



The Human Dimension in the Thought of Mohamed Ben Brika

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Abstract:

Referring to the biography of the late Algerian thinker Mohamed Ben Brika is a discussion of a complex personality specialized in multiple humanistic fields; he was a mixture of philosopher, Sufi, and man of letters. The thinker drew from all these areas of knowledge, blending his intellectual contributions, and translating this output into various intellectual activities ranging from authorship, teaching, and media.

And since our contemporary world suffers from an acute crisis of values, the thinker Mohamed Ben Brika chose to focus on the field of education and the promotion of values in man, as most of the late scholar's works were in Islamic Sufism, which considers human purification as its subject. He concentrated on academic authorship in this field, caring about writing while starting from a saying he often repeated to his students: that "soon old age will overtake him and weakness, and he will be unable to move his fingers to write, and the eyesight will betray him so he cannot distinguish letters, words, and lines, and memory will leave him so that he will not know the question from the answer, and such is the law of creation that continues..."

As for the reason for his interest in the themes of humanism, this necessarily goes back to his drawing from Islamic Sufism, both in theory and in practice. The late Ben Brika said about this: "My interest in Islamic Sufism goes back to the early years of my life, for my family environment had a role in that." The environment in which the thinker grew up was the first spark that alerted him to this type of knowledge, which he later took as a path for research and ijihad, thus producing a new entrance to the science of Islamic Sufism and therefore a human dimension rooted in the religious dimension, on which researchers in this field rely inside and outside Algeria.

Keywords: *Sufism, human dimension, Algerian thought, gnosis, manifestation.*

La dimension humaine dans la pensée de Mohamed Ben Brika

Résumé :

La biographie du défunt penseur algérien Mohamed Ben Brika est celle d'une personnalité complexe, spécialisée dans plusieurs domaines humanistes ; il était à la fois philosophe, soufi et homme de lettres. Le penseur puisait dans tous ces domaines de connaissance, mélangeant ses contributions intellectuelles et traduisant cette production dans diverses activités intellectuelles allant de l'écriture à l'enseignement en passant par les médias.

Et comme notre monde contemporain souffre d'une crise aiguë des valeurs, le penseur Mohamed Ben Brika a choisi de se concentrer sur le domaine de l'éducation et la promotion des valeurs chez l'homme, car la plupart des travaux du défunt érudit portaient sur le soufisme islamique, qui considère la purification humaine comme son sujet. Il s'est concentré sur l'écriture académique dans ce domaine, se souciant de l'écriture tout en partant d'une phrase qu'il répétait souvent à ses étudiants : « bientôt, la vieillesse et la faiblesse le rattraperont, il sera incapable de bouger ses doigts pour écrire, sa vue le trahira et il ne pourra plus distinguer les lettres, les mots et les lignes, sa mémoire le quittera et il ne saura plus distinguer la question de la réponse, telle est la loi de la création qui continue... ».

Quant à la raison de son intérêt pour les thèmes de l'humanisme, celle-ci remonte nécessairement à son inspiration du soufisme islamique, tant sur le plan théorique que pratique. Feu Ben Brika a déclaré à ce sujet : « Mon intérêt pour le soufisme islamique remonte aux premières années de ma vie, car mon environnement familial y a joué un rôle. » L'environnement dans lequel le penseur a grandi a été la première étincelle qui l'a sensibilisé à ce type de savoir, qu'il a ensuite emprunté comme voie de recherche et d'ijtihad, ouvrant ainsi une nouvelle voie à la science du soufisme islamique et donc à une dimension humaine enracinée dans la dimension religieuse, sur laquelle s'appuient les chercheurs dans ce domaine en Algérie et à l'étranger.

Mots-clés : *soufisme, dimension humaine, pensée algérienne, gnose, manifestation.*



Introduction:

Humanism was born from the need to restore consideration to man, especially after he was subjected, throughout history, to various forms of marginalization and exploitation, whether by authority, by the religious institution, or even by some philosophical systems themselves. In many moments, man was not treated as an end, but as a means, a being capable of reification and instrumentalization, and even denial in some conceptions that marginalized his role or emptied him of meaning. Faced with this situation, humanism emerged as an intellectual and moral stance insisting on the centrality of man and demanding his right to be regarded as a free, rational, responsible being who transcends all forms of restriction and exclusion.

The Arab and Islamic world has witnessed in recent decades profound transformations that included its intellectual, religious, and cultural structures, which made the need for a new religious discourse based on human values an urgent matter. In this context, many intellectual projects emerged that sought to offer a renewed reading of the religious heritage, moving beyond literalism and rigidity toward visions capable of touching the essence of man and his dignity. Among the most prominent of these intellectual projects in Algeria was the project formulated by Dr. Mohamed Ben Brika, which was based on Islamic Sufism as an existential and spiritual living experience, not separate from reality but interacting with it and reshaping it on the basis of mercy and love.

Ben Brika's intellectual project came in response to a dual need: the need to renew the understanding of religion in harmony with human dignity, and the need to restore the spiritual dimension from within Islam, without blind imitation of the West or detachment from the origin. What distinguishes this project is that it draws on Sufism not as a state of isolation or spiritual luxury, but as a deep moral and human path that restores to man the centrality of his existence as a being with a spiritual and value dimension.

The importance of the topic lies in that it addresses humanism within a modern Algerian Sufi project, which has not received sufficient attention in academic circles, despite its philosophical and religious value. It also falls within current intellectual concerns related to redefining the relationship between man and religion, and determining the place of human dignity in Islamic discourse. A number of thinkers have previously dealt with these issues, such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who called for freeing the religious text from the authority of closed institutions, and Abdul Jabbar Al-Rifai, who worked on grounding a new human religious discourse, and Muhammad Iqbal, who formulated a conception of the free man in light of the Islamic experience.

The main problem from which this study proceeds revolves around the nature of humanism in the thought of Mohamed Ben Brika: what are its features? What are its theoretical and spiritual foundations? And what are its limits in contemporary reality? From this problem, several sub-questions branch: How did humanism manifest in Islamic Sufism? How was it embodied by Mohamed Ben Brika within his project? And what are the challenges facing this project in our present context?



1. A Brief Biography of the Thinker Mohamed Ben Brika:

He is "Dr. Mohamed Ben Brika Al-Bouzidi Al-Hassani."¹ He was born on September 23, 1958, in the city of Doucen, Biskra Province. His scientific and religious brilliance appeared at an early age, as he "memorized the Qur'an in its entirety before the age of ten. He was also interested in literature, as he memorized various texts such as the Matn of Ibn Ashir at an early age in his birthplace, then memorized many difficult poems, some of which adults struggled with, let alone the young, which gave him eloquence from childhood. He then moved to complete his studies in the contemporary educational system."²

This early formation contributed to shaping his scientific and spiritual background, and he chose to direct his interest toward Sufism and Islamic philosophy. Among his first academic works was a study entitled: "*Epistemological Problems between Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi*". Given his outstanding excellence and distinction among his peers, he traveled to Britain to continue his studies there. However, the difference between the British environment and the environment in which he grew up made him return to Algeria, where he completed his studies to obtain a master's degree in the same specialization, then a State Doctorate in Islamic Sufism with a dissertation entitled: "*The Problem of*

¹Muhammad bin Mughayzil al-Maghribi al-Shadhili, *Al-Kawakib al-Zahira fi Ijtima' al-Awliya' Yaqazah bi Sayyid al-Dunya wal-Akhira*, edited by Muhammad bin Brika al-Bouzidi al-Hasani, Al-Balqa'iyya al-Hibriya Publications, Algiers, 1st ed., 2010, p. a

² Abdelhamid Marzouki, *Muhammad Ibn Brika – Philosopher of Sufis in Algeria*, Dar Al-Watan Today, Algiers, 2022, pp. 6–7..

Method and Terminology in Islamic Sufism".³ This dissertation received the highest distinction from the scientific committee, with a recommendation to publish the work, due to its academic value.

With this achievement, Dr. Ben Brika obtained the highest academic degree granted in Algerian universities and became known as one of the most prominent specialists in Sufism and Islamic thought. He remained faithful to his research and teaching career, where he worked in teaching and supervising research, and participated in a number of scientific events that addressed issues of Islamic thought and contemporary Sufism. Nevertheless, he suffered in his later years from the deterioration of his health condition until he passed away on *Thursday, 17 Shawwal 1440 AH, corresponding to June 20, 2019*, at the age of 61⁴. He left behind a scientific and spiritual legacy that remains strongly present in the academic and intellectual memory of all who approached his writings or studied under him.

2. Sufism as a Human Dimension:

Sufism represents one of the most prominent manifestations that express humanism in its spiritual and existential dimension, as it seeks to discipline the self and free man from the constraints of desires and materialism, in order to elevate himself to the meanings of purity, tolerance, and tranquility. In the thought of Mohamed Ben Brika, Sufism is present as a moral path and a deep awareness of the self and the world, not as isolation from life. So how does Ben Brika view the true Sufi? And what is the nature of

3. Abdelhamid Marzouki, *Muhammad Ibn Brika – Philosopher of Sufis in Algeria*, same reference, p. 7.

⁴ Same reference, p. 7.



the relationship between Sufism and purification in his intellectual project?

2.1. Sufism as a Path to Elevate the Human Spirit:

Mohamed Ben Brika sees that true Sufism does not mean withdrawal from the world or seclusion, but rather a responsible engagement in life from a position of deep awareness of existence and of the human self. For him, Sufism is not merely a religious stance, but a spiritual and moral experience that aims to elevate man from the lowest levels of instinct to the highest ranks of *ihsan*, that is, to a state in which behavior becomes a reflection of inner purity and self-purification.

In this context, man represents an open project toward perfection, shaped through spiritual journeying and striving, not by being content with external form or mere rituals. Therefore, Ben Brika highlights the educational dimension in Sufism, stressing that its goal is to educate the self upon higher values, such as patience, truthfulness, purity, loyalty, love, and detachment from material attachments.

In this sense, he recalls the words of Imam Al-Qushayri, one of the prominent figures of Sufism: "And Al-Qushayri, author of *Al-Risala* and one of the authoritative imams in this science, mentioned in his interpretation that the word Sufi is composed of four letters: the *sad* represents his patience, his truthfulness, and his purity; the *waw* his ecstasy, his

affection, and his loyalty; the *fa* his poverty, his loss, and his annihilation; and the *ya* is the ya of attribution.”⁵

This definition, as presented by Ben Brika, shows that the Sufi is not a person who isolates himself from people or adopts ascetic appearances, but a human being who has reached such inner purity that he becomes a mirror of inner peace and a source of spreading tranquility and mercy in his surroundings. He is a self that has been purified and opened to the Absolute, where the limits of the ego are broken and the light of meaning shines forth. Thus, Sufism in Ben Brika’s view becomes a path to liberate man from the constraints of desires and the weight of matter, toward a broader world of purity, *ihsan*, and connection with the Truth.

2.2. Sufism and the Foundation of the Moral Dimension in Man:

Mohamed Ben Brika emphasizes in his intellectual and spiritual project that Sufism is not confined to the inner experience or to seclusion from worldly affairs, but manifests as a deep moral path rooted in reality, aiming to discipline man and guide him toward the values of justice, mercy, and nobility. For him, Sufism is not an escape from the world but a presence in it, and it can only be realized through a responsible relationship with people, embodied in humility and noble conduct, starting from inner purity and sincerity of heart. In this context, Ben Brika considers that closeness to God is inseparable from closeness to man.

⁵Muhammad bin Brika, *Al-Habib Encyclopedia of Sufi Studies*, Book One: *Islamic Sufism from Symbol to Gnosis*, Dar Al-Mutoon for Publishing, Translation, Printing, and Distribution, Algiers, 1st ed., 2006, pp. 49–50..



Thus, there is no meaning to a Sufism confined within the self, isolated from the concerns of people and their pains; rather, Sufism is not truthful unless it is reflected in serving creation and showing compassion towards them. From here, the moral dimension in Sufism becomes not just a secondary addition, but an essential part of its structure, translated in daily practice into justice, fairness, and virtue. This orientation makes Sufism, in Ibn Brika's thought, a spiritual education that restores to man his inner balance and makes him morally present in the world. For the Sufi is not that person withdrawn from life, but rather a human being in whom the meanings of mercy, modesty, and wisdom have matured, so that he has become a model to be emulated in humility, acceptance of the other, and transcendence over selfishness and utilitarian inclinations. In this ethical context, Ibn Brika cites what has been mentioned by the Sufis in their emphasis on certain virtues, where he says: "Perhaps the most important moral virtues that the Sufis focused on are humility, modesty, virtue, chivalry, and contentment⁶." This clearly reflects the spirit of Sufism he adopted, where ethics are inseparable from faith, and behavior from the inner self; rather, they together form a single unity that leads to a complete human being: detached from the shares of the ego, preoccupied with serving others, elevated in his relations above harm and arrogance.

Muhammad Ibn Brika links between spiritual experience and moral action, seeing that spiritual ascent is not complete unless its effect appears in dealings and behavior, and that true purification does not mean confinement within the self,

⁶ Abdul Hamid Marzouki, *Muhammad bin Brika – The Philosopher of Sufis in Algeria*, same reference, p. 36.

but opening up to the other with a spirit filled with peace and love. In this sense, Sufism transforms into a civilizational project that establishes the foundations of coexistence and restores to man his humanity, not as a biological or social state, but as moral maturity that bears refined conduct reflecting the image of God in man.

In short, Sufism in the thought of Muhammad Ibn Brika is not mere contemplation or inward religiosity, but a call to establish a value-based world, beginning from the individual and extending to the community, where man is an ethical actor, not drowned in subjectivity, but open to the world with a responsible spirit that transcends the self towards the other, in a constant search for good, truth, and beauty.

3. Man and His Dignity in Muhammad Ibn Brika's Thought:

Speaking about man and his dignity occupies a central position in human thought, around which philosophies, religions, and spiritual experiences have converged. In Muhammad Ibn Brika's thought, this concern is manifested through a Sufi vision that regards man as a being honored in his essence, bearing meaning and responsibility that transcend the material dimension. So how did Ibn Brika conceive human dignity? And what are the foundations upon which this dignity rests in his intellectual system?

3.1. His Vision of Man

Muhammad Ibn Brika presents a profound conception of man, based on an ontological vision influenced by Islamic Sufism, where man is regarded as a dual-structured being: his outward appearance imitates the world of testimony,



while his inward touches the realms of the unseen. In this context, he describes him as “the comprehensive being,” that is, the one who encapsulates within his entity the meanings of existence, embodying in a unique way the interpenetration of the divine dimension with the human dimension. This vision becomes clear in his saying: “The outward is a mirror, the inward is the mirror of the outward, and what is between them is a mirror for both collectively and preferentially⁷.”

It is understood from this statement that the outward and the inward are not separate levels in man, but two complementary forms of a single reality. Man’s outward embodies his inward, and his inward reflects his outward, so that the human self becomes a double mirror reflecting the presence of the divine truth through its manifestation in both spiritual and physical dimensions alike. Ibn Brika bases his vision here on a conception that closely approaches the concept of the “Perfect Man” as known in the Sufi school, especially with Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, where man is not regarded as merely a biological individual or a social being, but as a locus in which divine attributes—mercy, knowledge, will, and wisdom—manifest. Man, in this sense, is not separate from divine existence, but is the nearest point of contact between the Absolute and the relative, between truth and the world, between God and creation.

This conception places upon man a spiritual responsibility that transcends the usual moral or religious standards, for his very existence becomes a spiritual function: to be a pure mirror in which the lights of truth are

⁷Muhammad bin Brika, *Al-Habib Encyclopedia of Sufi Studies, Volume One: Islamic Sufism from Symbol to Gnosis*, same source, p. 65.

reflected, not by withdrawing from the world, but by purifying his inward and refining his outward in an inner harmony that leads to a comprehensive unity of existence.

What Ibn Brika presents here is a conception that makes the human entity both a cognitive and spiritual structure at once. He is not merely a self that perceives or contemplates, but an entity that expresses cosmic meaning within itself, through his movement in life, his moral conduct, and his inner work of purification.

Muhammad Ibn Brika sees those religious texts, foremost among them the Qur'anic verses, are not limited to the apparent meanings grasped by common reason, but contain deep esoteric significations that are opened only to those "whose hearts God has opened" – those who have attained a state of spiritual purity enabling them to perceive these meanings with a kind of experiential and witnessing knowledge that transcends the usual tools of rational perception. Understanding here does not depend only on analysis or reasoning, but on an inner spiritual presence that allows the recipient to live the meaning rather than merely explain it.

In this framework, Ibn Brika re-proposes the concept of man from a deep Sufi perspective. Man, according to this conception, is not merely a thinking intellect or a social being engaged in external relations, but a continuous spiritual project that requires inner effort for purification. Everything that appears on the surface of man in terms of behavior or morals is not complete unless it is rooted in the purity of the inward.

This conception coincides with what Imam Al-Ghazali and Al-Sha'rani emphasized, when they stressed the centrality of the inward in the course of human reformation.



Al-Ghazali points out that people tend towards outward deeds because of their ease of practice and social monitoring, while deeds of the heart—such as humility, sincerity, and rejection of ostentation and envy—require an internal struggle of long endurance and patience in self-discipline. As for Abdul Wahhab Al-Sha’rani, he links the purity of the inward with the readiness to sit in the presence of God, considering that attaining this state resembles a kind of divine presence in the heart, achievable only after sincerity of intention and purity of conscience.

Ibn Brika grants this Sufi vision another depth when he describes the inward as “the house of burning.”⁸ That is, the place where the self undergoes a painful yet necessary process of purification, where arrogance, selfishness, envy, and all maladies of the soul are burned away. This “burning” does not annihilate man nor destroy him, but reshapes him, just as metals are refined by fire, so that the new man emerges purified by the spiritual experience, cleansed of the residues of his ego, and made worthy of being a locus for the manifestation of divine attributes in this world.

In this sense, humanization ceases to be a merely rational or moral orientation, but becomes an inner spiritual path founded upon struggle, purification, and manifestation. Humanism, for Ibn Brika, is understood as a striving towards human perfection achieved through balance between intellect and heart, between outward and inward, until man becomes a living manifestation of the Truth, not in

⁸ Muhammad bin Brika, *Al-Habib Encyclopedia of Sufi Studies, Volume One: Islamic Sufism from Symbol to Gnosis*, same source, p. 67.

abstract qualities, but in what divine light and transcendent conduct manifest in him.

3.2. Human Dignity

Human dignity holds a central place in the intellectual and Sufi project of Muhammad Ibn Brika, where he does not view it as a value acquired from outside man, or as a social right guaranteed only by law, but as an existential truth stemming from the origin of man and the source of his creation. Dignity, according to his conception, is not merely a biological preference or a social honor. This understanding transcends the modern liberal definitions of dignity, which often link it to individual freedom or legal equality, to return it to its transcendent formative foundation. Man, according to this perspective, is not honored because he merely possesses reason or civil rights, but because he carries within his being a divine trace, and has the potential to be a mirror of the divine names and attributes, if he purifies his inward and walks the path of purification.

3.3. Dignity in the Qur'anic and Prophetic Texts

Ibn Brika's conception of dignity is based on clear legal proofs that establish that divine honoring of man is both prior and ongoing: it begins from the origin of creation and is renewed with the purity of the inward and the soundness of the heart. In the Holy Qur'an, God Almighty says: *"And We have certainly honored the children of Adam."*⁹ This is a decisive verse in demonstrating the position of man in the universe, not as superior to other creatures by his intellectual or physical capacities only, but by virtue of what God has deposited in him of spirit, attribute, and choice. The

⁹ Qur'an, Surah Al-Isra, verse 70.



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honoring here is general, encompassing every human being, regardless of his gender, color, or religion, as long as he retains the essence of his humanity.

The prophetic hadith deepens this meaning, when it points to the centrality of the “heart”¹⁰ in a person’s righteousness or corruption: *“Indeed, in the body there is a morsel of flesh; if it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Indeed, it is the heart.”* Here, the heart is not merely a biological organ, but a symbol of the inner self and of ethical and spiritual life. Its soundness is a true measure of human dignity, for there is no real dignity alongside hatred, hypocrisy, arrogance, or other maladies of the heart that distort the human inner self, even if outwardly the person appears righteous.

From this standpoint, Muhammad Ibn Brika sees that dignity is not a gift granted by society or seized by authority, but a divine endowment and a spiritual station that man must preserve and purify. Thus, it is not limited to a negative existential dimension (such as freedom from humiliation), but is a positive call for a person to strive toward his perfection. Dignity, therefore, requires continuous inner struggle, purifying the self from desires and disciplining it to be worthy of this honor.

The importance of this understanding is clear in today’s world, where dignity is sometimes reduced to a legal or superficial dimension, while the spiritual and moral dimension of man is absent. In Sufism as Ibn Brika understands it, human dignity originates from the spiritual essence of the person and requires constant inner vigilance

¹⁰ Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, edited by Muhammad Fouad Abdul-Baqi, Vol. 3, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1st ed., 1991, p. 1220

to preserve this essence from distortion. Hence, human dignity, according to Muhammad Ibn Brika, is not understood from an external or formal perspective, but stems from the very essence of the human being, from the purity of the inward and the uprightness of the heart, because the body is only a reflection of the clarity or corruption within the soul.

3.4. The Insight of the Believer and the Indication of Divine Light

Ibn Brika links the dignity of the saint (wali) with the insight (firasa) of the believer through the prophetic hadith: *“Beware of the insight of the believer, for he sees with the light of God.”*¹¹ This insight is not ordinary intuition, but a penetrating vision resulting from the purity of the heart and sincerity of orientation. It is a form of inner dignity that does not appear in supernatural acts, but in the strength of discernment, truthfulness, and serenity. In this sense, insight becomes a kind of internal unveiling derived from spiritual purity, where the believer – at the stages of sainthood – does not need miracles to prove his truthfulness, but is sufficient with an illuminating gaze by which he reads the world and people through perception. It is not a sudden mystical gift, but the fruit of a long spiritual conduct, which purifies the heart of impurities of desires and suspicions, making it a place for manifestations of divine light.

¹¹ Mouloud Sayad, *These Are Injecting Poison into the Fat!!*, available at: <https://elhiwar.dz/national/138741>, accessed on April 20, 2025, at 14:02.



4. Applied Sufism as a Manifestation of Humanity in Ibn Brika

4.1. The Pledge (Bay'a)

The pledge in the Sufi experience is a foundational and highly significant step, not reducible to a symbolic ritual or a formal procedure performed at the beginning of the path. It represents a moment of spiritual awareness in which the seeker makes an internal decision to surrender himself to the guidance of an experienced sheikh, who assists in disciplining the self and purifying the heart in a gradual path based on trust and discipline. From this perspective, we may ask: what are the educational and spiritual dimensions encompassed by the pledge in Islamic Sufism? And how did Muhammad Ibn Brika employ the pledge within his Sufi project?

The pledge represents a key station in the spiritual journey and cannot be reduced to a formal rite performed at the start of the path. Rather, it is a decisive moment in which the disciple expresses his true readiness to engage in an educational and spiritual relationship that requires commitment and conscious submission to the guidance of the sheikh. This pledge is not merely an expression of intent, but a translation of a deep understanding of the self's need for someone to aid it in discipline and to guide it toward levels of purity and spiritual elevation.

In this context, the pledge is understood as a relationship with a clear human dimension, based on trust, love, and voluntary discipline. The disciple does not surrender himself to the sheikh under coercion, but out of a sincere need for guidance, a need intrinsic to human nature, which, however strong its will, remains in need of experience, knowledge,

and spiritual companionship. Thus, Sufism does not see the pledge as a mere external commitment, but as an existential act arising from human acknowledgment of the limits of the self and the pursuit of its elevation within a free and responsible relationship.

Dr. Muhammad Ibn Brika refers to the historical roots of this concept in Islamic history by recalling the incident of Saqifa, stating: *“And the narration of his pledge to the caliphate is extensive. When the Ansar gathered in the Saqifa of Banu Sa’ida to pledge allegiance to Sa’d (may God be pleased with him), our master Abu Bakr said: ‘Among us – meaning the Muhajirun – are the rulers, and among you are the ministers.’ Then our master Umar said: ‘Do you agree that I leave two men to lead the people whom the Prophet ﷺ presented?’ So Umar pledged allegiance to him and the people pledged allegiance as well.*¹²” Through this reference, Ibn Brika emphasizes that the pledge originally represented a collective agreement based on acceptance and appreciation, not coercion from one party over another. He links the pledge to the caliphate in the political realm with the pledge to the sheikh in the spiritual realm, as both arise from free will and collective or individual awareness of the competence of the one being pledged to, and trust in his ability to guide. Ibn Brika confirms the continuously renewed spiritual dimension of the pledge, saying: *“The pledge occurs in the remembrance of God at all times, in pleasure and hardship, in seclusion and congregatio¹³n.”* This statement clarifies that the pledge is not a one-time act, but a continuous and renewed commitment, translated into the daily behavior of the disciple, manifested in his

¹² Mohamed Ben Brika, *Jamhara of Sufi Works: Al-Riyad Al-Ahmadiya from the Ten Muhammadi Lessons*, Al-Diwan Press, Algiers, 1st ed., 2016, p. 147.

¹³ Ibid., p. 350.



remembrance and dedication to purification in all circumstances. He also refers to God's words: *"Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you, they pledge allegiance to Allah¹⁴."* to demonstrate that the pledge, in essence, is not merely a relationship between two persons, but a deep spiritual covenant linking the disciple to God through a spiritual intermediary who dedicates himself to guiding the path.

In light of this, the pledge—according to Muhammad Ibn Brika—becomes a true manifestation of the human inclination in Sufism, as it expresses man's need for the other in the process of self-completion, not out of subservience or dissolution, but from conscious and responsible interaction with a trusted guide, based on experience and spiritual knowledge, affirming that education cannot be reduced to theoretical advice but requires continuous companionship and practical guidance.

4.2. The Sheikh

In the Sufi journey, spiritual progression does not appear as a mere individual effort performed alone, but requires conscious companionship and spiritual expertise that protects the seeker from wandering or deviation. For this reason, the presence of the "sheikh" appears as an essential element, indispensable and irreplaceable. This prominent presence raises key questions: what is the nature of the role performed by the sheikh in the Sufi educational path? How is the relationship between the sheikh and the disciple formed?

¹⁴ Qur'an, Surah Al-Fath, Ayah 10.

The sheikh occupies a central position in the spiritual structure of Sufism. He is not merely a religious figure guiding the disciple, but represents the “existential model” in which the values of conduct, knowledge, and connection to truth are embodied. Dr. Muhammad Ibn Brika emphasized this foundational role, describing the sheikh as “*the first relationship for the disciple,*” noting that Sufis unanimously recognize his necessity: “*As for the sheikh, he is a fundamental pillar in the Sufi method, as he is the first relationship for the disciple, and this is a necessity according to the consensus of Sufi mentors.*”¹⁵ This statement reflects a deep understanding of the educational nature of the relationship between the sheikh and the disciple, which goes beyond formal structure toward a human relationship based on trust and sincere intention in seeking purification.

In this context, a saying circulated in Sufi literature is cited: “*He who has no sheikh, the devil is his sheikh*”¹⁶. This statement strongly indicates that the absence of spiritual guidance exposes the disciple to wandering and falling into illusions and desires, as the seeker cannot reach the high stations in the path to God without companionship from one with experience in the path. Ibn Brika supports this with the Qur’anic verse: “*And whomsoever Allah leaves astray, you will find for him no guiding wali.*”¹⁷ demonstrating that guidance is linked to the presence of a guiding saint, not merely theoretical or individual considerations.

Although the sheikh holds a special position in Sufism, Ibn Brika does not see him as a superior authority symbol,

¹⁵ Mohamed Ben Brika, *Al-Habib Encyclopedia of Sufi Studies, Volume One: Islamic Sufism from Symbol to Gnosis*, previous source, p. 308.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

¹⁷ Qur’an, Surah Al-Kahf, Ayah 17



but as a “*human guide*” who lives with the disciple, not above him; who directs, not imposes; who precedes in the path, not to command but to illuminate the way. According to this understanding, he is not an adversary of the disciple’s freedom, but a witness to it and a mentor who elevates the value of man, with the sheikh’s role being tied to the elevation of the heart and the liberation of the mind, not to their subjugation or restriction.

Ibn Brika warns—based on his guidance—against blind veneration and excessive dependence that may turn the sheikh into a “domineering pole,” emphasizing that the educational relationship must remain conditioned by Qur’anic ethics, founded on mutual respect and humility. Thus, Sufism, in his vision, redefines the sheikh not merely as a source of spiritual authority, but as an embodiment of mercy and humanity in the relationship with the disciple.

This approach aligns with the statements of Sufi luminaries cited or implicitly referenced by Ibn Brika, such as Al-Ghazali: “*The seeker must have a sheikh who disciplines him and guides him to the path of God.*¹⁸” And Imam Al-Sha’rani’s statement that the sheikh is the manifestation appointed by God to pour upon the disciple, while some emphasized—as in Ibn Ata Allah Al-Sakandari—that the sheikh must be an educator who raises the state of the disciple and reminds his speech, otherwise companionship becomes harmful rather than beneficial.¹⁹

All this illustrates how the humanistic tendency is clearly manifested in Muhammad Ibn Brika’s conception of the role

¹⁸Mohamed Ben Brika, *Al-Habib Encyclopedia of Sufi Studies, Volume One: Islamic Sufism from Symbol to Gnosis*, previous source, p. 309

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

of the sheikh, where the relationship transforms from mere traditional subservience into a human educational project, aimed at building the human being from within, through spiritual companionship based on advice, purification, and love, not coercion or absolute submission. In this sense, the sheikh in Sufism, as presented by Ibn Brika, is: the human who guides the human, not the master who owns his servants, but the companion on the path to God.²⁰

4.3. Adab (Manners) and Dhikr (Remembrance)

Adab and dhikr occupy a central place in the Sufi experience, not only as spiritual practices but because they reflect a deep aspect of human refinement and the ethical formation of the seeker. The Sufi does not suffice with worship alone but strives to embody qualities that purify the self and open it to meaning. From this perspective, one may ask: what is meant by adab and dhikr in Sufism? And how do these two dimensions contribute to the manifestation of Sufism as a practical education with human objectives?

Adab in the Sufi framework is one of the main pillars upon which the spiritual journey toward God is founded. The concept of adab here is not limited to outward ethical refinement or good behavior but extends to being an internal condition for the sincerity of human orientation toward divine truth. The Sufi does not reach the station of closeness without passing through the test of adab. Dr. Muhammad Ibn Brika highlights this concept by referring to a set of classical Sufi texts dedicated to this topic, such as *Fasl al-Adab fi Madarij al-Salikin* by Ibn al-Qayyim and the chapter on adab in *Al-Risala al-Qushayriyya*. He comments that, at its

²⁰ Mohamed Ben Brika, *Al-Habib Encyclopedia of Sufi Studies, Volume One: Islamic Sufism from Symbol to Gnosis*, previous source, p. 309.



core, Sufism is nothing but a “circle of spiritual education,²¹” a conduct based on purification, refinement, and internal readiness before any intellectual theorization or rational deduction. This approach reflects a deep humanistic tendency, seeing that the essence of religion is not necessarily in the accumulation of knowledge, but in behavioral refinement that prepares the human being for divine knowledge. In this context, Dr. Ibn Brika refers to the Prophet’s ﷺ statement: “*My Lord educated me and perfected my discipline*²².” This hadith is considered in Sufism as a foundation for the status of *adab*, making divine upbringing the basis of prophecy itself, meaning that spiritual refinement precedes knowledge, and knowledge bears fruit only when nourished by the water of *adab*.

Ibn Brika summarizes the Sufi stance by quoting the mystics: “*All of Sufism is adab (proper conduct), for every time there is adab, for every state there is adab, for every station there is adab...*²³” This statement reveals an existential approach based on inner awareness and appropriate action in every moment. In Sufism, *adab* represents the practical aspect of spiritual humanity. Ibn Brika also cites Ibn al-Mubarak: “*We need a little adab more than we need much knowledge*²⁴.” This saying reflects a deep Sufi awareness that knowledge which does not bear *adab* becomes a burden on the self, and a

²¹ Ibid., p. 312.

²² Al-Sakhawi, *Al-Maqasid al-Hasanah fi Bayan Kathir min al-Ahadith al-Mashthurah ‘ala al-Asinah*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, 1st ed., 1979, p. 29.

²³ Mohamed Ben Brika, *Al-Habib Encyclopedia of Sufi Studies, Volume One: Islamic Sufism from Symbol to Gnosis*, previous source, pp. 312–313.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 313.

cause of arrogance and detachment from people and the Truth alike.

Dhikr (remembrance) occupies a central place in the Sufi experience, as it is not viewed merely as a verbal act but as a vital spiritual means aimed at purifying the self and freeing the heart from anything that distracts it from connection with God. Muhammad Ibn Brika emphasizes that one of the foremost principles for the seeker in Sufism is to increase dhikr by heart and tongue, so that remembrance moves from mere repetition of words to permeating the body and entering the heart, producing a profound internal transformation. In this sense, dhikr is not a passing state but an existential process that fills the human being and liberates him from transient worldly attachments. Dhikr here is not limited to vocalization alone; it is an act that reorders the human relationship with the world, transferring him from a state of distraction and preoccupation with external influences to a state of clarity and spiritual stability.

This is illustrated by the analogy Ibn Brika cites from al-Sha'rani, who compared the one engaged in dhikr to "*a person polishing corroded copper with pebbles*²⁵," indicating that dhikr cleanses the heart and removes the dust of heedlessness, making it receptive to knowledge and spiritual truths. Ibn Brika stresses that dhikr is a comprehensive spiritual experience aimed at freeing the human from inner veils that hinder self-realization in relation to the Truth, stating: "*The fruit of dhikr is al-fath (opening), and al-fath, as its name indicates, is the removal of the veils from the heart. When they are removed, influx occurs, which is the casting of knowledge*

²⁵ Mohamed Ben Brika, *Al-Habib Encyclopedia of Sufi Studies, Volume One: Islamic Sufism from Symbol to Gnosis*, previous source, p. 318.



and gifts into it from the Almighty²⁶.” This statement encapsulates Ibn Brika’s vision of dhikr as a practical path of human education, producing openness of the heart to meaning and direct internal reception of spiritual knowledge. Here, al-fath is not understood in its external or apparent sense.

Furthermore, Ibn Brika highlights the importance of dhikr by referencing numerous Sufi and Sharia sources, such as *Miftah al-Falah wa Misbah al-Arwah fi Dhikr al-Karim al-Fattah*²⁷ by Ibn Ata Allah al-Iskandari, a key reference in explaining dhikr, and *Tanbih al-Fikr ila Haqiqah al-Dhikr*²⁸ by Muhammad Adib Kalkal, which presents dhikr from a contemporary perspective combining knowledge and Sharia. He also refers to Qur’anic verses emphasizing the status of dhikr, including: “O you who believe! Remember Allah much²⁹” (Al-Ahzab 33:41), stressing limitless dhikr, indicating its universality for all human conditions, as in: “Those who remember Allah standing, sitting, and on their sides³⁰” (Al-Ahzab 33:41), showing that dhikr is a continuous state, not confined to time or place.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 319.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 318.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 318.

²⁹ Qur’an, Sūra Al-Aḥzāb, 33:41.

³⁰ Qur’an, Sūra Āl ‘Imrān, 3:191.

Conclusion:

The humanistic tendency in the thought of Dr. Muhammad Ibn Brika represents a philosophical and spiritual approach that establishes the centrality of man in the religious conception, by returning to the spirit of Sufism as a source of ethical and spiritual values. In his view, man is not merely a biological being, but a moral entity worthy of purification and care, considering that religion in essence is a call to mercy, dignity, and tolerance, not a tool for exclusion or domination.

Therefore, his project is based on the concept of "*applied Sufism*," which transfers the Sufi experience from an individual dimension to the social sphere, making it a source for human reform and balance in relationships. He also believes that renewing religious discourse requires invoking universal values where philosophy, religion, and ethics intersect. In this way, Ibn Brika's humanistic tendency forms a comprehensive vision that seeks to achieve a balance between spirit and reality, in an age dominated by materialism and extremism, opening a new horizon for understanding religion from a humanistic perspective that restores meaning and affirms man as a supreme value.

In this context, the humanistic tendency as presented by Muhammad Ibn Brika opens a philosophical and spiritual horizon worthy of further exploration and study. It neither closes the door to reason nor excludes faith, but calls for integration between heart and mind, spirit and life, in a vision reconciled with self and others. It is an attempt to transcend the rigid duality between religion and modernity, through a path based on the Sufi heritage as a reservoir of



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authentic human values, aiming to establish a broader, more flexible religious consciousness.

Ultimately, this tendency, with its philosophical, educational, and spiritual dimensions, represents a serious attempt deserving of further reflection, critique, and development, as it not only restores the value of man, but also prompts reconsideration of the role of religion in a time of complex questions and intertwined values.

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