

## THE MAJLIS DHIKR OF INDONESIA Exposition of Some Aspects of Ritual Practices<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This study will explore the extent to which Indonesian *Majlis Dhikr* groups interpret and respond theologically certain aspects of their ritual practices. Several topics discussed in this paper wish to answer whether or not the belief and ritual of *Majlis Dhikr* are relevant to the normative dimension of Islamic teachings and Islamic Sufi practices. This research reveals that some aspects of Sufi practices have been adopted by *Majlis Dhikr* groups in their main ritual practices have a strong basis in the practices of the Prophet and Sufi masters. I argue that what they have practised actually cannot be regarded as the violation of Islamic teachings as has been frequently accused by other groups of Muslims. Some aspects of Sufi practices and concepts adopted by *Majlis Dhikr* group include the reciting of *shlaman*, the concepts of sainthood (*wali*) and miracle (*karamah*), *tawassul*, sending the merit of pious deeds to deceased persons, and the concept of *tabarruk*.

**Keywords:** Islamic ritual, *majlis dhikr*, the concepts of sainthood.

### Introduction

One of obvious scenes in Indonesian Islam today is the proliferation of Islamic spiritual groups which has attracted its followers not only from rural but also urban area. The interesting feature of these groups known as *Majlis Dhikr* (religious chanting group) is that they are not affiliated with previous Islamic groups that have been known as *tarekat* (Sufi group). Unlike *tarekat*, in order to

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for the comments of James Fox, Muhaimin A.G., and Abdul Kadir Riyadi on an earlier version of this paper.

become a member of *Majlis Dhikr* group, people should not make an oath (*bay'at*) to the leader concerned. As a result, people can voluntarily join one group, while also being member of another group, something, which is not, generally, possible for members of *tarekat*.

Another obvious different is the form of *dhikr* being recited. The *dhikr* text recited by *Majlis Dhikr* groups are generally composed by the leader of the groups or taken from *dhikr* formulas taught by the Prophet or those which are widely practised by prominent *ulama* (Muslim clerics). In contrast, *dhikr* formulas recited by *tarekat* are those which are transmitted by a series of unbroken links from the Prophet (*sanad*). It is in this sense that *tarekat* groups in Indonesia have considered themselves as *thriqah mu'tabarab* (Ar., an acknowledged Sufi order). In other words, any Islamic ritual groups which do not have a series of unbroken links from the Prophet to their leaders cannot be regarded as *mu'tabarab*.

Although the *Majlis Dhikr* groups that I have studied cannot be categorised as a recognized *tarekat* (*thriqah mu'tabarab*), their ritual practices have been strongly influenced by Sufi teachings. For example, the *dhikr* ritual practised by these groups is similar to the ritual that has long been practised by other *tarekat* groups. Apart from the *dhikr* ritual, these groups also teach and practise some aspects of Sufi which have been written and practised by earlier Muslim Sufi masters. Therefore, instead of accusing these groups of introducing innovation (I., *bid'ah*) within Islam and performing syncretistic practices, I argue that they can be regarded as groups that still preserve and maintain the continuity of Sufi practices in Islam. To support my argument, this study will explore how and to what extent these groups interpret and respond theologically to certain aspects of their ritual practices. Several topics discussed in this paper will answer whether the belief and the ritual of *majlis dhikr* are relevant to the Islamic teachings and Islamic Sufi practices. Furthermore, these topics will give an understanding of the common ritual practised in the *majlis dhikr* groups.

Research for this paper was conducted during twelve months of fieldwork in the East Javanese city of Kediri beginning in 2004. Kediri is a home to dozens of *pesantren salaf* (traditional Islamic boarding house). The research was focused on three *Majlis Dhikr* groups, namely, *Shalawat Wabidiyah*, *Dhikr al-Ghafilin* and *Istighasab Ihsaniyah* groups. All of these groups have established their branches in many regions of Indonesia.

### *Majlis Dhikr Groups' Understanding of Sflawat*

The members of *Majlis Dhikr* groups in Indonesia believe that it is obligatory for Muslims to recite *Sflawat* as an expression of their love and their gratitude to the Prophet. For them, the Prophet has sacrificed his life and time bringing his followers from the age of darkness (A., *jabiliyya*) to the age of brightness and from sadness to happiness in this world and the hereafter. In other words, according to them, the Prophet was the most loving person toward his followers. Moreover, they argue that if it was not for him, there might be no other lives in this world. As a result they feel that they are immeasurably in debt to the Prophet. This notion arises from their understanding of a well-known statement attributed to God who said to Adam, 'If it were not for Muhammad, I would not have created you.' It is in this sense that they should ask blessing from God by reciting *Sflawat* to the Prophet; rewards will then be given not only to the reciters of the *Sflawat* but also to other people surrounding them as well as other creatures such as *jinn*.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, for the *Majlis Dhikr* groups, the reciting of *Sflawat* is not simply an oral recitation of the blessing phrase for the Prophet but should be seen as a means to communicate spiritually with the Prophet (A., *ta'alluq bi jabibi al-nabi*). For example, according to a member of the *Wabidiyat* group, communicating with the Prophet can be performed in two ways: *ta'alluq shariyy* (outward relationship) and *ta'alluq ma'naviyy* (spiritual relationship). The former can be achieved by, firstly, completely following what the Prophet has ordered and completely avoiding what he has forbidden as well as maintaining a good relationship with other people, and all human beings. Secondly, by experiencing the state of oneness in the love of the Prophet by reciting *Sflawat*, continuously remembering the Prophet's fine qualities followed by love and longing and the recitation of the life stories of the Prophet together with poems which can help people to increase their love for him. The second way (*ta'alluq ma'naviyy*) can be done, firstly, by visualizing the image of the Prophet. Of course, this way of communication can only be done by those who have experienced a visionary dream of the Prophet or have met him when awake. Those who have not experienced this simply imagine his fine personality

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Kyai Zainuddin, 2005.

followed with full of passion and compliments. If they have performed the *hikmah*, they can imagine historic places in Mecca and Medina where the Prophet used to teach his followers. After this, they should internalize the concept of *Bibhqiḡat al-Muḡḡmmadiyah*, which means that the origin of all creatures is from the Light of Muhammad (*Nuḡḡ Muḡḡmmad*). This notion is based on the statement attributed to God that 'I (God) created you (Muhammad) from My light and I created creatures from your light.' To internalize this concept, people should imagine that anything they smell, see, and touch consists of *Nuḡḡ Muḡḡmmad*. If they fail to visualize this concept, it is believed that their mind's eye must have been veiled by the dirt of passion (I., *nafsu*). Moreover, for the *Wabidiyah* group in particular, the simplest way to implement the concept of communicating with the Prophet is by increasingly reciting the phrase, *ya>sayyidi>ya>rasuḡḡullab*, which helps people remember the Prophet.<sup>3</sup>

In order to pay homage to the Prophet, the *Majlis Dhikr* groups add the word *sayyidina* prior to the name of Muhammad when they recite the *Sḡḡlawab* phrase. Some of them argue that it is considered stingy if Muslims do not mention *sayyidina* prior to the name of the Prophet of Muhammad whereas when they address the president, they always add his title before his name such as Mr. President (I., *Bapak Presiden*). They believe that adding the word *sayyidina* before the name of Muhammad in the *Sḡḡlawab* phrase is a courtesy (I., *sopan santun*), which is preferable to complying with the command. They also base their notion on the Prophetic tradition that AbuḡḡBakr refused the order of the Prophet who asked him to lead prayers. In courtesy, AbuḡḡBakr requested that the Prophet be the leader. Based on this story, members of Indonesian *Majlis Dhikr* groups add the *sayyidina* before the Prophet's name, as a courtesy, ignoring the Prophet's prohibition of the practice.

From the perspective of Indonesian *Majlis Dhikr* groups, the recitation of *Sḡḡlawab* is an important aspect of their ritual practices. They fully understand that *Sḡḡlawab* is a necessary condition for a prayer request to be granted. In other words, every prayer directed to God without adding *Sḡḡlawab* is considered meaningless. It is for this reason

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, *Bahan Up Grading Da'i Wabidiyah Bagian A* (Kediri: Yayasan Perjuangan Wahidiyah dan Pondok Pesantren Kedunglo, 1999), pp. 36-40.

that those groups include the blessing phrase of *Sfilawat* in their ritual practices. Some *Majlis Dhiker* groups urge that *Sfilawat* be read hundreds of times. One group has even singled out *Sfilawat* for their practice, and believe that the *Sfilawat* is the easiest way to acquire the knowledge (*ma'rifat*) of God without the medium of the perfect master (A., *kamil al-mukammil*), especially in the current situation where a perfect master is difficult to find. Another reason to recite *Sfilawat* relates to the suggestion by Muslim scholars that *Sfilawat* removes intense emotion, while other litanies (*dhiker*), can result in intensifying the emotion of the reciters. Adding *Sfilawat* among other litanies according to these scholars, can therefore balance the effect of those other litanies.

As far as the benefits of *Sfilawat* are concerned, Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker* groups, in common with other Muslim scholars, consider that reciting *Sfilawat* can be used for worldly purposes and non-worldly purposes. Furthermore, they argue that *Sfilawat* can be used as a means to ask for the Prophet's intercession in this world and the hereafter. In this world, the members of these groups ask for the Prophet's intercession so that the Prophet can help them to succeed in their worldly endeavours. In this respect, one *Majlis Dhiker* group composed *Sfilawat* for particular purposes and performed special rituals to obtain their particular needs. Moreover, they also believe that some *Sfilawat* composed by Muslim scholars have particular benefits. For example, *Sfilawat Narayat* can be used to improve one's livelihood (I., *rizki*); while *Sfilawat Munjiyat* can be used for safety purposes. In the hereafter, they believed that the Prophet will give his *shafa'at* (intercession) to those who recite *Sfilawat* and hence save them from trials of the hell.<sup>4</sup>

In relation to the texts of *Sfilawat* that must be recited, the Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker* groups use and recite not only the texts of *Sfilawat* taught by the Prophet but also *Sfilawat* written by other scholars. Unlike some Muslim scholars who forbid Muslims from reciting the latter, the Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker* groups regard those *Sfilawat* as appropriate to follow the commands of God to send *Sfilawat* to His Prophet Muhammad. As a result, instead of regarding these *Sfilawat* as innovations (*bid'ah*) to Islam, they consider reciting any respectful kind of *Sfilawat* to be lawful. In this respect, *Kyai* Busyra Mughni, one of the members of those groups argued as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with *Gus* Latif, Kediri, September, 2004.

Since the meaning of *Sfilawat* itself is prayer or supplication, it cannot be considered as *bid'ah* if Muslims compose texts of *Sfilawat* and recite the texts of *Sfilawat* which were not taught by the Prophet. Like prayer, the Prophet only asked Muslims to pray, but he did not ask them to pray any particular prayers. In other words, the Prophet gave them freedom to recite various prayers. Furthermore, none of the Prophet's HHadith asked Muslims to recite *Sfilawat* as taught by the Prophet. God and His Prophet only asked Muslims to recite *Sfilawat*. The Prophet never asked them to recite only the texts of prayers from him. In this case, as long as they have ability, people can write their own beautiful texts of *Sfilawat*. However, I admit that the *Sfilawat* and prayer taught by the Prophet are more excellent than others.<sup>5</sup>

*Kyai* Marzuki, a leader of a *pesantren* in East Java, shared *Kyai* Mughni's view on this issue. *Kyai* Marzuki argued that Muslims can pray by using either text of prayers taught by the Prophet or texts from others. His view was based on the fact that according to Islamic law, all things are permissible (A., *'ibabah*) unless there is evidence of prohibition. In line with this notion, composing *Sfilawat* and reciting of these texts are permissible because no HHadith prohibits Muslims from doing so. In addition to this argument, *Kyai* Marzuki categorized religious affairs into two categories. The first is *'ibadah mahfilla*, which means something ordained specifically by God in the Qur'an and by the Prophet in his sayings (HHadith), including detailed instruction of such matters as prayers, almsgiving, fasting during the Ramadhan month, and the pilgrimage (the *hajj*). The second is *'ibadah ghair al-mahfilla*, which means something ordained by God and his Prophet in general, but without specific mention of how to perform and practice it. Examples of this latter category are *dhiker* (chanting religious litanies), reciting *Sfilawat* and reciting the Qur'an. God and the Prophet only asked Muslims to recite these, but how many times was not specified. Therefore, Marzuki argues that Muslims are allowed to recite various texts of *Sfilawat*, recite as many pages of the Qur'an as they like, and perform *dhiker* as many times as they wish.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Interview with *Kyai* Busyro Mughni, Kediri, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with *Kyai* Marzuki, Malang, March, 2005.

It is clear that in terms of *Sflawat* and related topics, Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker* groups have based their arguments on what has long been pointed out by the Prophet through the interpretation of other Muslim scholars. While following these Muslims scholars' notions of *Sflawat*, they also have creatively adapted those notions in relation to the context of their culture. The process of adaptation, however, cannot be regarded as a violation of the main teaching of Islam itself, since Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker* groups still refer to the Prophet tradition. What Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker* groups have done can thus be regarded as maintaining the Islamic tradition, a term used by Nashr to refer to:

Something which incorporates both the message received by the Prophet Muhammad in the form of Scripture as well as that Islam, as a religion, absorbed according to its own genius and made its own through transformation and synthesis.<sup>7</sup>

With this definition, they believe that what they practise is justifiable by the text of Qur'an and HHadith.

### **The Concepts of Sainthood (*Wali*) and Miracle (*Karamah*)**

It is no exaggeration to say that the concepts of sainthood and miracles are an entry point to the understanding of practices of *Majlis Dhiker* groups in Indonesia. Like other Sufi groups, Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker* groups regard the concepts of sainthood and miracles as significant themes in their religious practices and beliefs. These two concepts have important meaning particularly in establishing the ritual and the teachings of these groups. Therefore, in order to understand *Majlis Dhiker* in Indonesia, people need to understand how these two concepts are understood by these *Majlis Dhiker* groups.

As argued by *Gus* Latif, a leader of *Majlis Dhiker* group *Ihsaniyyat* in Kediri, East Java, believing in the existence of saints (*auliyah*) is compulsory for Muslims, since God and his Prophet spoke about these saints and their miracles in the Qur'an and in Hadith. For Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker*, *wali* are generally understood to be those who are loved by God and are entrusted to be His representatives on this world.<sup>8</sup> Abdul Latif Madjid, a leader of *Wabidiyat*, pointed out that a *wali* is a

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<sup>7</sup> Muhaimin, A.G., *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon: Ibadat and Adat Among Javanese Muslims* (Australia: The Australian National University, 1995), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with *Gus* Latif, Kediri, January, 2005.

person whose role is to improve the condition of this world. The heart of a *wali* is always connected to God. As a result, a *wali* is not only able to spread the light of God (A., *nur>Allah*) over the world but also to help others to approach God.<sup>9</sup>

*Kyai* Misbah, an older brother of *Gus* Latif from *Pesantren* Jampes, pointed out that *wali* can be divided into two categories. The first category is *wali* who are consistently devoted to God without any slightest indication of disobedience. The second category is *wali* who are protected by God. *Kyai* Misbah believed the former as could be achieved by anyone through consistency of worship. In contrast, the latter cannot be sought because this status is given by God through His blessing. Such a person is sought by God to be His friend (A., *awliya>*)<sup>10</sup> and is known as a *majdub*, a person who is drawn from the place of divine closeness up to God Himself, to the highest of God's realms. All such persons are chosen by God as *wali*, although they do not intend to become *wali*. With these categorizations, *Kyai* Misbah pointed out that saints are not limited to Muslim scholars; instead they may be chosen from farmers, traders and other ordinary Muslims, as long as they abide by Islamic laws. Consequently, people should not disparage other people because they do not know whether they are *wali* or not.<sup>11</sup>

Like other Sufi, Indonesian *Majlis Dhikr* groups agree that the consistency of worship (I., *istiqamat*) is a primary requirement for *wali*. As a result, Muslims who do not undertake active worship (I., *ibadah*) and who commit sins cannot be considered as *wali*. In other words, as pointed out by *Kyai* Misbah, a major indicator of sainthood is the extent to which Muslims abide to Islamic Law. If they fail to follow the law, Muslims cannot be considered to be *wali*, even if they are able to perform miracles. *Kyai* Misbah told me that this is explained by most '*ulama>*' in order to prevent people from wrongly identifying *wali*. For him, the appearance of *khariq al-'ada* (lit. violating habits) and the popularity of a person but without constant worship cannot be regarded as signs of sainthood. *Kyai* Misbah stressed this important aspect because many people misunderstand *wali*. They think a *wali* is a

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Abdul Latif Madjid, Kediri, February, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> This is reminiscent of the two distinct classes of *wali haqqullah* and *waliullah* mentioned previously.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with *Kyai* Misbah, Kediri, January, 2005.



person bestowed with supernatural powers whose guests ask for blessing. In addition to constant *ibadah*, *Gus* Latif added that people cannot be considered as true *wali* until they die with a *hikmah al-khatima* (a good ending). In line with this, *Gus* Latif argued that unlike prophets, the status of saint can be removed by God, if they do not abide to *shariat*. He stated:

The status of prophets cannot be lost because they have received their status as prophet from the time they were born and God protects them from sins (*ma'shum*). In contrast, since God does not protect *wali* from sins, God can remove their status. This can be described with this analogy: if I love someone, but he or she does not respect me, I will not love him or her anymore. The same is true if God loves or chooses persons as His *wali* (friends), but they never respect Him, God will not love those saints.<sup>12</sup>

Indonesian *Majlis Dhikr* groups strongly believed in the hierarchy of saints. Zainuddin, one of the senior leaders in *Wahidiyat*, believes that the highest level in the hierarchy is called *wali qutb* or *ghawth hadza al-zaman*. Although he could not name the *qutb* of his time, Zainuddin believed that these *qutb* have existed in every age. When one died, another saint will succeed him. However, Zainuddin believed that by practising particular prayers, Muslims might be able to know the identity of the *ghawth* of the age, depending on the purity of their heart. Moreover, *qutb* are considered to have received perfection (I., *kesempurnaan*) and a mandate from God so that they can perfect other people. They are so close to God that they are able to help other people who want to approach God. Zainuddin explained to me how these *ghawth* could bring people closer to God:

The closest person to God is a *qutb* or *ghawth*. They are so close to God that they 'know' where God exists. This closeness is obviously not in physical terms. As a result, they can help others to be close to God. Therefore, as explained by Jalaluddin al-Rumi, it might take two hundred years for people to approach God. However, if people approach these *qutb* who are able to approach God, they may take only two days.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with *Gus* Latif, Kediri, January, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Zainuddin, Kediri, November, 2004.

Zainuddin argued that in order to help people to approach God, these *quthb* should not meet people directly. But although they did not meet them, these *quthb* are believed to be capable of bringing people to approach God and to know God (*ma'rifa billah*). Zainuddin explained that if these *ghawth* live at the place of sunset and people live at the place of sunrise, the *ghawth* are still able to teach people how to approach God.

Zainuddin, and his *Majlis Dhikr* members generally believe that if those *ghawth* have disciples, they must be able to give their spiritual light (A., *nadrat*, I., *pancaran batin*) to their disciples (I., *murid*) without meeting them. However, in order to receive this *nadrat* (spiritual light), disciples should be ready to accept it, by reciting particular prayers taught by their master. Zainuddin described the process of spreading *nadrat* (spiritual light) as follows:

Disciples are like those who turn on television, while *ghawth* is like a TV station. When the TV station broadcasts its programs, people can watch these programs if they turn on their television. If they sleep or turn off the TV, they will not be able to watch them.<sup>14</sup>

The ability of the *ghawth* to give their *nadrat* is illustrated by the following story. Zainuddin told me that when he married his wife, Ima, he asked her to practise a specific ritual (I., *mujabadah*) for forty days, a precondition for any new member of the *Wabidiyat* group. However, his wife was unable to complete the forty days *mujabadah*. Later, she dreamed one night that Abdul Latif Madjid, a leader of *Wabidiyat*, visited her. In her dream, he asked Ima whether she had finished. She said that she had not yet finished the *mujabadah*. After this occurrence, Ima completed the forty days *mujabadah* because she was worried that Abdul Latif would ask her again about it. Zainuddin maintained that this event is evidence that Abdul Latif Madjid, who is believed by *Wabidiyat* member to be a *ghawth*, is able to give his *nadrat* to his chosen disciples. As well as helping people to achieve the Gnosis of God (*ma'rifat bi Allah*), *ghawth* are believed, especially among *Wabidiyat* members, not only to be capable of attracting, lifting and strengthening people's belief but also of withdrawing and weakening people's belief.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Zainuddin, Kediri, September, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, the *Majlis Dhikr* groups believe that saints, even if they have died, are capable of providing intercession (A., *shafa'at*) to living Muslims. *Gus* Latif told me that this is possible because their task is to help prophets, so they can give their intercession to other people. It is even thought that in their tombs, saints can hear people praying because they are still alive. They have only moved from this world to another and are still alive in the other world. The evidence for this belief, as *Gus* Latif argued, is taken from the practice of the Prophet Muhammad. When he passed Muslim tombs, Muhammad always prayed and greeted those buried in the tombs. This proved that the dead persons could hear the voice of living persons.

When asked whether saints know that they are saints, *Majlis Dhikr* members have different views. *Kyai* Mughni believes that saints do not know that God has chosen them as His saints.<sup>16</sup> They do not realize that they themselves are saints. *Kyai* Mughni's counterpart, *Kyai* Misbah, believes a notion prevalent in Sufi tradition that since sainthood is a secret matter, no one knows saints, including the saints themselves, except other saints of the same status. He quoted the familiar phrase: *la>ya'rifu al-wali>illa al-wali>*(no one knows any saint except another saint). This is a strong belief in the *pesantren* tradition. *Kyai* Misbah made the following analogy:

No one knows *wali* except another *wali*. It is fair that students should be tested with students and car mechanics should be tested with other car mechanics.<sup>17</sup>

As a result, *Kyai* Misbah maintained that true *wali* never disclose their sainthood to anyone else. If they expose their sainthood, they can be considered as the extremely stupid. Since sainthood is the trusteeship from God, it should be kept secret and not to be told to anyone else.

In contrast, although he quoted the same phrase as *Kyai* Misbah cited, Zainuddin interpreted it differently. He argued that no one knows a saint except the saint himself or herself. Zainuddin based his view on the fact that some Muslim saints such as Shaykh 'Abd al-Qa'dir al-Jaylani and Ibn 'Arabi knew that they were saints. According to him, some saints were even given the right to reveal their sainthood, some

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with *Kyai* Mughni, Kediri, February, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with *Kyai* Misbah, Kediri, January, 2005.

should conceal their sainthood, while others can choose either to expose or conceal their sainthood. Despite this, Hasyim Asy'ari, a founder of Nahdlatul Ulama, strongly condemned those who proclaimed themselves to be *wali* as happened in many Sufi orders. He maintained:

One of the temptations which could ruin Muslims in general is self-announcement of *murshid* (I., *guru tarekat*) and self-announcement of saints of God, even *wali qutb* or *imam mahdi*. When people proclaim themselves as *wali*, but never abide by the Prophet's laws (*shariat*), they are liars. Those who proclaim sainthood are not real saints, they are only fake saints (I., *wali-walian*) because they reveal a specific secret (*sirr al-khususiyat*)<sup>18</sup>

The discussion of sainthood among *Majlis Dhikr* members is inseparable from the discussion of *karamah*. Members of *Majlis Dhikr* are concerned with *karamah* because this term has often been linked with other terms such as *ilmu karamah*, *ilmu hikmah*, *keadigdayan karamah*, and *karamah sejati*, which have been used and advertised widely in particular Indonesian media. Responding to this issue, Gus Latif explained that there are two kinds of *karamah*. The first *karamah* is natural and is possessed by devout Muslims because of their intense devotion to God. This *karamah* happens merely because of God's blessing and cannot be sought by Muslims. The second type of *karamah* is sought (I., *yang dicari*). For example, when devout Muslims practise and recite particular prayers and are then able to perform miracles (I., *ilmu putih*), this can be categorized as the second type of *karamah*. In contrast, if these miracles are performed by bad people (I., *orang yang durbaka*), this kind of miracle can be categorized as black magic (I., *ilmu hitam* or *ilmu musyrik*). Therefore, Gus Latif concluded that if those *karamah* discussed by the Indonesian media are sought and practised by good Muslims, then they can be categorized as *ilmu putih*.<sup>19</sup>

Based on this categorization, Gus Latif agreed with the general view of Muslim Sufi and theologians and argued that miracles (*karamah*) are not a prerequisite of sainthood. Unlike prophets

<sup>18</sup> Mukhtar Qomari, *Sejarah dari Awal Perjuangan Wahidiyah* (Kediri: n.p., 2003), p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Gus Latif, Kediri, January, 2005.

equipped with *mu'jiza* to spread Islam (A., *tabligh*) and to challenge unbelievers, saints do not have this task, so they do not need miracles (I., *karamah*). In other words, saints should not use *karamah* as a testament to their sainthood, while prophets should have *mu'jiza* as a testament to their prophethood. *Gus* Latif argued that many Muslim saints who cannot perform miracles still frequently achieve the highest level of sainthood. *Kyai* Misbah, senior teacher in Jampes and *Gus* Latif's older brother, pointed out that *karamah* is not the main objective of people's worship of God. *Kyai* Misbah gave an example of a person who was able to perform a miracle by changing rice into gold nuggets by touching it but he did not wish to have such miracle and prayed to God so that he would not have such miraculous ability. This indicates that performing miracles is not the main objective of the person. Like other Muslim scholars, *Kyai* Misbah agreed that since the consistency of worshipping (*istiqamat*) is more important than *karamah*, people should seek *istiqamat* instead of *karamah*.

It is clear that in regard to the concepts of sainthood and *karamah*, Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker* groups base their views on the interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith and the notions of Muslim Sufi and other theologians. Therefore in terms of these important concepts, Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker* groups cannot be regarded as violating the teaching of *tasawuf*.

### Understanding the Concept of *Tawasul*

Indonesian *Majlis Dhiker* groups are familiar with the concept of *tawasul* discussed by Muslim scholars. For example, *Kyai* Zainuddin, one of the leaders in the *Wahidiyat* group, gives a similar definition of *tawasul* to the one pointed out by other Muslim theologians. He is also well aware of the different interpretations of *tawasul* or *wasikat* and the argument as to whether this should be practised only through living persons and pious acts or also through deceased persons. Zainuddin is the proponent of the latter notion. For him *tawasul* is a means to approach God either using pious acts (I., *amal saleh*), the Prophet, or other pious Muslims.

In discussing about this topic, Zainuddin criticized those who have rejected *tawasul* through the dead. On this matter, he cited the Prophetic Hadith relating to Adam who asked God for forgiveness by seeking a means through the Prophet Muhammad long before he was

born.<sup>20</sup> Zainuddin asked why people rejected the permissibility to seek a means through the Prophet after his death, while the Prophet Adam himself performed *tawasul* through the Prophet Muhammad, even though the Prophet Muhammad was not born yet. Zainuddin maintained that Adam sought his *tawasul* through Muhammad's spirit (I., *ruh*) not through his body. He thus stated unequivocally that this implied that the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad was alive both before his birth and after his death. Therefore, Zainuddin argued, following the practice of Adam, *tawasul* can be performed through the spirit of the Prophet after his death, even though his body no longer exists.

Zainuddin also criticized those who have confined *tawasul* to pious acts and have rejected *tawasul* through the person of the Prophet and his dignity. In his view, people seek *wasikat* through the person of the Prophet because of their love of him. Since, love (A., *mahabbat*) of the Prophet is a pious act, Zainuddin argued that seeking *wasikat* through the person of the Prophet is similar to performing *tawasul* through a pious deed (I., *amal saleh*).

Zainuddin strongly supported such *tawasul* because this is the main practice of his *Majlis Dhikr* group. *Tawasul* practised by this group, he noted, is to ask the intercession (A., *shafasat*) of the Prophet Muhammad either in this world or in the hereafter, and to ask him to supplicate God on behalf of the supplicant. This practice of *tawasul* is performed in the group by reciting the following phrase: 'Ya>Sayyidi>ya> Rasu>llahu>' (Oh My Lord and Prophet of God). For Zainuddin, the purpose of this exclamation is to seek the intercession of the Prophet because he is the person created by God to call on (I., *mengadu*). Zainuddin described the process of *tawasul* as follows:

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<sup>20</sup> The Prophet said on the authority of `Umar: 'When Adam committed his mistake he said: O! My Lord, I am asking you to forgive me for the sake of Muhammad. Allah said: O! Adam, and how do you know about Muhammad whom I have not yet created? Adam replied, O! My Lord, after You created me with your hand and breathed into me of Your Spirit, I raised my head and saw written on the heights of the Throne: *La>Ilaha illa Allah Muhammad al-Rasu>llahu* I understood that You would not place next to Your Name but the Most Beloved One of Your creation. Allah said: O! Adam, I have forgiven you, and were it not for Muhammad I would not have created you.

According to a Hadith, the Prophet said: 'God has chosen a servant to become a place to call on, and the Prophet is the perfect person to be called on. He said that, 'I will give my intercession to my *umat* who always call me.' Calling the Prophet does not mean that we worship him and the supplication is not being made to the Prophet whose name is invoked, but to Allah. Just as when people come to a *kyai* asking him to supplicate God on their behalf. In this case, we do not consider the *kyai* whom we asking to be God.<sup>21</sup>

According to Zainuddin, practising such *tawasul* cannot be considered superstition or polytheism because it is strongly recommended in the Qur'an. Zainuddin pointed out that people can only be accused polytheist if they believe in the existence of another god. Zainuddin believed that as long as people practice *tawasul* under this framework: seeking the help of Allah through the Prophet without regarding him as God, they cannot be regarded as polytheist. Zainuddin believed that seeking a help through the Prophet or pious Muslims will make it more likely that supplicant's prayer will be speedily answered by God. *Gus Farih*, a leader of *Dhiker al-Ghafilin* group, supported this view. He argued as follows:

What is meant by *wasul* here is that we believe that only God will help us and so we ask only Him for help. If we do not have such a conviction, our *tawasul* can be considered as idolatry (*shirk*). Therefore, if people say that asking Allah through dead persons is regarded as *shirk*, I would say that asking living persons can be considered as *shirk* too if we believe that these persons have the power to help. For example, when we ask a doctor to cure our sickness and we believe that the doctor, not God, can heal the sickness, this conduct can be considered as *shirk* too. Therefore, in *tawasul* we never regard people we use as a means in *tawasul* or as agents who can give help or assistance.<sup>22</sup>

Asked why people still need a means to approach God if He is closer to people than their jugular vein, Zainuddin told that although God is the most powerful, He still relies on Angels and the Prophet to

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Zainuddin, Kediri, November, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with *Gus Farih*, November, 2004.

deliver His teachings.<sup>23</sup> However, Zainuddin was reluctant to give this answer to support his notion of the permissibility of *wasikat* through the Prophet because this argument opens endless debate (I., *debat kusir*). Therefore, Zainuddin believed that if Islamic law (*shariat*) acknowledges such *tawasul* practice, Muslims should accept and practise it, even though there are some different opinions on this matter.

Similarly, Gus Latif, one of the leaders of *Majlis Dhikr* in Kediri, also supported the practice of *tawasul* through the person of the Prophet and other pious Muslims after their death. He cited previous Hadith that support the permissibility of such *tawasul*. He also pointed out that *tawasul* is needed in the supplication to God since this means that one's prayer to God will be more easily granted than if no intermediaries are used. For him, this practice is important because those persons whose names are mentioned in *tawasul* possess high status, dignity, and respect in Allah's eyes. By mentioning their names in the supplication, God will therefore give much more attention to one's prayer. Gus Latif also said that since the Prophet, his Companions, Muslim saints (A., *awliya*) and other pious Muslims are the most beloved persons of God, if people love these persons by mentioning their names in their prayer, in return God will love those supplicants. In this sense, *tawasul* is closely related to the concept of *barakah* (blessing), since Gus Latif believed that these pious persons are able to spread *barakah* because they are the most beloved persons to God. This is similar to the notion put forward by *Kyai Hasyim Asy'ari* who interpreted the Prophetic tradition as follows, 'People who love someone will be gathered [in the hereafter] with someone they love.' For *Kyai Hasyim Asy'ari*, this Hadith can also mean that people whose pious acts are relatively few who love someone whose pious acts are perfect will be gathered [in the hereafter] with the that person.<sup>24</sup>

Although most leaders of *Majlis Dhikr* groups are familiar with the concept of *tawasul* as described by Muslim theologians, some of their practices of *tawasul* are different from those of the theologians. During my attendance at the *dhikr* rituals held by these groups, I never heard

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<sup>23</sup> In this context, Zainuddin said that God relies on Angels and the Prophet to deliver His teachings.

<sup>24</sup> Hasyim Asy'ari, *Sang Kyai: Fatwa K.H.M. Hasyim Asy'ari* (Yogyakarta: Qirtas, 2005), p. 27.



the *tawassul* phrase such as *Allahumma inni>atawassul>u bijabi nabiyyika an taqdir>hajati>* (God, verily I seek a means by the dignity of your messenger, fulfil my needs) used when those *Majlis Dhikr* groups performed *tawassul*. I only found one passage in the last part of a prayer in the *Salamat Wabidiyat* group that could be categorized as a *tawassul*. This passage was:

In the name of Allah the Beneficent and the Merciful. O Allah! For the sake of Your greatest name and with the dignity of Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and with the blessings of *ghawthi haatha al-zaman* and his helpers and the rest of your saints O Allah! O Allah! O Allah! May Allah be pleased with them, may God deliver our call onto the whole of universe and may God make deep impression on it. Verily, You are able to all things. And verily You are the Most deserved One to grant a request.

The phrase categorized as *tawassul* in the passage is: ‘For the sake of Your greatest name and with the dignity of Muhammad’ and the word ‘with the blessings of *ghawthi haatha al-zaman* and his helpers and the rest of your saints.’ Instead of using a *tawassul* phrase, other groups performed *tawassul* by reciting the names of people followed by the recitation of *al-Fatihah* (the first chapter of Qur’an), for the benefit of the parties named. For example, in the *dhikr* ritual that I attended in one Muslim graveyard complex, the leader of the group *Majlis Dhikr al-Ghafilin* recited the following:

To the presence (*il>ah>fatih*) of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him, next to the presence of my lord Syaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jailani> and Syaykh Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali> and my lord al-Habib ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Alwi>al-Haddad, may God be pleased with them: *al-Fatihah*.

After this, the gathering recited the first chapter of the Qur’an in unison. The leader of *Majlis Dhikr* then continued to mention other names followed by reciting *al-Fatihah*. However, Marzuki, a Muslim scholar in the State Islamic University in Malang, argued that reciting *al-Fatihah* for the benefit of deceased persons obviously could not be regarded as the practice of *waslat*. Instead, this practice can be categorized as paying homage to fellow Muslims and the most respected people, including the Prophets of God, Muslim saints,

parents, teachers, and others. For him, according to Islam, respect for those people is not confined to their life but also continues after their death by sending them *al-Fatihah* for the benefit of the people named. Muslim theologians have widely discussed this practice within the context of giving presents to deceased persons by sending them *al-Fatihah*.<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that on the matter of *tawassul*, Indonesian *Majlis Dhikr* groups do not confine the concept of *tawassul* to living persons, their prayers and through pious acts. *Tawassul* can also be conducted through deceased persons who are considered to occupy a position of favour with, or close proximity to, God. It is for this reason that *Majlis Dhikr* groups conduct their rituals at Muslim tomb sites and other Muslim saints' graveyards whose occupants are considered to have close proximity to God.

### **Sending the Merit of Pious Deeds to the Deceased**

Most of the leaders of *Majlis Dhikr* well understand that Muslim jurists have different views on the possibility of deceased persons receiving merit from others' pious acts. Responding to this matter, *Kyai* Misbah cited the Hadith and the verses used by those who reject this possibility. Like al-Ma'likī, *Kyai* Misbah based his interpretation of the texts of the Hadith on common sense: deceased persons are no longer able to conduct any kind of deeds, whether pious or sinful, because they have passed away. Therefore, according to him, the content of the Hadith describes deceased persons who are not able to do anything. However, the Hadith implies that living persons are still able to send the merit of their pious acts to the deceased. Asked about the Hadith stating that a righteous child (i., *anak saleh*) who prays for his or her deceased parents can bestow benefit on their parents, *Kyai* Misbah said that the term 'righteous' was the main factor. As a result, only righteous children can assist their deceased parents with their prayers. In other words, if their children are not righteous, the parents cannot obtain any benefit from their children's prayers. However, if others who do not have any familial relationship with the deceased are righteous and pray for the deceased, the latter can benefit from their

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with *Ustadz* Marzuki, Malang, November, 2004.

prayers. Likewise, only charity accompanied with sincerity (I., *ikhlas*) can benefit its doer after they have died.<sup>26</sup>

Regarding the text of the verse, 'and the man can have nothing but what he does (53:39),' *Kyai* Misbah pointed out that this verse is right in the sense that deceased persons can only take their own deeds to the grave. However, for him, this verse does not prevent living persons from sending the merit of their good deeds to deceased persons. To illustrate this point, *Kyai* Misbah made the following analogy: although I had come to his house to interview with him with only a pen and a notebook and have not brought a tape recorder, my brother could send me a tape recorder later.

*Gus* Farih, one of leaders of the *Dhiker al-Ghafilin* group, is also convinced that deceased persons can obtain benefit from prayers offered on their behalf. To prove his claim, *Gus* Farih also uses a method of reasoning by analogy (A., *qiyas*), quoting one of the Qur'an's verses in which Abraham asked God for forgiveness for his parents and other believers until the day of Judgment. For *Gus* Farih, this verse indicates that Abraham asked God's pardon not only for living believers during his time but also all believers after his time until the Day of Judgment, including all those who had died. He further argued that if the prayer of Abraham did not benefit deceased persons, God would not have revealed the verse. In addition, *Gus* Farid used another example to support his claim as follows:

One day the chairman of Muhammadiyah Youth Association in Kediri (*Ikatan Pemuda Muhammadiyah*) asked me as to whether our prayer can be received by deceased persons. The chairman asked me again, 'If the prayer can be received by the deceased persons, can you show me the Hadith which justifies that practice?' I knew this young man wanted to ask me about the legitimacy of *tablilan* [special ritual by reciting the phrase *la ilaha illa Allah* person in unison for a deceased] that I practise. I said to him, if we have found evidence (I., *dalil*) justifying this view in the Qur'an, I think we do not need to find another *dalil* from an Hadith, even though we can find another *dalil* from an Hadith. As mentioned in the Qur'an, God teaches the Prophet to pray for his Muslim brothers who have preceded him. The prayer is as follows, *rabbana ighfir lana wa*

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with *Kyai* Misbah, Kediri, November, 2004.

*li ikhwanina wal-ladhinna sabaqunashi al-iman* {Our Lord! Forgive us and our brethren who came before us into the Faith} (59:10). If the prayers of living person could not be received by deceased persons, God would not have taught this prayer to his Prophet. Meanwhile, argument from the Hadith can also be found in the Hadith narrated by Imam Muslim and Bukhari relating to the occasion when the Prophet visited Uhd and Baqi's grave sites. Firstly, the Prophet greeted the personages in those graves, saying *al-salam 'alaykum*, and the Prophet prayed for them. The word *al-salam 'alaykum* indicates that the Prophet chatted with the deceased persons and the prayer supplicated by the Prophet could be heard and its merit could be received by the deceased persons.

The members of the *Wahidiyat* group even believe that the merit of charity performed by living persons can benefit deceased persons. This can be seen from the courtesy (*adab*) of giving donations imposed by the group on its members. One of the *adab* is that before putting money into a donation box, members of this group should intend to give the merit of the donation to their families who are still alive or dead. This is due to the belief that donating to the *Wahidiyat* group can cause happiness and perfection of gnosis for living families and deceased families.<sup>27</sup> One of the members of this group, Dedey Firmansyah, a member of the group from Lampung, told the following story about the importance of delivering the merit of putting a money in a donation box (I., *kotak amal*) for his deceased father.

This story took place when I ignored the significance of putting money into a donation box for the *Wahidiyat* group. One day, I saw my father in a dream, who had passed away, came to me. His face looked sad. He was silent but tears dropped from his eyes. In that dream, I was extremely sad too. The more I approached my father, the louder he cried. Then I asked him, 'Why are you crying?' He did not reply my question and kept crying. While he was crying, he answered my question, 'Currently, I no longer receive your

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<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, "Berdana sebagai Penyempurna Iman dan Makrifat," in *Aham*, Vol. 44. (1423a): pp. 31-32.

charity; pointing his finger to a donation box. Now, I feel tired. Do you leave me with this tiredness?<sup>28</sup>

There are many other stories told by the members of this group relating to the significance of putting some money into a donation box for deceased persons. These stories are stressed within the *Wabidiyat* group to encourage its members to donate more to the group.

### The Concept of *Tabarruk*

In relation to *tabarruk*, the *Majlis Dhikr* leaders define *barakah* as 'increase' (A., *ziyadah*) or 'growth' (A., *nama*). In other words, Muslims who perform *tabarruk* are seeking an increase or growth in something such as their possessions, wealth, offspring or success. In line with this definition, *Kyai* Misbah, a senior leader among *Majlis Dhikr* groups in Jampes Kediri, told that *barakah* is a quality that can lead to an increase in other qualities. However, for him, some qualities cannot grow or increase, as he explained in the following:

For instance, some people have mastered many kinds of Islamic knowledge. Nevertheless, the knowledge they have does not contain *barakah* because they use the knowledge for the benefit of themselves. They never spread and teach the knowledge for the benefit of other Muslims, such as teaching the knowledge to other people. Another example of *barakah* is someone who has a rice field. Even though the rice field is not large enough, these people can share their harvest with the needy. In this case, this rice field can be regarded as having *barakah*.

In this sense, something can be regarded as having *barakah* if it can generate further qualities and benefit for other people.

According to *Kyai* Misbah, there are two kinds of *barakah*. The first is a *barakah* which is dependent (I., *disandarkan*) on humankind. This type of *barakah* is similar to *wasfah*; hence a person who becomes the object of *tabarruk* serves as a means to ask God. In this sense, when people seek *barakah* from righteous dead persons, they should not ask the persons in the grave because the source of the *barakah* is God. Like the Salafi groups, *Kyai* Misbah pointed out that since it is only God who has the authority to give *barakah* to someone, people should ask for *barakah* to God rather than through righteous persons who do not

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<sup>28</sup> Team Pengalaman Rohani, *Shalawat Wabidiyah dan Pengalaman Robani* (Kediri: Qalamuna Pondok Pesantren Kedunglo, 2004), p. 143.

have the authority to spread blessing. To further explain this, *Kyai* Misbah gave the analogy of people who ask for money from a particular person who does not have money. Even though that person is asked to give money, he or she will not be able to, because he or she does not have any. The same is true of righteous persons who cannot give *barakah* because they do not possess *barakah* since the source of *barakah* is in the hands of God. *Kyai* Mughni, another senior *Kyai* in Jampes, gave the following example of this kind of *tabarruk*:

Seeking *tabarruk* through pious persons is similar to *tawassul*. We just recite a prayer and send the merit of the prayer to the deceased pious persons with the hope that by our recitation we can obtain *barakah* from God. For example, someone with difficulty in seeking a livelihood can easily gain a livelihood because of prayers recited at the tomb of those righteous persons. In this case, we do not invoke those persons for *barakah* because they have passed away and they cannot do anything; instead, we invoke God. In other words, in this practice, we only approach the most beloved persons of God and by this practice we can obtain *barakah* from God, not from those persons we have visited. Unfortunately, lay people have misunderstood this practice. They practise *tabarruk* by seeking *barakah* directly from the personage lying in the graves.

The second type of *barakah* is dependent on God. For *Kyai* Misbah this type of *barakah* is the best *barakah* to seek. Therefore, *Kyai* Misbah urged Muslims to ask God for *barakah* directly either in worldly matters (I., *masalah duniawi*) or heavenly matters (I., *masalah ukhrawi*). For example, in worldly matters Muslims can ask *barakah* from God for their children to become righteous persons. Moreover, Muslims can invoke *barakah* from God for their wealth so that, even though it is not much, they can use it for useful purposes. Invoking *barakah* for wealth is stressed by *Kyai* Misbah because if the wealth does not contain *barakah*, even though it is much, it will not benefit the owner and others. For instance, people may spend their wealth on wasteful things (I., *hura-hura*), in which case, *Kyai* Misbah said, it is not useful. In heavenly matters, Muslims can ask God for *barakah* to increase the quality of their pious acts by imbuing them with sincerity. *Kyai* Misbah also argued that even though a pious act may be small, it can produce *barakah* if it is sincere.

Asked why people should seek *barakah* through righteous persons before and after their death, the *Majlis Dhikr* leader referred to similar practices performed by the Prophet and his Companions. Another reason for such a practice is that righteous persons, such as *'ulama*ʒ *wali*, and *kyai* have a high status before God.<sup>29</sup> With their high status and their closeness, they deserve to be approached. For *Kyai* Misbah, seeking *barakah* through these righteous persons is conducted with the hope that God will bless supplicants so they may be able perform the same righteous acts as those pious persons. However, Tholhah Hasan, a Muslim scholar from Nahdlatul Ulama has warned that people should not incorrectly seek *barakah* through anyone whose righteousness is in dispute. Consequently, Muslims are not allowed to seek *barakah* through sacred sites where guardian spirits (I., *pundben-pundben keramat*), *dukun-dukun* or sacred things (I., *benda-benda keramat*) are worshipped.<sup>30</sup>

Like *Kyai* Misbah, *Gus* Fahri defined *barakah* as increasing qualities (I., *tambah ke'apikan*) and gave the following example:

My grandmother used to be a fabric seller. She had many customers. However, she went bankrupt because the customers cheated her. They took material from her shop and promised to pay later, but they never returned to pay. Since all the stock in her shop was borrowed from her boss (I., *juragan*), the supplier, she had to pay him for all the stock. Unfortunately, she did not have enough money to pay her boss. She was very upset. She remembered that she had a piece of land in Ponorogo, which was given to her by her deceased parents as inheritance. She wanted to sell the land so that she could pay her boss. Even though she advertised the land, no one was interested in buying it. She remembered that the land used to belong to the late Mbah Muharram, so, she visited the tomb of Mbah Muharram and recited a whole chapter of the Qur'an. Before finishing the last part of the Qur'an she received a spiritual experience and could see the personage lying in the grave. One day later, she offered the land to Haji Maemun, a cow

<sup>29</sup> The high status of *'ulama*ʒ for example is shown in the hadith where they are described not only as heirs of the Prophet but also as trustworthy persons of God for His people.

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Tholhah Hasan, *Ahlusunnab Wal-Jama'ah dalam Persepsi dan Tradisi NU* (Jakarta: Lantabora Press, 2006), p. 287.

seller and the owner of land beside her land. Haji Maemun agreed to buy the land.

In his example, *Gus Fahri* described *barakah* as increasing a quality in the sense that his grandmother obtained *barakah* by reciting the Qur'an. As a result, she could obtain another quality, namely, she succeeded in selling her land.<sup>31</sup>

According to *Kyai Mughni*, *Kyai Misbah's* brother-in-law, seeking *barakah* through the Prophet and his relics was not confined only to his lifetime but also continued after his death. As *Kyai Mughni* explained that one can seek *barakah* through the Prophet after his death, for example, by reciting a blessing phrase (*Salawat*) to him. Since the meaning of *barakah* is growth, reciting a blessing for the Prophet can lead to an increase in a quality. In addition, one can seek *barakah* through his relics praying in three mosques, namely the al-Haram mosque in Mecca, the al-Nabawi mosque in Medina, and the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. *Kyai Mughni* said that it is mentioned in a Prophetic Hadith that by performing prayers in those mosques, God will increase the merit of the prayers a hundred thousand times compared to other mosques. Those three mosques, said *Kyai Mughni*, are regarded as blessed places and more efficacious than others because they are the places where the Prophet prayed. Since the source of *barakah* is God, *Kyai Mughni* argued that people could seek *barakah* through these mosques by invoking God directly, but not the Prophet.

## Conclusion

It is clear that in some aspects of practical Sufism, *Majlis Dhikr* groups in Indonesia follow similar notions to those articulated by prominent Muslim scholars, Sufi and theologians. Leaders of Indonesian *Majlis Dhikr* groups attribute their notions to similar practices conducted by the Prophet himself, his Companions (A., *shahabat*), the Successors of his Companions (A., *tabi'in*), and the Successors of the Successors (A., *tabi' al-tabi'in*). Therefore, the Indonesian *Majlis Dhikr* groups cannot be regarded as practising polytheism (*shirk*) or making innovation (*bid'ah*) because what they practise can be related to their interpretation of the main sources of Islamic law (A., *shari'at*), the Hadith and the Qur'an, and the practice of the Prophet's Companions. If this interpretation differs from that of

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with *Gus Fahri*, Kediri, September, 2005.



other groups of Muslims, one interpretation cannot be judged by another. Moreover, I argue that interpretations can be regarded as under the field of *ijtihad*, which means the use of all capabilities of reason by particular Muslims in deducing interpretations from the Qur'an and Hadith. If this is the case, one can expect different results of *ijtihad* among Muslims scholars. Muslims should not therefore claim that their own results of *ijtihad* are deemed to be true, while others' *ijtihad* are false, because all of these will be justified later in the hereafter. If the result is true according to the meaning and purpose of God and the Prophet, then it will have two rewards. In contrast, if the result is wrong because it does not agree with God's and the Prophet's purpose, it will have only one reward. []

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