



The ‘Dancing’ of the Sūfis

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Dancing is divided into three categories:

1. The forbidden.
2. The permissible.
3. The recommended.

1. The **forbidden category** is the dancing of the common with ladies and youths present. This can lead to spoiling and uncontrolled lower natures, and satanic selves and so on. Its purpose is to show off and to exhibit a state which is not real. This is also forbidden. This is why certain people have said that dancing is forbidden.²

2. The **permissible category** of dancing is the dancing done by the right-acting ones and the *fuqarā* without ecstasy or finding. They do it as a relaxation to the self and energy for their hearts, fulfilling the conditions of time and place and the brothers. No women participate in it, nor youths. This is permissible, and it does not call for prohibition, because the causes of forbidding dancing are what was mentioned before. The latter case is free of these conditions. If this dancing is compared to what the Samiris did when they worshipped the cow, it is seen that their dancing was forbidden because theirs was spoiled. Their purpose was to glorify the calf, and to be happy with it. This is *kufir*. If their dancing had been free of that it would not have been forbidden for them.

It is confirmed that Ja’far ibn Abū Tālib ؑ danced in the presence of the Prophet ﷺ, when he said to him,

*“You resemble me in my creation and my behaviour.”*³

¹ Excerpted from *al-futubhat al-ilahiyya sharh al-mabahith al-asliyya* by Sidi Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ajibah al-Hasani(died 1224 Hijrah)

² Imam Nawawī said: “Dancing is not unlawful, unless it is languid, like the movements of the effeminate. And it is permissible to speak and to sing poetry, unless it satirizes someone, is obscene, or alludes to a particular woman” (*minhaj al-talibin wa `umdat al-muttaqin*. Cairo 1338/1920. Reprint. Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, n.d., 152)

³ `Alī ؑ said: ‘I visited the Prophet with Ja`far (ibn Abī Tālib) and Zayd (ibn Harītha). The Prophet said to Zayd: “You are my freedman” (anta mawlay), whereupon Zayd began to hop on one leg around the Prophet (*hajala*). The Prophet then said to Ja`far: “You resemble me in my creation and my manners”,

This was mentioned by Shaykh Sanūsī in his *musrat al-faqīr*.

Ibn Layun at-Tujībī said,

“As for dancing in the mosque, it is in the *sahīh muslim* collection from A`īsha ؓ who said,

‘An army came from Ethiopia beating drums on the day of the feast in the mosque. The Prophet ﷺ invited me and I put my palms on his shoulders and watched them play.’”

Ibn ‘Aynia said that *‘rafaf* was to dance. So it is confirmed that dancing is permissible. If it was forbidden in its essence, it would not have been done in the presence of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

3. The category of dancing which is **recommended** is the dancing of the Sūfīs, the people of taste and state, whether they are in ecstasy or seeking ecstasy, whether that is in the presence of the *dhikr*, or in *sama*. There is no doubt that the cure of the heart of forgetfulness and gathering with Allah ﷻ is sought by whatever means there are, as long as they are not forbidden with a clear and definite declaration of them as forbidden. We have seen the speech of al-Junayd when he was asked about *sama*.

Al-Fāsī said in his *sharh al-bisn* from [Shaykh al-Islam] al-Suyūti ؓ that he [al-Suyūti] said:

“How can one condemn making dhikr while standing, or standing while making dhikr, when Allah ﷻ says, “**. . . those who invoke Allah standing, sitting, and upon their sides**”⁴. And A`īsha ؓ said, ‘The Prophet ﷺ used to invoke Allāh at all of his times.’⁵ And if dancing is added to this standing, it may not be condemned, as it is of the joy of spiritual vision and ecstasy, and the Hadīth exists⁶ that Ja`far ibn Abī Tālib ؓ danced in front of the Prophet ﷺ when the Prophet ﷺ told him, ‘You resemble me in looks and in character,’ dancing from the happiness he felt from being thus addressed, and the Prophet did not condemn him for doing so, this being a basis for the legal acceptability of the Sūfīs dancing from the joys of the ecstasies they experience.”⁷

whereupon Ja`far began to hop behind Zayd. The Prophet then said to me: “You are part of me and I am part of you whereupon I began to hop behind Ja`far.” Imam Ahmad related it in his *musnad* (1:108) and Ahmad Muhammad Shākir declared it sound (*sahīh*) in his Riyadh, 1949 edition; it is related also by `Uqaylī, Abu Nu`aym from Jabir, and Ibn Sa`d in his *tabaqat* with a sound chain to Muhammad al-Baqīr. [Shaikh GF Haddad in his recently released *Sunna Notes* says it is a ‘fair narration from ‘Alī by Imām Ahmad’]

⁴ Qur`ān 3:191

⁵ Sahīh Muslim, 1.282: 373

⁶ In many sources, such as *musnad al-imam ahmad*, 1.108, with a *hasan* chain of transmission.

⁷ *Al-hāwī lil fatāwī*. 2 vols. Cairo 1352/1933–34. Reprint. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyya, 1403/1983, 2.234

Among these people are great *Imams*, and one of them was the Shaykh of Islam, ‘Izzuddīn ibn ‘Abdul Salām, as is mentioned in the *ihya* ⁸. This is also confirmed by the hadith reported from A‘īsha ﷺ, and the people from Ethiopia who were dancing. The Prophet ﷺ, said to her, “Would you like to look at the dance of the Ethiopians?” Ibn Zakrī mentioned it in the commentary of the *nasihaj*.

It is reported from previous times, from both the east and the west that the Sūfīs used to gather to remember Allah and that they used to dance. It is not reported that any of the worthy scholars denied them. I have seen in Fez, in the *Zawiyya* of as-Siqillī, a group who used to do dhikr and dance from the ‘*asr* on the day of *jumu‘a* until the *isha*, with a lot of scholars around. No one denied what they were doing. It has reached me that our Shaykh, the Shaykh of the group Sidi at-Tawdī ibn Sūda used to be present with them sometimes. He did not deny anything to the *fuqarā*, except someone who was a cold imitator or an argumentative competitor.



⁸ It is authentically reported that al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abdul Salām “attended the *sama*’ and danced in states of ecstasy”. Stated by Ibn al-‘Imād, *shadharat al-dhahab* 5:302; Ibn Shakir al-Kutabi, *fawat al-wafayat* 1:595; al-Yafī‘i, *mir‘at al-jinan* 4:154; al-Nabhānī, *jāmi‘ karamat al-awliyā* 2:71; Abu al-Sa‘adat, *taj al-ma‘arif* p. 250. Imam Ibn Hajar Al-Haytamī also mentions “it is permissible to stand and dance during gatherings of remembrance [of Allah] and audition according to a group of great scholars, among them being Shaykh al-Islam Ibn ‘Abdul Salām.” (*fatava hadithiyya*, p. 298)