). Humans are not only alien to others, but also unknown to themselves. Alienation is the biggest challenge that may not be solved (Hristovitch 2012). Those who are unable to answer their own problem (alienation) tend to run away. They go away from reality and draw closer to temporary solace (*fana*). The mortal world has become a life orientation, transcending the true meaning of life itself. This alienation problem even infects our youth. Those who are considered to be the owners of the people's leadership in the future, have slipped into the abyss of emptiness. Temporary life fails to find meaning, only because it is lulled by mere jokes. It is true what God said through His holy book, "Life in this world is just a joke." It is as if the life of the world is only in this world, while the eternity in the afterlife is never realized.

Hamka and all his teachings are actually an antithesis that can provide an answer as to which way this

life should be taken. Through the advantages of his religious creativity, he reformulates various insights that are extracted from Islamic religious teachings, then expresses them through popular language that can be understood by all levels of society. In the introduction to his book, Hamka said,

“We are grateful because we have been able to serve readers, have been able to fulfill our obligations to fellow believers, fellow human beings... If compiling this book can already be called valuable, there are many more secrets of Islam that need to be explained, spoken in our language, so that those who cannot know Arabic will also know secret religion. So the price of this work is still very small.” (Hamka, 1990: vi-vii).

Hamka teachings, called Sufism. Sufism is one way that is able to refresh the parched soul of modern men. In its most famous sense, Sufism is the activity of purifying oneself and then setting foot on the path to the divine presence. (Harun Nasution, 1973: 56-58). In terminology it is also called Sufism (or *tasawwuf*), because it comes from the word *shuf* or simple clothes made of sheep skin. The symbol of simplicity illustrates that Sufism is not luxurious in silk robes or other expensive fabrics. Sufism is the adherents of simplicity (Waines 2003). That is all done in every breath of life, just because of his love for Allah (Annemarie Schimmel, 2000: 17).

Sufism in this case is opposite to all forms of worldly entertainment which are tiring and seem to have no orientation regarding the vision of life in the hereafter (Muedini 2015). Entertainment, which is only entertainment, is not a permanent solution to the problem of human existence (Hamzah 2016). Contemporary trends, styles, fashions, and lifestyles tend to lead to materialism which marginalizes aspects of spirituality, especially religiosity. Not to mention that all of that is just a commodity in its position in the midst of the prevailing economic system. It seems that humans are so fond of accumulating money, to the extent that they involve themselves in greedy behavior. Humans do not care about each other when humanity is undermined, even though in truth they have lost because they are trapped in pleasures (*wahm*) that have no end, all day long, all their lives. In the end they do not realize that their self-awareness is out of control, so they act like animals that live only by instinct. Man no longer uses his mind, especially his heart to weigh this life, because the purity of his soul has been polluted by sinful lust.

Hamka in his essay entitled “Tasauf, Perkembangan dan Pemurniannya” once commented that,

“That’s how it is in today’s world. Everywhere has arisen a feeling of dissatisfaction with this progress of material life. Airplanes, radars, flying saucers, bombs, more powerful hydrogen bombs, radio, television, and various new means of income for the luxury and pleasures of life, all of which can be mastered, but the self is still lacking. Living according to mere material orders, itself has caused, boredom. During the day, hard work seeks profit and wealth with the motto: ‘Time is money!’ But it turns out that fellow human beings have been fighting over time to make as much money for themselves, even if it harms others. Whoever is not quick to catch up with time, he is knocked over the edge and ends his life for that.” (1984: 14).

Because of that, then Hamka, through his reflections on Sufism, tries to offer healing drugs that lead to holiness (Azmiyana, Kadir and Yuningsih 2012). The paradigm of a sufistic life that is full of simplicity (*zuhud*) and is able to bring oneself to the heights of reason, is not a temporary solace, but opens the door to the horizon that shows the straight path to true happiness. he said,

“*Tasauf* at first appeared was sacred in meaning, namely to improve morals, ...During the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW lived, when people became ‘Sufi’...Both the Prophet and his four companions, or the thousands of them, were all of high morals, virtuous, able to suffer from hunger and thirst, and if they gain wealth, the wealth is not attached to his heart, so he does not feel sad when the treasure runs out. Moreover, the atmosphere at that time, the association, the location of the country, everything made a simple life commonplace.” (Hamka, 1990: 4-5).

In the first chapter of his writing “Pengantar tentang Tasauf”, he fulfills his work with a sentence that is so full of wisdom, that Sufism is

“Getting out of disgraceful manners and entering commendable manners.’ With the word ‘modern’, we reaffirm the original intent of *tasawuf*, namely, to cleanse the soul, educate, and elevate the degree of mind; emphasizing all greed and fighting lust that is more than the need for self-peace.” (1990: 7).

In modern words, Sufism is expected to participate in providing guidance to the realm of modern life (Gill 2013). The modern era is clearly different from the past. Changing times towards modernity is a necessity, while the spirit of Islamic teachings is something that must be maintained (Milani 2015). Therefore, without having to defend the classicism and antiquity of Sufism, substantive values regarding noble character are expected to be the answer to the problems of modernity. Hamka’s modern Sufism is an alternative way, which is able to provide light, for all the dead ends of modernism which directs human spirituality towards shallow atheism.

According to Hamka’s opinion, true happiness will only come later, in the afterlife village, after the balance of our sins and rewards has been decided by a Judge who is Most Just and Wise. Therefore, “denial” (*kufri*) is actually just a fabricated thing, by those who insult their own humanity.

### Hamka’s Sufi Path

There have been three types of Sufism throughout Islamic history. The first Sufism, is true Sufism, practiced by Muhammad SAW and his pious companions. Then the second is Sufism which began to develop. There are those who stay on the right track, because they carry out God’s laws. But some of the others, actually go too far like people who are in love and are no longer able to distinguish between right and wrong, faith and disbelief, monotheism and *shirk* (El-Rouayheb 2010). The last one is Sufism which tries to follow the path taken by the Prophet, even though in a different (modern) space and time. Usually, scholars call it neo-Sufism or new Sufism (Voll 2008). Actually this type of Sufism wants to benefit from all prophetic concepts and practices. This last typology of Sufism is offered by Hamka (through modern Sufism) to all of us who live today.

First, is true Sufism which became part of the life of the Prophet. The teachings of Sufism in the Prophet’s era were not referred to as Sufism or *tasawuf* (Far and Bozorgi 2013). Even those who followed the religion of Muhammad when Allah’s revelations had been gradually revealed, never called themselves Sufis. It is indeed commonly known by all Muslims around the world today, that the figure of Muhammad is the prototype of the perfect human from the Islamic point of view. Ethically, this Abdillah’s son is also called a noble role model. That is the main reason why he is called the truest Sufi teacher. In religious affairs and the ethical practice of the Qur’an, he is the best. In Islamic historical records, one of his friends asked his closest person (Aisyah), “What is the moral of the Prophet?” One of the Prophet’s wives replied, “The morality of the Prophet is the Qur’an.”

When Muhammad is referred to as the living Qur’an, then in fact the practice of Sufism at that time was carrying out Islamic teachings perfectly (Thomson 1945). Nevertheless, there are features that are clearly not shared by ordinary humans like us. The prophet and the perfection of his life are always controlled by a supernatural figure, the angel who gives revelation named Jibril. Jibril always accompanies, advises, conveys divine information, and controls this best subject chosen by Allah, so that he always treads the straight path. Thus, including how to get the perfection of the mystical achievement of Islam with full totality, then Muhammad is someone who has a guarantee. That said, according to several narrations that tell about the *mi’raj* event - the journey of the Prophet from the al-Aqsa mosque to *Sidrah al-Muntaha’* to meet God - it is stated that the Prophet actually met Allah SWT directly without cover (*laisa wara’ al-hijab*). Thus, the culmination of all the peaks of mystical experience in Islamic history, only the Prophet Muhammad was able to reach it. Transcendence that is essential in the last Abrahamic religious tradition, has fulfilled the life of a human child with the title *al-amin* (one who can be trusted).

Meanwhile, positive overflows from the attainment of transcendence manifest in everyday life. The terms regarding the best society (*khair al-ummah*) and ideal state (*baladun thayyibatun warabbun ghafur*), land of peace, prosperity and God’s forgiveness) emerged, as a manifestation of transcendence. Meanwhile, at the individual level, the term *akhlaq al-karimah* or noble character is also published. Thus, whether we realize it or not, Sufism has shown its quality in the midst of concrete life.

Second, is Sufism that has developed. It is considered developing, because Sufism has become a trend in itself, as one of the currents in understanding and implementing the teachings of Islam. Sufism, it turns out, is also a synthesis of various traditions, religions, customs, and appreciation outside Islamic countries, such as India, Persia, Ancient Egypt and so on. (Knysh 2014). 'Eastern' civilizations have made great contributions to how to leave the noise of the world and solitude in religious contemplation (*uzlah*). Therefore, this Sufism also appears as a movement against other traditions that are considered contradictory, such as hedonism and corruption. Sufi people usually only wear wool (*shuf*) as clothing. By wearing clothes made of the cheapest and unused materials, maybe they want to show the public that they have a simple lifestyle (*zuhud*). In the midst of a part of society that is engulfed in the frenzy of luxury, money mad alias materialism, having too much fun, then the elites and rulers are becoming more and more tyrannical and corrupt, then some others are becoming aware that this is not the right way of life. All of these behaviors that are blamed are considered to be contrary to religious teachings, because they forget God for the sake of all things that are perishable, moreover, to fulfill the overflow of misleading desires.

Through this practice of asceticism (*zuhud*), the tradition of Sufism has developed rapidly. Like all things that are currently popular, Sufism gradually becomes a craze in society. It was also noted that this activity underwent structuring and institutionalization. Sufism is not just a way to get closer to God, or an ascetic attitude among those who are tired of excessive servitude to worldly life, or just a style in carrying out religious life, but a stable religious institution. (Lewisohn 1998). During this period, the terms Sufi disciple and Sufi teacher emerged (*mursyid*). As a teacher, each *murshid* has his own Sufism curriculum. This special curriculum is referred to as *tariqah* (Trimingham 1998).

There are many *tariqah* of Sufism. Some are good, in the sense of having a vision that enlightens humanity, some are the opposite. However, it is necessary to specifically note here that, asceticism in certain contexts, leads to an attitude of life that is too fatalistic (Sidani 2019). Total surrender seems to be the main requirement, so that he can be called a Sufi, who only serves God. Because life is fully lived with the role of God's servant, the stamina to provide a proportional response to worldly life (such as social, political, economic, cultural downturns and so on), becomes completely meaningless. Some of them are even intoxicated with the wine of mystical consciousness. Or, engaging in theological-philosophical (scholastic) debates without a clear end. In this context, excessive asceticism, fatalism, intoxicating mysticism and philosophical Sufism (*tasawuf falsafi*) do not really care about the rules of sharia. (Smirnov 1992). Whereas sharia, one of its roles is to provide balanced attention, both for religious-spiritual life, as well as in worldly life.

Nevertheless, there is also Sufism which pays proper attention to worldly life. Between religion and world affairs, *sharia* and *mu'amalah*, are well grasped by the essence of Sufistic teachings. This is clearly different from the fatalist, mystical and philosophical-scholastic schools of Sufism. This model of Sufism appreciates a good relationship with God, as well as with fellow human beings. In addition, while the previous schools of Sufism tended to oppose sharia, this current of Sufism is very much in harmony with sharia. Another unique thing that needs to be highlighted is that the manifestation of religious appreciation is manifested in the practice of daily life, with the light of religious ethics full of benevolent values. Akhlaq is the dominant color, which fills the whole picture of the life of a Sufi who belongs to this school. Some scholars call it *sufi akhlaqi*, while his school is called ethical sufism or *tasawuf akhlaqi*.

Third, is new Sufism or commonly recognized as neo-Sufism (Sarr 2019). Substantively, neo-Sufism wants to follow all the examples of the Prophet, both in worship and in the practice of a life full of virtues. Nevertheless, neo-Sufism does not mean to trap itself in Islamic romanticism which is too utopian. That is, even though times have changed, neo-Sufis do not have to try to do a total imitation of the situation and conditions at the time of the Prophet. And it feels like doing that is impossible. The modern era must be accepted first, as a natural circumcision. However, at the same time, the Islamic ethical values taught by the Prophet must be used as a guide in living this life. Therefore, neo-Sufism does not emphasize symbols and accessories alone, but the most essential Islamic ethics (Rafiuddin, Muhammad and Pauzi 2015). Once again, it is the Koran and al-Sunnah (or universal virtues and prophetic practices) that are the references for this model of Sufism, not the others.

From here, the question then is, does this neo-Sufism have implications for other Sufism practices? It is clear that neo-Sufism is more of an antithesis to various practices of Sufism that are considered to deviate from Islam. This understanding wants to correct all Sufistic activities that seem to justify shirk, superstition and *bid'ah*. For example, philosophical Sufism (and *kalam*) often alludes to divinity in ways that are too vulgar and unethical. Apart from that, there is also a typical mystical Sufism which often mentions the problems of *hulul* and *ittihad*. In other words, self and God are considered to experience existential unity, so that the most appropriate sentence to describe a certain mystical achievement, does not consider the issue of right-wrong, permissible or not, monotheism-*shirk* (*shari'a*). In fact, the Prophet, who is considered as a human being who has the best piety, never insulted the majesty of Allah, even though he experienced certain conditions of mystical ecstasy, for example when he was receiving revelations.

On the other hand, neo-Sufism acts as a new energy filler for the revival of Muslims. If the previous Sufism fell into total fatalism, then this new Sufism provides a proportional place for the existence of freedom of human will. Getting closer to Allah can also be realized through activities that demand human creativity, as long as they do not go outside the corridors of Islamic law and ethical values themselves. In this matter, Imam al-Ghazali is considered a figure who has a big role, in appreciating the Shari'a and *akhlaq al-karimah* in the life of Muslims. He is also seen as a Sufi who moderates the practice of philosophical-theological Sufism which tends to overly appreciate freedom (free thinker) as well as mystical Sufism which completely erodes the rules of sharia. This made a prominent Muslim scholar, Nurcholish Madjid, write his impression on al-Ghazali's very inspirational thoughts. According to him, "One of al-Ghazali's merits which is unanimously recognized by the Islamic world is his effort and success in uniting the two great camps of external orientation and spiritual orientation." (1997: 86). This Ghazalian doctrine can be read well by a visionary scholar, Ibn Taimiyyah. For Ibn Taimiyyah, Sufism which upholds sharia and morality is the most important capital in reviving the noble Islamic civilization (1384H: 19-21). Thus, neo-Sufism is one of the new streams in Sufism, which emphasizes the importance of sharia and all the esoteric dimensions in it.

In neo-Sufism, all Muslims have the most basic right and are free to think and act. It is just that these two things are limited by the prohibition to betray Allah, especially insulting His majesty. Meanwhile, another aspect emphasized in neo-Sufism is upholding noble morals and always having a positive (optimistic) outlook in facing the future. Anyone who accepts neo-Sufism is not weak, fatalistic, negatively resigned and excessively ascetic. A neo-Sufi, able to weigh religious (spiritual) and worldly life proportionally. In the language of Nurcholish Madjid, every adherent of neo-Sufism has a tendency to think, understand and act with balance, proportionality and equilibrium (*tawâzun*). (1995: 91).

It is this kind of Sufism that Hamka seems to desire. In his work entitled "Tasauf: Perkembangan dan Pemurniannya" it is written that, "So it remains my inquiring impression that Islamic Sufism originates from the Qur'an and Hadith" (1984: 208). Then, once again he emphasized that, "The Qur'an remains the Qur'an, it is there that all thoughts that go astray for the Muslim community return" (1984: 208). From this, we can understand with careful and careful consideration that the two sources of reference to Islamic teachings illustrate their submission to sharia aspects. In very beautiful lyrics, he tries to elaborate various thoughts, from sharia experts, Muslim philosophers, and Sufism experts, to become a series of ideas that are very inspiring.

"Humans have disagreed about what they see and tell  
All confessed that they were the ones who got it  
So, take the words endorsed by Nash  
Either from Allah, or from the Lord of all mankind  
Al-Ghazali, Ibnu Taimiyah, Ibnu Qayyim  
Ibnu 'Araby, Ibnu Sabi'in, Ibnu Al-Faridh  
Jalaluddin Rumi, and others." (1984: 210).

In this context, sharia for Hamka is a means to moderate all aspects of human humanity, both for reason in the mind, and mystical whispers in the inner space (heart). With *sharia*, the mind and heart get a solid

position. Because it stands on the right foundation, not inequality, turmoil and tossed around by the big waves of human passions. What Hamka understands is the same as what Nurcholish Madjid emphasized, that the balance between the outer and inner dimensions in Islam is very important. With such a beautiful allegory, Hamka explained,

“Because between the *Shari'ah* and the essence are the outer and the inner; as in the wood of the tree, heartwood and sapwood. The heartwood is the heart of the wood, and the sapwood is the bark... A wood that only has the heart left, is not thickened, or has no skin, does not last long. And the wood that is part of the heartwood is crushed, and only the skin is left, is not strong against the hurricane.” (1984: 212).

What he describes as *Shari'a*, is simply like bark. As we understand that, every skin will appear before our eyes. Therefore, it is considered as an external dimension. As for nature (or Sufism), he explained the core of the wood. Each core lies deep. Therefore, it is seen as an inner dimension. Hamka explained that *Shari'a* and reality must go hand in hand, just as bark is attached to its essence. Then later, a tree grows thickly, with lush green leaves and pleasing to the eye, its delicious fruit can be enjoyed. The image of a delicious fruit is to express the attainment of *taqarrub ila Allah*, in other words, that is *ma'rifatullah*.

Apart from sharia issues, Sufism for Hamka is not a stumbling block for the revival of Islam. Precisely with a sufistic breath, every Muslim has certainty, confidence, firmness, and courage to face life's challenges. In line with what was expressed by Ibn Taimiyyah, Hamka understands Sufism or Neo-Sufism as the best way to seek *ijtihad*. Neo-Sufism can be controlled or self-controlled, when it wants to make serious efforts in order to answer various contemporary and heretical problems. From this it actually appears that Neo-Sufism is like the teachings of Islam itself. Like a wide and deep ocean without end, blessing the creatures that live in it, as well as providing opportunities for fishermen who try to earn a living. Therefore, according to Hamka, Sufism is not justified asceticism in an oppressive and self-defeating way. Meditate and self-isolation (*uzlah*) for introspection and serving the inner solitude of individual to find true inspiration from the Divine Rabbi, must also be manifested in everyday social-human life. In short, neo-Sufism does not serve individualism, but socialism.

This is the Sufism that Hamka understands if we refer to the writings of his own pen. These primary works provide a brief description or summary of the thoughts of the author of the novel “Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah” regarding neo-Sufism which is framed by the term “Modern Sufism” (Tasauf Modern). Nevertheless, this summary does not give relief at all, if it does not try to answer more fundamental questions regarding Hamka's neo-Sufism. The question revolves around “What really is Hamka's main motivation to tread the path of Islamic Sufism?” This question clearly concerns the problem of the orientation of the Sufi's religious life.

## Hamka, Sufism and Transcendence

The question regarding, “What exactly is the main motivation for someone to tread the Sufi path,” is comparable to the question “What exactly is the orientation of every human being in life in this world.” Is human life merely the life of the world, or is there another life that goes beyond worldly materialism? Indeed, philosophically this matter has become the object of discussion, discussion and debate that has no end. Even those who have the strongest opinion are actually not strong enough when faced with unsolved future mysteries. In fact, if every human being knew what would happen in the future, - at least being able to predict it with full confidence and firm faith, especially supported by the grace of the Most Transcendent - then he would be able to explain what is the purpose of the life he must live.

The term “approximately”, as is usual for every prediction, is only limited to the ability of human reason itself. It cannot be denied that every reasoning ability is relative. Relativism is an indication that every human being is negligent, needy, and wrong, but at the same time it also emphasizes that he is only a servant of God Almighty. Relativism is like a steep abyss without end for those who are filled with lust for insolence, while for wise humans, it is like signs that give direction, where this soul should be anchored. In literary expression, relativism means the longing of every human being for the ultimate truth. So, what is the meaning of longing? Is it confused, or is it a solid belief?

Presumably it is necessary to realize that, in this context, humans are the most unique figures. On the one hand he can question and argue about everything without any restrictions. But on the other hand, he is weak and helpless when he is guided by what is the most correct answer to all the questions he asks. In other words, as a being who is both unlimited and completely limited, humans stand between two choices in interpreting their lives, getting lost or accepting guidance, denying or affirming the truth, disbelieving or believing and so on.

Throughout the history of human civilization, it is recorded that at least those who like to celebrate confusion are philosophers. Philosophers from all over the country have noted that they are seen as more capable of dealing with abstract concepts. They are known as intellectuals who struggle with lofty words, not standing on the ground. For them, what is right can become wrong, what is wrong becomes right, what is bright becomes gray, those who are sure become doubtful, those who have faith become difficult to hold on to every belief and so on. Philosophical traditions at certain times have always been busy with ridiculous debates that will never end. In the period of scholasticism or scholasticism, for example, philosophers made people prefer to talk, deny, reject and fight, rather than be happy to accept the real truth. It is not surprising that relativism is the homeland of true philosophers.

Responding to this issue, in a cynical tone, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali said, "People are only interested in the ends of philosophy, but people don't dig down to the vein. Yet if you dig deep into your veins, philosophy will not gain a divine stand, it will only shake it" (Hamka, 1984: 133). A similar thing was also the stance of a philosopher in the heyday of the glorious Islamic civilization, Fakhruddin al-Razi. In his tired poetry, he emphasizes the anxiety of his soul as follows,

"The end of the progress of the mind is only self-binding  
The end of concern for nature's journey is only delusion  
Nothing we've found out from a lifetime of investigations  
Just collecting one person's words and the other"  
(Hamka, 1984: 134).

When humans do not know the true essence of life, they usually surrender themselves to God alone. Consequently, the steps taken in life are also a way of life that is *lillahi Rabbil 'Alamin*. There is no longer any obstacle to getting drunk because of sipping the wine of longing for the Real, because reason has submitted to the owner of the house in the bosom of every human being. Only Allah, as the Owner of the house of the heart is able to give one the gift of peace (*muthma'innah*) and turn around in real error. Regarding this issue, Hamka put forward his statement,

"The first is the philosopher. And the second is Sufi. Sometimes the two paths that are taken meet, and mostly it is the first that submits to the second. It is tiring to find reason and intelligence, only a part or a corner (relatively) is obtained, then it comes to complete self-surrender. They also enter the realm of Sufism. That is where they find satisfaction." (Hamka, 1984: 9)

As has been discussed by many experts, Sufism is a teaching about how each servant draws closer to his Lord. The purpose of Sufism (which means *taqarrub ila Allah*) is to find and, of course, to know God more deeply (*ma'rifatullahi*). For Hamka himself, for example, knowing the existence of God (*hadrat Rububiyyah*) is something that can lead to true happiness. he declared,

"Humans are eager to know. Because he came to this world totally ignorant (*la ta'lamuna syai'an*). If we can know something that we do not know, it feels good. There are two levels of pleasure. The first is *lazaat*, namely satisfaction. The two *sa'adahs*, namely happiness... The more one knows, the more the level of satisfaction rises and the deeper the feeling of happiness. That is why people who have more knowledge feel happier than people who lack knowledge." (Hamka, 1984: 141).

If humans know just a little bit can lead to true happiness, what if they know something that is Most Mysterious, like Allah SWT.? Of course, the happiness that will be achieved is clearly unlimited happiness. The ultimate truth always goes hand in hand with essential happiness as well. That's why maybe the Qur'an writes



in beautiful sentences, that every human being who feels *ma'rifatullah* is never overwhelmed by sadness and discouragement because of fear (*la tahzan wa la takhaf*). Hamka said,

“That is happiness that there is no happiness on it anymore. That is the end of all satisfaction. Because there is no Being who is more noble than Him. Even all that exists is glorious, is because of His glory. Yes, because he wanted.” (1984: 142).

These words are coupled with a very soul-stirring poem,

“Even though it is dark, the nature around us,  
the light shines in our souls,  
as long as our faces do not turn  
towards the nature of the Creator” (Ibid., 143).

Hamka himself has written a book, which actually describes at length the matter of happiness that we are currently studying. The book entitled “Tasawuf Modern” is an important overview of this discourse of happiness. More than just a discourse, the book is treatises on Hamka's orientation to Sufism (or neo-Sufism). The book is divided into twelve special chapters. These chapters include: 1. Opinions about Happiness; 2. Happiness and Religion; 3. Happy and Main; 4. Mental and Body Health; 5. Property and Happiness; 6. *Qana'ah*; 7. *Tawakkal*; 8. The happiness felt by Rasulullah SAW.; 9. *Ridha*'s relationship with the beauty of nature; 10. Happy Stairs; 11. Woe; 12 *Munajat*.

However, the author reclassifies the thematically exposed chapters into simpler themes. For example, the first is a summary of the characters' opinions about happiness; Second, regarding the orientation of neo-Sufism (about true happiness) in Hamka's opinion; Third are the obstacles and ways to overcome these obstacles.

For Hamka, important figures in the world of philosophy and Sufism, each has their own opinion about happiness. However, even though it is often associated with concrete (material and empirical) things, the term happiness is more of an abstract thing. As an object, it is often the subject of discussion of the mind. But the basics are indeed abstract from the start, - because they are hidden in the most subtle areas of the human soul - then what is abstract always has an abstract form. Unless indeed, try to examine happiness from the depths of the human heart itself. Like the sweetness of sugar, it is not only in the mind where it is located, but on the tongue which tastes and is firmly imprinted in the soul which feels satisfaction over the sweet taste.

First, the figures discussed by Hamka, such as Aristotle, Leo Tolstoy, Bertrand Russell, George Bernard Shaw to al-Ghazali and Muhammad Rasulullah SAW, all stated that happiness means the fruit of virtue, human dignity and piety and piety to Allah SWT. Indeed, this has its roots in happiness that is oriented towards religiosity, especially the noble religion of Islam.

In this modern world, where the attacks of thoughts and lifestyles are filled with the overflow of animal passions, nothing can counteract them, except by rethinking and realizing what is really the orientation of every human being's life. When we have been walking in an industrialization era where capitalism is glorified, then is it appropriate for inner happiness because of our love for Allah to be exchanged for the accumulation of profits that actually suck up the poor? Is happiness simply the possession of material things? As previously explained, it is clear that happiness is more a condition in the soul. Therefore, neo-Sufism (which is clothed in the modern term Sufism) for Hamka is a teaching that is contrary to the bestiality of capitalism. Not the system, but the behavior that tends to oppress and indulge in insolence.

In the 2020s, - where we are about 80 years apart when the teachings of Hamka were first disseminated - neo-Sufism is still relevant to our lives. In their study, Scheherazade S. Rehman and Hossein Askari may say that New Zealand is the most Islamic country, because it is considered the most prosperous, safe, peaceful, civilized, cultured and highly respects human dignity (Rehman dan Askari, 2012: 1-40). Unfortunately, they forget that there are many international scale companies that are headquartered and owned by people in developed countries such as the United States, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands (including New Zealand), which makes third world

countries, including countries -Poor Muslim countries, as the target market. Methods of investment, methods of production, ways of managing the economy - whether we realize it or not - have controlled the social system and structure of society (especially those who become market expansionists), control their way of life and culture, build a consumptive, greedy, forgetful mentality, and paradigm of life. Modest Islamic moral values. Perhaps this is the relevance of neo-Sufism in today's global capitalism.

In the political, social, and cultural context, anger still often adorns human life today. Prolonged wars in the name of controlling oil fields and expanding the arms market have not made humans more civilized. On the contrary, the military and intelligence aggression of the superpowers has caused millions of casualties in Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Pakistan, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, and many other countries in Africa. Will the way of managing the economy that believes in capitalism satisfy the inner heart of modern (or even post-modern) humans? Will the brutality of the human figure who incarnated the most terrible devil bring true happiness to the realization? Definitely not. It is human rights, civilized behavior and upholding peace and peace that will lead to happiness in the world. Meanwhile, for eternal happiness in the hereafter, only the noble teachings of Islam can answer that. In fact, the happiness of both, the world and the hereafter, is a guarantee for those who tread the right path, as in the teachings of Hamka's neo-Sufism.

Hamka's awareness of the more complicated issues in contemporary life is represented by the lyrics which are truly meaningful,

“The ship came back from Mecca,  
Full load of pilgrims  
Watch out your steps,  
Plucking flowers in thorns.  
If you are good at avoiding foam,  
Saved the body to the other side” (Hamka, 1997: 47).

“The ship came back from Mecca” means that a servant has completed the teachings of neo-Sufism. Those who are successful, even have the title “haji” who are imagined as perfect people. At that time, “Watch out your steps, plucking flowers in thorns” symbolized that humans who are wading through life in this world, must always be introspective. If you want to achieve true happiness, then it is not permissible for an inch to slip and fall into the abyss of sin. Therefore, “If you are good at avoiding foam” provides an indication that if we know which things are useful and which are not, which are upholding and oppressing, and which are rewarding and which are not, or which are lulled by capitalism and which are not, then “saved the body to the other side”. It means having achieved happiness, especially to life in the afterlife village.

Second, true happiness according to Hamka personally. For him, true happiness is the main orientation of neo-Sufism. Every Sufistic activity is considered a perfect religious way. Considered perfect, because neo-Sufism goes hand in hand with the *Shari'a*, *hakikat* and even *ma'rifatullah*. *Shari'a* has usually been achieved by someone who obeys all of Allah's laws according to the teachings of Islam, the *hakikat* has been achieved by those who feel the inner meanings behind the shari'a that has been carried out, while *ma'rifat* is the highest knowledge attained by people who literally totally understood God.

To achieve *ma'rifatullah* through neo-Sufism, one must have clean faith. His inner intentions are sincere. So, do not be interfered with by all kinds of dictates from burning desires. After a sincere intention is stamped, then every servant must be sure that life, death, worship, and orientation of his life in this world and the hereafter are for Allah alone. If he is still in doubt, then the intention that he instilled before will also be damaged. After the belief has been awakened, he is required to fulfill his faith absolutely. Absolute faith is the opening door, where he has been declared ready to enter every religious teaching that will lead him to the disclosure of the existence of Allah SWT.

Third, Hamka continued, to take these arduous steps, every servant must have virtue, be it the virtue of knowledge or mind. With his knowledge he knows, while with his mind he agrees. Every servant must know and

be able to fight the passions in his soul. He prioritizes the truth that makes sense over his lust which is impossible for common sense to accept. All of this must be done sincerely. *Ikhlas* means really doing the truth because it is true, not self-interested. After sincerity, he must *qanaah* and resignation. The first are: 1. Accept willingly what is; 2. Asking God for the addition that is appropriate and trying earnestly; 3. Patiently accept God's provision; 4. Put your trust in God; 5. Not attracted by the deceptions of the world. While the second is to surrender the decision of all matters, endeavors, and efforts to the Lord of the worlds. Hamka also believes that *qanaah* and *tawakkal* are the methods taken by the Prophet in achieving true happiness (1997: 266).

Happiness, for Hamka, has the steps. Indeed, there may also be levels of happiness. That, depending on the type and depth of feeling. The first ladder is material happiness. The second is trust from others. The third is a quiet, peaceful, and grace-filled family. The fourth is a livelihood that brings happiness. In other words, our work is lawful, good, and full of blessings. In addition, it also does not oppress and bring prosperity to others either. The fifth is the sweet fruit of a hard and unyielding struggle to live life in the true way of Islam. The ladder of happiness still has obstacles that must be faced. There are three biggest obstacles that are vulnerable to bringing humans to disaster, namely: wrong sense of opinion, hatred and resignation or easy despair. All of this should be avoided, and at the same time give thanks to Allah, so that neo-Sufism can always run smoothly, so that true happiness will no longer be a dream because it is something that has been achieved. More or less, that is what is meant by Hamka's neo-Sufism orientation, that true happiness is the motivation why every servant needs to tread this Sufi path.

## Conclusion

Hamka as a Sufi, writer, Muslim scholar, Muhammadiyah activist has such a good explanation of new Sufism or neo-Sufism which he calls modern Sufism. This type of Sufism is declared as a Sufi teaching that does not conflict with Shari'a. In addition, the moral teachings in it emphasize the spirit of revival and the spirit of hard work in the life of every Muslim. Sufism for him is not despair, moreover, fear and a cowardly mentality in facing life. Today's modern life, which is full of chaos, indulgence in human animalistic lust and sin-stained capitalism, must be answered with the ideas and ethical practices of neo-Sufism as proposed by Hamka. Neo-Sufism has an orientation towards achieving true happiness, both in this world and in the hereafter. Neo-Sufism – like other Sufism teachings – invites us all to reach *ma'rifatullah*, or knowledge of the ultimate truth of Allah SWT. It is just that, more specifically, this is implemented in the context of modern society which is conditioned by capitalistic industrialization and hedonistic popular culture. Thus, in this constantly changing context, perhaps Hamka's words are right, that if we know even trivial things, we will be very happy, then knowing the truth of our God, who is Most Abstract and Mysterious, will give happiness that is incomparably beautiful. As a matter of reflection, this Hamka's neo-Sufism seems to influence the Sufi scholars' thoughts in dealing with the current challenging problems.

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