

QUIETISM AND END-TIME RECLUSION IN THE QUR'ĀN AND HADITH:
AL-NĀBULUSĪ AND HIS BOOK *TAKMĪL AL-NU'ŪT*
WITHIN THE 'UZLA GENRE

Gibril Fouad Haddad

‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī’s (1050-1143/1641-1731) *Takmīl al-nu’ūt fī luzūm al-buyūt* (Perfecting the qualities: on keeping to homes) is a 39-folio treatise that epitomizes eight centuries of Islamic works on the theme of social reclusion (‘uzla) away from latter-day strifes (*fitan*) and has received two editions 21 years apart, the latter of which I received from and read with its editor, the Ḥumṣī grammarian and exegete Munīr al-Ḥāyik, from beginning to end in Beirut. ‘Uzla built upon the Qur’ānic and Hadith texts enjoining social withdrawal and political quietism for the sake of preserving one’s religion and safety, practicing repentance (*tarāba*), keeping to simple living (*zuhd*) and sparing others one’s own harm. The author begins by quoting scholarly poetry then about 60 hadiths related to reclusion, which he follows up with a lament on the dissolution of morals in his time as well as previous times. As did his predecessors, he demarcates reclusion from un-Islamic practices such as monasticism and clears it from any suggestion of divisiveness. He concludes his work with examples of past authorities who all practiced one form or another of qualified asociality. This article situates his work within the literature of ‘uzla in the Sunni tradition and its development of the sub-themes of safeguarding one’s faith, social disengagement and informal eremitism, the refocus on personal priorities, pacifism in the face of intra-Muslim strife, misanthropy and the struggle against egotism.

Keywords: Asceticism; corruption, Damascus, end times, *fitan*, Hadith, misanthropy, Nābulusī, pacifism, political quietism, Qur’ān, reclusion, repentance, salvation of the soul, seclusion, self-purification, simple living, spiritual jihad, spiritual retreat, strifes, sufism, Sunnism, *Takmīl al-nu’ūt*, ‘uzla, withdrawal from society, *zuhd*.

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Abū Hurayra (Allah be well-pleased with him) said the Messenger of Allah (upon him blessings and peace) said: "Part of the beauty of one's submission is to leave that which is of no concern to him."

Sunan al-Tirmidhī. It is the 12th of Nawawī's *Forty Hadiths*.

The son of 'Umar (may Allah be well-pleased with them both) said: "The Messenger of Allah (upon him blessings and peace) held my shoulders and said: 'Be in the world as if you were some stranger, or just passing through.'"

Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī. It is the 40th of Nawawī's *Forty Hadiths*.

"Obtain knowledge then isolate yourself (*tafaqqah thumma i'tazil*)."

al-Rabī' b. Khuthaym.¹

'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's (1050-1143/1641-1731) *Takmil al-nu'ūt fī luzūm al-buyūt* (Perfecting the qualities: on keeping to homes) is a 39-folio treatise that epitomizes eight centuries of Islamic works on the theme of social reclusion ('*uzla*) away from latter-day strifes (*fitan*) and has received two editions 21 years apart, the latter of which I received from and read with its editor, the Homsī grammarian and exegete Dr. Munīr al-Ḥāyik, from beginning to end in Beirut.² '*Uzla* built upon the Qur'ānic verses and Hadith texts enjoining social withdrawal and political quietism for the sake of preserving one's religion and safety, practicing repentance (*tawba*), keeping to simple living (*zuhd*) and sparing others one's own harm. The author begins by quoting scholarly poetry then about 60 hadiths related to reclusion, which he follows up with a lament on the dissolution of morals in his time as well as previous times. As did his predecessors, he demarcates reclusion from unislamic practices such as

1. Narrated by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Zuhd*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Shāhīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1420/1999), p. 72 no. 436 and p. 271 no. 1955; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-'Uzla wal-infirād*, ed. Mashhūr Ḥasan Salmān (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan, 1417/1997), p. 70 no. 36; al-Khaṭṭābī, *al-'Uzla*, ed. Yāsīn Muḥammad al-Sawwās, 2nd ed. (Damascus and Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1410/1990), p. 88; al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-zuhd al-kabīr*, ed. 'Amīr Aḥmad Ḥaydar, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1417/1996), p. 94 no. 122; Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'*, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 1399/1979; rept. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1409/1988) 8:220 and 9:49. Also attributed to Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī by al-Khaṭṭābī in *al-'Uzla*, p. 225 and Ghazālī in the *Iḥyā'*.
2. 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, *al-Muslimūn fī zamān al-fitan kamā akhbar al-Rasūl ṣallā Allahu 'alayhi wa-sallam al-musammā bi-Takmil al-nu'ūt fī luzūm al-buyūt*, ed. Majdī al-Shūrī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1416/1996); *Takmil al-nu'ūt fī luzūm al-buyūt*, ed. Muḥammad Munīr b. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥāyik (Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Daqqāq, 1438/2017).

monasticism and clears it from any suggestion of divisiveness. He concludes his work with examples of past authorities who all practiced one form or another of qualified asociality. This article situates his work within the literature of *‘uzla* in the Sunni tradition and its development of the sub-themes of safeguarding one's faith, social disengagement and informal eremitism, the refocus on personal priorities, pacifism in the face of intra-Muslim strifes, misanthropy and the struggle against egotism.

Nābulusī's life and works

The pious Damascene polymath, “renewer of the religion,” prolific author and commentator of over 300 books, “the most famous of the friends and knowers of Allah from his time to ours” (al-Nabhānī), Shaykh al-Islām Abū al-Fayḍ ‘Abd al-Ghanī b. Ismā‘īl b. ‘Abd al-Ghanī b. Ismā‘īl b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nābulusī al-Dimashqī al-Ḥanafī al-Naqshbandī al-Qādirī was born in the Damascus neighborhood of Zuqāq al-Maṣbana and Sūq al-Quṭn (wool market) near Bāb al-Jābī on 5 Dhūl-Ḥijja 1050/18 March 1641. He died a nonagenarian on 24 Sha‘bān 1143/4 March 1731 and was buried in the Ṣālīhiyya home he built for himself over a garden that had been gifted to him by the Damascene notable As‘ad b. Khalīl al-Ṣiddīqī, near the ‘Umarī school of the Banū Qudāma at the foot of Mount Qasyūn.³ That home was turned into a mosque that bears his name and is still frequented today. His family hailed from a scholarly Palestinian Maqdisī family descending from the Hanbali scholar Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma and affiliated to the Banū Jamā‘a on his father's side, and from the wealthy merchant family of the Banū Duwayk on his mother's side. They became known as Nābulusīs because one of the ancestors lived in Nablus for some time before moving to Damascus.⁴ His

3. See Muḥammad Muṭī‘ al-Ḥāfīz, “‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī: dirāsa fī ḥayātih wa-a‘mālīh wa-aḥwālīh,” in *al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, vol. 10 (1983), pp. 155-166; al-Murādi, *Silk al-durar fī a‘yān al-qarn al-thānī ‘ashar*, ed. Akram Ḥasan al-‘Ulabī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2001) 3:30-38; Ibn Shāshū, *Tarājīm ba‘ḍ a‘yān Dimashq* (Beirut: al-Maṭba‘a al-Lubnāniyya, 1886) pp. 67-83; al-Jabartī, *Ajā‘ib al-āthār fīl-tarājīm wal-akhbār*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1997) 1:263-267; Yūsuf al-Nabhānī, *Jamī‘ karāmāt al-awliyā’*, ed. Ibrāhīm ‘Awaḍ, 2 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-Thaqāfiyya, 1411/1991) 2:194-200; Ismā‘īl Bāshā Baghdādī, *Hadīyyat al-‘arīfīn: asmā’ al-mu‘allīfīn wa-āthār al-muṣannifīn*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Milli egitim basımevi, 1951-1955; rept. Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.) 1:590-594; introduction, al-Nābulusī, *al-Ajwiba ‘alā 161 su‘alan*, ed. Imtithāl al-Ṣaghīr (Damascus: Dār al-Fārābī lil-Ma‘ārif, 1422/2001), pp. 16, 39; Muḥammad al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī a‘yān al-qarn al-ḥādī ‘ashar*, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘at al-Wahbiyya, 1284/1868) 2:433.

4. This explains why they are not mentioned at all among the scholars of

first teacher was his father Ismā‘īl (1017-1062/1608-1652), an erudite jurist who taught *tafsīr* and *fiqh* in the Umawī mosque and the Salīmiyya school and had him memorize the Qur’ān by the age of nine as well as much Hadīth. He left his son a vast library as borne out by the large scope of references in the latter’s works, for example the more than 30 commentaries of the Qur’ān he cites in his 40-folio monograph entitled *Burhān al-thubūt*, written in 1130/1718 in defense of the doctrine of infallibility of angels and published in 376 pages.⁵ His Shafī‘ī grandfather ‘Abd al-Ghanī b. Ismā‘īl and his great-grandfather *Shaykh mashāyikh al-Shām* Ismā‘īl b. Aḥmad were also top scholars.

Among al-Nābulusī’s most famous teachers were the Sufi *muḥaddith* and historian Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī, the Cairene Azhari imam al-Shabrāmallasī, the Hanbali hadīth scholar ‘Abd al-Bāqī b. ‘Abd al-Bāqī al-Ba‘lī and the jurist Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qal‘ī. Among the most prominent of his abundant students were the litterateur and historian Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Dakdakjī at whose death in 1131/1719 “the master wept as he had never been seen weeping before,”⁶ the Damascene then Egyptian Sufi Muṣṭafā al-Bakrī who authored a biography of his master, the Hanbali Syrian jurist and doctrinaire Shams al-Dīn al-Saffārīnī, the hadīth scholar and jurist Zayn al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kuzbarī (the grandfather), and Muṣṭafā al-Ayyūbī al-Raḥmatī. With its 15 links of great imams, each link spanning from 45 to 106 years, the shortest and most prestigious authentic transmission chain for *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* is the pattern-chained *isnād* that goes through al-Nābulusī and is formed mostly—from Abū al-Yusr ‘Ābidīn to Aḥmad al-Ḥajjār—of scholars from the Ṣālīhiyya-Qāsyūn district of Damascus thus:

1. Abū al-Yusr ‘Ābidīn (d. 1401)
2. His grandfather Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ghanī ‘Ābidīn (d. 1307)
3. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kuzbarī (the grandson) (d. 1262)
4. Muṣṭafā al-Raḥmatī (d. 1205)
5. ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143)
6. Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī (d. 1061)
7. Badr al-Dīn al-Ghazzī (d. 984)
8. Abū al-Fatḥ al-Mizzī (d. 906)
9. ‘Ā’isha bint ‘Abd al-Hādī (d. 816)

Nablus, cf. Mahmoud Yazbak, “Nabulsi Ulama in the Late Ottoman Period, 1864-1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Feb. 1997), pp. 71-91.

5. al-Nābulusī, *Burhān al-thubūt fī tabrī‘at Hārūt wa-Mārūt*, ed. ‘Umar Aḥmad Zakariyyā (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 1429/2008).

6. al-Ḥāfiz, *‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī*, p. 161, citing al-Ghazzī’s *al-Wird al-unsī*.

10. Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭālib al-Ḥajjār (d. 730)
11. Sirāj al-Dīn al-Rabaʿī al-Zabīdī (d. 631)
12. Abū al-Waqt al-Sijzī (d. 553)
13. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Dāwūdī (d. 467)
14. Ibn Ḥammūyah al-Sarakhsī (d. 381)
15. al-Faʿirabrī (d. 320)
16. al-Bukhārī (d. 256).⁷

Al-Nābulusī's scholarly output was high and he is counted among the prolific scholars of Islam in jurisprudence, legal theory, hadith, doctrine, Qur'ānic commentary, sufism, grammar and rhetoric, poetry and literature, travelogues, history and interpretation of dreams, as well as more peripheral disciplines such as medicine, music and agriculture. Among his works:

- *al-Abḥāth al-mukhlṣa fī ḥukmī kay al-ḥimmiṣa* on cauterization.
- *al-Aḥādīth al-manthūra wal-akhbār al-ma'thūra*, a collection of reports.
- *Anwār al-sulūk wa-asrār al-mulūk* (1113/1702) on the levels of sainthood and the exclusive universality of Islam.
- *Barwāṭin al-Qur'ān wa-mawāṭin al-furqān*, see next section.
- *Burhān al-thubūt fī tabri'at Hārūt wa-Mārūt*, see above.
- *al-Iḥkām bi-sharḥ Durar al-aḥkām* on Hanafī *fiqh*.
- *Dhakḥā'ir al-mawārith fīl-dilāla 'alā mawāḍi' al-aḥādīth*, a 437-folio source index of hadiths written in 1111/1700.
- *Dīwān al-dawāwīn*, a compilation of his poetry on many topics.
- *Dīwān al-ḥaqā'iq*, a compilation of mostly spiritual poetry.
- *Dīwān al-ḥaqīqa wa-sulūk al-ṭarīqa*, another compilation of spiritual poetry.
- *Ghayth al-qabūl hammī fī ma'nā ja'alā lahu shurakā'a fī-mā atāhumā*, an explanation on *shirk*.
- *Fath al-'ayn wa-kashf al-ghayn 'an al-farq bayn al-basmatatayn* on *tafsīr*.
- *al-Fath al-rabbānī wal-fayḍ al-raḥmānī*, a Sufī treatise on repentance and doctrine.
- *Hadiyyat al-faqīr wa-taḥiyyat al-wazīr* (1102/1691) on good governance.
- *al-Ḥadhrat al-unsīyya fīl-riḥlat al-qudsīyya*, a travelogue to Jerusalem.
- *Ḥaqā'iq al-īmān*, on the divine attributes.

7. This "high" (i.e. short) transmission chain was conferred on this writer by four Damascene permittees (*mujāzīn*) of Abū al-Yusuf 'Ābidīn: his younger brother the late qadī Muḥammad Murshid 'Ābidīn, the late jurist 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥalabī, the historian Muḥammad Muṭī' al-Ḥāfiz, and the *musnid* Muḥammad Abū al-Hudā al-Ya'qūbī.

- *al-Haqīqa wal-majāz fīl-riḥla ilā al-Shām wa-Miṣr wal-Ḥijāz* (1105/1694), a travelogue.
- *al-Ḥāṣil bil-falak wal-maḥmūl fīl-fulk fī ṭlāq lafẓ al-nubuwwa wal-risāla wal-khilāfati wal-mulk*, on using certain lofty names in an unqualified manner.
- *Ḥillat al-dhahab al-ibriz fīl-riḥla ilā Baʿlabakk wal-Biqāʿ al-ʿazīz* (1100/1689), a travelogue on Baalbek and the Bekaa valley in Lebanon.
- *Ibānat al-naṣṣ fī masʿalat al-qasṣ* on cutting the beard.
- *al-Ibtihāj bi-manāsik al-ḥājj* on pilgrimology.
- *Īdāḥ al-dilālāt fī samāʿ al-ālāt*, a documented fatwa on the permissibility of musical instruments.
- *Īdāḥ al-maqṣūd min maʿnā waḥdat al-wujūd*, a classical defense of Ibn ʿArabī.
- *Itḥāf man bādar ilā ḥukm al-nūshādar*, on the ritual purity status of ammonium chloride produced from fermented urine.
- *al-Jawāb al-sharīf fīl-ḥaḍrat al-sharīfa*, on the identification of the school of Abū Yūsuf and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan as being the same as that of Abū Ḥanīfa despite some differences.
- *Jawāb suʾāl fī bidʿat al-hashish*, “answer on the innovation of hashish.”
- *Kashf al-nūr ʿan aṣḥāb al-qubūr* (1106/1695), a discussion of the miracles of *awliyāʾ* who passed away and the different types of miracles.
- *Kanz al-ḥaqq al-mubīn fī aḥādīth Sayyid al-mursalīn* (1097/1686), a selection of sound reports.
- *al-Kashf wal-bayān ʿammā yataʿallaq bil-nisyan*, an eight-folio brief on the rulings pertaining to forgetfulness and amnesia.
- *al-Kawkab al-sārī fī ḥaqīqat al-juzʾ al-ikhtiyārī*, on the relative free will of human beings.
- *Khamrat Bābil wa-ghināʾ al-balābil*. A poem on monotheism and true belief.
- *Khamrat al-ḥān wa-rannat al-alḥān fī sharḥ risālat al-Shaykh Arslān*, a 125-folio commentary on a famous sixth/12th-century Sufi doctrinal treatise.
- *Khamsūna majlisān min majālis al-Shām*, a compendium of exegetical talks he had given in Turkey.
- *Munājāt al-Ḥakīm wa-munāghāt al-Karīm*, eighteen intimate supplications.
- *Nafahāt al-azhār ʿalā nasamāt al-ashār*, a large commentary on al-Nābulusi’s own *Badiʿiyya* or “poem on tropology,” written in three

weeks after some people voiced doubt that he had authored the poem.⁸

- *Radd al-jāhil ilā al-ṣawāb fī jawāz idāfat al-ta'thīr ilā al-asbāb* (1090/1679), an affirmation of the permissibility of attributing effectiveness to causes.
- *al-Radd al-matīn 'alā muntaqīṣ al-ʿarīf Muḥyī al-Dīn*, in 67 folios, a defense of Ibn ʿArabī.
- *Rāʾiḥat al-janna fī sharḥ 'aqā'id Ahl al-Sunna*, a 49-folio commentary on al-Maqqarī's (d. 1043/1634) poem on Ash'ari doctrine.
- *Rawḍ al-anām fī ḥukm al-ijāza fīl-manām*, a discussion on the status of licenses granted in dreams.
- *al-Riḥla ilā Istānbūl* (1075/1665), a travelogue, one of his earliest books.
- *Risāla fī ihtirām al-khubz*, a brief on respecting bread.
- *Risālat al-ʿabīr fīl-ta'bīr*, a 320-line poem on the interpretation of dreams.
- *Ṣarf al-ʿanān ilā qirā'at Ḥaḍḥ ibni Sulaymān*, a poem on the most widespread reading mode of Qur'ān.
- *Sharḥ al-Ashbāḥ wal-nazā'ir*, a large commentary on Ibn Nujaym's classic on Hanafi law.
- *Sharḥ al-badī'iyya*, see *Nafaḥāt al-azhār*.
- *Sharḥ dīrwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, a commentary on Sufi poetry.
- *al-Ṣulḥ bayn al-ikhwān fī ḥukm ibāḥat al-dukhān*, a fatwa on the indifferent (*mubāḥ*) status of smoking.
- *Taḥqīq al-dhawq wal-rashf fīl-mukhālafat al-wāqī'a bayna ahl al-kashf* (1089/1678), on the issue of differences among spiritual unveilings.
- *Taḥqīq al-qadīyya fīl-farq bayn al-rishwati wal-hadiyya*, on the difference between bribes and gifts.
- *al-Taḥrīr al-ḥāwī 'alā Tafṣīr al-Bayḍāwī*, a 300-folio supercommentary on al-Bayḍāwī's commentary up to al-Baqara 2:98.
- *Taḥṣīl al-ajr fī ḥukm adhān al-fajr* on the special merit of the dawn call to prayer.
- *Takmīl al-nu'ūt fī luzūm al-buyūt*, on the preferred status of social reclusion in times of moral dissolution.
- *Tamhīd al-Sunna fī tajrīd al-Sitta*, an epitome of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* and four *Sunan*.

8. Epitomized and translated by our late teacher Pierre Cachia respectively as *Riyy al-badī'*: *masrad li-muṣṭalaḥ 'ilm al-badī'* and *The Arch Rhetorician or The Schemer's Skimmer: A Handbook of Late Arabic badī' drawn from 'Abd al-Ghanī an-Nābulusī's Nafaḥāt al-azhār 'alā nasamāt al-asḥār* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 1998).

- *Taʿtīr al-anām fī taʿbīr al-manām*, an encyclopedia on the interpretation of dreams.
- *al-Tawfīq al-jalī bayn al-Ashʿarī wal-Hanbalī*, showing that the divergence between Ashʿaris and Hanbalis is in terminology and not in fundamentals.
- *al-Tuhfat al-nābulusiyya fīl-riḥlat al-ṭarābulusiyya* (1112/1701), a travelogue on Tripoli, Lebanon.
- *ʿUrwān al-āyāt ʿan awāʾil al-āyāt*, an index to sura openings.
- *al-Wujūd al-ḥaqq wal-khiṭāb al-ṣidq*, a large volume on doctrine sharing some aspects with *Idāḥ al-maṣṣūd*.
- *Zahr al-ḥadiqa fī tarjamat riḡāl al-ṭarīqa* in 86 folios, biographies of the Sufi masters mentioned in al-Birikli's *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*.
- *Ziyādat al-baṣṭa*, an expansion on the monograph by the Sufi Aḥmad b. Muḥyī al-Dīn b. Muṣṭafā al-Jazāʾirī al-Ḥasanī (1249-1320/1833-1902) entitled *Nathr al-durr wa-baṣṭuh fī bayān kaṣn al-ʿilmi nuḡṭa* on oneness of being.

Nābulusī's earliest known biographer, his student Ḥusayn al-Baytamānī, in his 1142/1730 epistle *al-Mashrab al-hanī fī tarjamat al-Nābulusī*, quotes poetry from his teacher in reference to the latter's many enemies on account of his stature as a Sufi shaykh who disclosed his miraculous unveiling and defended Ibn ʿArabī, but, al-Nābulusī said,

More of my enemies have died than I have hair on my head...

Allah has caused all my opponents to die and has made me endure for Him....

*My candle shone most bright with the light of my Lord,
and my enviers surrounded it like moths;*

*Every time they tried to put me out, they got burnt by me, and my fame spread.*⁹

Nābulusī's seven-year seclusion

Nābulusī published *Takmil al-nuʿūt* in 1096/1685 at the age of 46, in the fifth of a seven-year seclusion (*khalwa*) which he had begun in 1091 and which he kept in the family house opposite the *qibla* door of the Umawī Mosque in Sūq al-ʿAnbarāniyyīn (amber market). The title, "perfecting the qualities," is a double-entendre: the qualities being perfected can be understood to refer both to the character of the God-wary recluse and to the lawful preconditions of seclusion in Islam. At the time, Damascus was being shaken by street fights and civil unrest pitting the city's partisans of the sherifs (Prophetic descendants,

9. In the editor's introduction to Muḥammad Kamāl al-Dīn al-Ghazzī al-ʿAmirī, *al-Wird al-unsī wal-wārid al-qudsī fī tarjamat al-ʿarif ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī*, ed. Sāmīr ʿAkkāsh (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 50.

ṭā'ifat al-ashraf) against Ottoman soldiers (*jund al-qol*).¹⁰ Al-Nābulusī spent his time alone in worship, reading and meditating on the Qur'ān, and writing the 5,000-verse poem entitled *Bawāḥin al-Qur'ān wa-mawāḥin al-Furqān* (The inner meanings of the Qur'ān and highlights of the Discernment). He refers to that period in several passages of the *Takmil*:

I swear by my life that that we live in a time when leaders think only of themselves while dividing the booty and spoils of war in jihad: they do not give it to those who rightly deserve it nor do they divide it among those who won them; and that is a despoiling of the Muslims themselves, a foul betrayal of the religion! There is no change nor might but with Allah, the exalted, the magnificent.

Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī said in his book *Minhāj al-ʿābidīn*: "Choose solitude over people, for they distract you from worshipping Allah; nay, they block you from it; nay, they hurl you into evil and destruction. Abū Hātim al-Aṣamm said: 'I asked them to obey Allah and be content with little but they refused; I said, then do not prevent me from that but they prevented me; I said, at least do not call me to what Allah dislikes, but they did. So I abandoned them and focused on my own personal soul.'"¹¹ We say: we now live in that time....

What greater confusion is there than that of the imams of our time in all the mosques, who gave up beneficial knowledge, yet they themselves claim to possess knowledge although their ignorance is evident, their arrogance, their conceit, their self-display, their love of the world, their running after positions, their eating up the illicit, their envy of one another, and what not?...

If [al-Ghazālī] had seen this time he would declared it universally obligatory to embrace reclusion and stay inside houses, quitting *jumu'as*, congregations, and festivals! Nay, he would have made it categorically forbidden to attend any such gathering, in light of the way the people of our time violate the purified sacred law in their beliefs, their deeds and their states. ...

We say that if reclusion was already truly licit in the time of al-Thawrī and al-Ghazālī, then it makes up *islām* and *īmān* in our time! For whoever does not practice it but instead mixes with people, their *islām* and *īmān* are an empty claim without reality in the heart, like the *islām* of a hypocrite. ...

10. al-Ḥāfiẓ, *ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī*, p. 159, citing al-Ghazālī's *al-Wird al-unsī*. See also Ḥassān Ḥallāq and ʿAbbās Ṣabbāgh, *al-Muʿjam al-jāmiʿ fīl-muṣṭalaḥāt al-ʿUthmāniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍat al-ʿArabiyya, 1430/2009) p. 183, entry *qol*.

11. Cf. al-Ghazālī, *Minhāj al-ʿābidīn ilā janmat Rabb al-ʿālamīn*, ed. Maḥmūd Muṣṭafā Ḥalāwī (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 1409/1989), pp. 89-90 (*al-ʿaqaba al-thālitha*, *al-ʿāʾiq al-thānī*).

Now strifes have spread far and wide in abundance, to the point that people view them as licit, and evil scholars aid them in that... such as adulation of worldly people to the point of forgiving their every sin, even calling them pious acts in order to gain their favor, and utter contempt of the poor, who are considered justly deprived wretches!¹²

‘Uzla as credal divide and safeguard of faith

The Arabic word *‘uzla* literally means isolation and in the Islamic sources refers to social withdrawal together with political quietism. Several Qur’ānic verses mention the cognate *i‘tazala*, always in the sense of a shunning of persons and communities dictated by a doctrinal parting of ways: *And now when you have withdrawn from them (i‘tazaltumūhum) and that which they worship, except Allah, betake yourselves to the cave...* (al-Kahf 18:16); *Now I will go apart from you all (wa-a‘tazilukum) and that you call upon, apart from Allah...* (Maryam 19:48); *So, when he had withdrawn from them (i‘tazalahum) and that which they worshipped beside Allah...* (Maryam 19:49); *And if you will not believe in me, then leave me alone (fa‘tazilūni)* (al-Dukhān 44:21). These four verses support the social withdrawal of archetypal believers—the Seven Sleepers, Ibrāhīm and Mūsā—from a setting in which pure monotheism is threatened, and their dealing with a bad environment by fleeing it. The verses are all quoted at the opening of one of the early monographs on the subject, the 73-folio *Kitāb al-‘uzla* (Book of isolation) by the Shafī‘ī jurist, hadith master and litterateur Abū Sulaymān Ḥamd b. Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī (319-388/931-998) as well as other works covering the same subject such as Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111)’s “Book of the Proprieties of Reclusion” (*Kitāb ādāb al-‘uzla*) in his *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*.¹³

al-Muḥāsibī and al-Ghazālī on ‘uzla: al-Waṣāyā and Minhāj al-‘arīfīn

One of the earliest treatises containing an explicit treatment of *‘uzla* is al-Muḥāsibī’s (d. 243/857) brief chapter in his *Waṣāyā*:

My brothers! I warn you against mixing with people. All transgressions and offenses are gathered up in mixing and cohabiting with them even if you do not feel it. Only people of scrupulosity and self-accounting know this. We are not of those who hand over their religion when the devils of human beings and jinn work together, as if we were one of them, *inspiring one another gilded speech, all as a delusion* (al-An‘ām 6:112). Lo! Keep company with two types of people: one who helps in virtue and

12. al-Nābulusī, *al-Muslimūn fī zamān al-fitan kamā akhbar al-Rasūl ṣallā Allahu ‘alayhi wa-sallam al-musammā bi-Takmil al-nu‘ūt fī luzūm al-buyūt*, ed. Majdī al-Shūrī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1416/1996), hereafter *Takmil*, pp. 12, 15, 18, 22 and 25-26.

13. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, ed. “*Hay’at al-ta’līf wal-taḥqīq fī Dār al-hādī*,” 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, 1412/1992) 2:317-350, cf. 2:324.

God-wariness, and the other who helps you in your worldly affairs. If Allah puts help in religion and in the world in one and the same person then hold fast to him and avoid all others. They all jeopardize religion except those who assist towards virtue. Lo! the best safety is in avoiding people. It brings the most rewards and is greater than what you fear. Likewise were we told that “worship is ten parts, one consisting in silence and the other nine in avoiding people.”¹⁴ I have done my best to advise you. Accepting it is up to you. Those who will accept this are very few. Enduring solitude is hard to bear. *That is the immense favor of Allah which He gives to whomever He wishes* (al-Mā’ida 5:54 etc.). May Allah grant us and you success toward every goodness in His mercy! Lo! Therefore shun people with the hearts, and keep in touch with them with salaam and all that is obligatory of the rights of Muslims.¹⁵

As al-Nābulūsī showed, al-Ghazālī discussed reclusion in his book *Minhāj al-‘ābidīn*, widely believed to be his last work.¹⁶ His less famous *Minhāj al-‘ārifīn*¹⁷ also contains a chapter on ‘*uzla* which lists its preconditions:

The one who is in reclusion needs ten things: (i) knowledge of what is true and what is false; (ii) doing with little; (iii) embracing difficulty; (iv) making the most of seclusion and haleness; (v) anticipating last things; (vi) considering others better than him; (vii) keeping people safe from his evil; (viii) working ceaselessly, for idleness is deadly; (ix) never being pleased with his current state; (x) his home is free of nonessentials, defined as everything other than the day’s needs for true seekers and everything other than the moment’s needs for true knowers. Let him cut off everything that cuts him off from Allah Most High. The Messenger of Allah—upon him blessings and peace—said to Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān, “Be the saddle-cloth in your home.” ‘Īsā b. Maryam—upon him peace—said, “Master your tongue, let

14. A saying of Wuhayb b. al-Ward (d. 153/770) in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-ṣamt wa-ādāb al-lisān*, ed. Najm ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khalaf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1406/1986), pp. 208-209 no. 36 and al-‘*Uzla*, p. 97 no. 87 and p. 148 no. 169; al-Khaṭṭābī, ‘*Uzla*, p. 86; al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, p. 95 no. 126; all with “wisdom” instead of “worship.” Both wordings and also that of “haleness” (‘*āfiya*) are related as Prophetic hadiths whose chains are disclaimed, cf. al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, p. 95 no. 127 and al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-ṣamt fīl-ṣamt*, ed. Muḥammad Zaghlūl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1407/1987), p. 13 no. 15 and p. 37 nos. 84-85.

15. al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1406/1986), p. 104.

16. See Khālīd Aḥmad Ḥarbī, ed., *Minhāj al-‘ābidīn: ākhir taṣnīf li-Abī Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī* (Alexandria: Dār al-Wafā’ li-Dunyā al-Ṭibā’a wal-Nashr, 2007).

17. Cf. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Mu’allaḥāt al-Ghazālī* 2nd ed. (Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maṭbū‘āt, 1977), pp. 248-250.

your house contain you, and deem yourself a ferocious beast and a scorching fire!”¹⁸

The chapter ends with the hadith, “A time will come when the one who holds on to his religion is as one who is grasping a hot coal. Such a person will have the reward of fifty of you.”¹⁹ At the time the Maliki qadī Abū Bakr b. al-‘Arabī spent time with al-Ghazālī in Baghdad in 490/1097, the latter, he said, “had befriended ‘uzla and forsworn all sects” for already five years.²⁰

Monasticism as pre-Islamic ‘uzla

A statement attributed to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq employs the word ‘uzla as a synonym for monachism: “As for those who exited their hermitages (*ṣawāmī*) and did not remain steadfast (*lam yaṣbirū*) in ‘uzla...”²¹ In the ensuing discussion of this report, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (ca. 300/913) appears to assume that ‘uzla in the latter sense typifies Christians and Jews exclusively of Muslims, and makes a rhetorical bodily-‘uzla/heart-‘uzla dichotomy between “the Israelites who physically roamed the mountains and deserts with a bodily shunning (*‘uzlatan bil-abdān*) away from people” and the Muḥammadan *Umma* who “roamed with their hearts in the deserts of Sovereignty to the Creator of the Throne with a heartfelt shunning (*‘uzlatan bil-qulūb*) away from the concerns of egos.”²² “For monasticism and desert-roaming did exist in past communities... and one would betake oneself to a cell to make their monachal devotion endure in that ‘uzla.”²³

The chapter on ‘uzla in Ibn al-Mubārak’s (118-181/736-797) *Kitāb al-zuhd*, described as “le plus vieil écrit dans l’histoire du mysticisme musulman qui nous soit parvenu,”²⁴ relates from Abū al-Dardā’ a figurative reference to

18. Al-Ghazālī, *Minhāj al-‘arīfīn*, in *Farā'id al-la'ālī min rasā'il al-Ghazālī*, ed. Muḥammad Bakhit (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'ada, 1344/1925), pp. 117-118.

19. Narrated from Abū Tha'laba al-Khushanī by al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan (Tafsīr al-Qur'ān 'an Rasūl Allāh, bāb: wa-min sūrat al-mā'ida)*, Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan (Malāḥim, al-amr wal-nahy)*, and Ibn Mājah, *Sunan (Fitān, bāb: qawluhu ta'ālā: yā ayyuhā al-ladhīna āmanū, 'alaykum anfusakum)*.

20. Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Naṣṣ al-kāmil li-kitāb al-‘Awāṣim min al-qawāsim*, ed. ‘Ammār Ṭalībī (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1997), p. 24. Cf. Kenneth Garden, “The *riḥla* and Self-Reinvention of Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 135, No. 1 (January-March 2015), p. 13.

21. al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-uṣūl fī ma'rīfat aḥādīth al-Rasūl*, ed. Tawfīq Takla, 2nd ed., 7 vols. (Damascus: Dār al-Nawādir, 1432/2011) aṣl 12.

22. al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir*, aṣl 67.

23. al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir*, aṣl 97.

24. R.G. Khouury, review of *Kitāb az-Zuhd wa-l-raqā'iq* by ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-

‘uzla as a permissible form of eremitism in a manner that closely echoes the Prophetic hadiths on reclusion: “What a wonderful hermitage for the Muslim his house is (*ni‘ma ṣawma‘atu al-mar‘i al-muslimi baytuh*)!”²⁵

Last-ditch disengagement from all but personal concerns

Al-Khaṭṭābī cites many of the Prophetic hadiths recommending isolation and the recentering of a Muslim’s focus on his or her own personal priorities, identified in the Qur’ān and the Hadith as private concerns (*amr al-khāṣṣa*), as in the verse with which al-Nābulūsī opens his book on ‘uzla, *O believers, look after your own souls!* (*‘alaykum anfusakum*). *Those who are astray cannot hurt you if you are rightly guided. Unto Allah is your return, all together; and He will tell you what you were doing* (al-Mā’ida 5:105). Both al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah devoted a chapter on this verse in their respective *Sunan*, in which they narrated the famous hadith, “A time will come when the one who still holds on to his religion is as one who is grasping a hot coal. Such a person will have the reward of fifty of you!” which al-Ghazālī will also cite in his own writings on ‘uzla as just shown.

The latter verse does not contain any cognate of ‘z-l but the expression *‘alaykum anfusakum*, “you must take charge of your own selves,” implies the same meaning and does recur in several of the hadiths ‘uzla authors cite, all of them prescribing the shunning of society and the preference of keeping to one’s home:

- “When you see people not keeping their promises, becoming untrustworthy, and they are like this—he clasped his hands together²⁶—at that time keep strictly to your house, keep custody of your tongue, take what you recognize as good and leave what you do not. You must take care of your own personal affairs (*‘alayka bi-amri khāṣṣati nafsik*), and stay away from public affairs!”²⁷
- “Nay, command one another to do good and forbid one another to

Mubārak, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A‘zamī, *Arabica* 19, fasc. 2 (June 1972), p. 196.

25. Narrated by Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād in his addenda to Ibn al-Mubārak’s *Kitāb al-zuhd*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A‘zamī (Malegaon: Majlis Iḥyā’ al-Ma‘ārif, 1966; rept. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.), p. 4 no. 14; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *‘Uzla*, p. 63 no. 25; al-Khaṭṭābī, *‘Uzla*, p. 70; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, ed. Kamāl al-Ḥūt, 7 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1409/1989) 7:112 no. 34595; and others.

26. To mean they are indistinguishable one from another in good or bad character.

27. Narrated from Ibn ‘Amr by Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan (Malāḥim, bāb al-amr wal-nahy)*; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā’ūt et al., 50 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1995-2001) 11:566-567 no. 6987; and others. Cf. al-Nābulūsī, *Takmil*, p. 8 [misattributed to Ibn ‘Abbās] and 19; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *‘Uzla*, p. 199; al-Khaṭṭābī, *‘Uzla*, p. 64.

do wrong until you see avarice in command, lust in the lead, this world being preferred, and everyone having a different opinion and being pleased with it; at that time, you must take care of your own self (*fa-‘alayka bi-khāṣṣati nafsik*) and leave the people at large!”²⁸ Another version has “you must take care of your own little self” (*fa-‘alayka khuwayṣṣata nafsik*).²⁹ This is in fact one and the same hadith with “A time will come when the one who still holds on to his religion is as one who is grasping a hot coal...” already cited.

- “How will you all fare when the time comes—and it is near—where people will be literally sifted (*yugharbalu al-nāsū gharbalatan*)? A rabble will remain whose promises and trusts are blurred and they all differ, and they are like this—he clasped his hands together. At that time you should take what you recognize as good and leave what you do not. Take care of your personal affairs and leave your public affairs.”³⁰ Another version adds: “And beware of inconstancy when it comes to the religion of Allah.”³¹ The fact that the latter hadith was included by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā in his monograph *al-Amr bil-ma‘rūf wal-nahy ‘an al-munkar* (Commanding good and forbidding wrong) shows that such commanding is superseded by *‘uzla* once the negative conditions of endtime strifes become prevalent.

‘Uzla as self-imposed censorship

When Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī was perceived as summoning people to an overly strict religious regimen—he would stand at the Ka‘ba and threatened fire and brimstone unless people gave up their gold and silver and official posts—the caliph ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān pressured him to give up public life altogether: “*Iaw*

28. Narrated from Abū Tha‘laba al-Khushanī by al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan (Tafsīr al-Qur’ān ‘an Rasūl Allāh, bāb: wa-min sūrat al-mā’ida)* and Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan (Malāḥim, al-amr wal-nahy)*. Cf. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 14; Ibn al-Wazīr, *al-‘Uzla*, ed. “*qism al-tahqīq bil-dār*” (Ṭanṭā: Dār al-Ṣaḥāba lil-Turāth, [1992]), p. 32.

29. Narrated from Abū Tha‘laba al-Khushanī by Ibn Mājah, *Sunan (Fitan, bāb qawlihi ta‘ālā Yā ayyuhā al-ladhīna āmanū ‘alaykum anfusakum)*.

30. Narrated from ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr by Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan (Malāḥim, bāb al-amr wal-nahy)* and Ibn Mājah, *Sunan (Fitan, bāb al-tathabbut fīl-fitna)*. Cf. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 10;

31. Narrated from Sahl b. Sa‘d al-Sa‘idī by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-Amr bil-Ma‘rūf wal-nahy ‘an al-munkar*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Shallāḥī (Medina: Maktabat al-Ghuraba’ al-Athariyya, 1418/1997) p. 72 no. 29; *al-‘Uqūbāt*, ed. Muḥammad Khayr Yūsuf (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1416/1996), p. 45 no. 42; *Makārim al-akhlāq*, ed. Majdī al-Sayyid Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qur’ān, [1990]), p. 91 no. 276.

i‘tazalta?” (Why do you not retire?).³² Abū Dharr first went to Syro-Palestine, from where Mu‘āwīya wrote to ‘Uthmān complaining that he was declaring asceticism obligatory, whereupon ‘Uthmān recalled him to Medina lest he be harmed, after which Abū Dharr asked permission (or was ordered) to retire to al-Rabadha—100km west of Medina—where he died in complete isolation and poverty.³³

Similarly, Abū al-Dardā’ left the Hijaz and sought ‘*uzla* in Syria after he witnessed a sign of change in morals which the Prophet had warned him to look for: Two men appeared before Abū al-Dardā’ quarreling over ownership of a span (*shibr*) of earth. He said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah—upon him blessings and peace—say, ‘When you are in a certain land and hear two men quarelling over ownership of a span of earth, depart thence.’” Then he departed for Syro-Palestine.³⁴

“Break up your sword!” Quietism and pacifism until Resurrection

It is the questionable validity of jihad in corrupt times that invalidates it according to al-Nābulusī, in light of the hadiths explicitly commanding pacifism. The fact that such hadiths were traditionally cited in times of civil strife among Muslims—the murder of ‘Uthmān, the rebellion against ‘Alī and his murder; the Umayyad and counter-Umayyad assaults on Medina and Mecca—makes them germane to the Damascus *fitna* which Nābulusī witnessed in his own time. These hadiths take the leaving of public affairs further yet, by explicitly enjoining not only general disengagement but a strict withdrawal from political activity as well as active pacifism:

- “Verily there will be a strife, a division and disagreement. When this occurs, go to your sword and strike it until it shatters! After that sit inside your house until a wrongful hand comes to you, or final death.”³⁵
- “Verily there will be strifes in which the one lying down is better than the one sitting, the one sitting down better than the one standing up, the one standing up better than the one walking, and the one walking better than the one running to them. Behold! Once they befall, whoever has camels let him retire to them; whoever has sheep let him retire to them; whoever has a plot of land let him retire to it; whoever has none of that, let him take his sword and strike its sharp

32. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 6:194 no. 30610.

33. Narrated from Zayd b. Wahb by al-Bukhārī and from ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Ṣamīt by Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad ‘Umar, 11 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1421/2001) 4:212-220.

34. Al-Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad*, ed. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Türkī, 4 vols. (al-Jīza: Hījr lil-Ṭibā‘a wal-Nashr, 1420/1999) 2:327 no. 1076.

35. Narrated from Muḥammad b. Maslama by Ibn Mājah, *Ṣunan (Fitān, bāb: al-tathabbut fīl-fitna)* and others. Cf. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 9.

edge against a rock. Then let him find salvation wherever he can. O Allah! Have I conveyed? O Allah! Have I conveyed? O Allah! Have I conveyed?”³⁶

- ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib summoned Muḥammad b. Maslama and asked him: “What kept you away from this matter?” [i.e., from fighting on my side.] He replied: “Your cousin—meaning the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace—gave me a sword and said: ‘Fight with it as long as the enemy is being fought. When you see people killing each other, take it and dash it against a rock, then keep to your house until final death comes to you, or some wrongful hand.’” ‘Alī said: “Let him go.”³⁷ Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān narrated that the Prophet had predicted to the same Ibn Maslama: “The *fitna* will never harm you.”³⁸

***I‘tizāl* of the near-totality of the Companions from civil strife**

Other paradigms of what can be called an early Sunni isolationism (*i‘tizāl*) of neutrality and disengagement in the midst of civil strife among the Companions were ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar, Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ and Usāma b. Zayd, although the near-totality of the Companions stayed aloof according to Ibn Sīrīn: “The *fitna* raged when 10,000 Companions were still alive, and barely 40 rushed in.”³⁹ The Prophet had asked Abū Dharr: “What will you all do when leaders after me will favor themselves with this bounty?” He replied: “Then, by the One Who sent you with truth! I shall carry up my sword and strike blows with it until I meet you again.” The Prophet said: “Let me tell you of a better way! Bear with patience until you meet me again.”⁴⁰ Abū Dāwūd included this hadith in his chapter on the *Khawārīj* to show that the way of the sword typified them rather than orthodox Muslims.

36. Narrated from Abū Bakra al-Thaqaḥī by Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ (al-Fitan wa-ashrāʾ al-sā‘a, bāb: muzūl al-fitan ka-mawāqī‘ al-qatr)*; Abū Dāwūd (with *fitna* in the sing.), *Sunan (al-Fitan wal-malāḥim, bāb: fīl-nahy ‘an al-sa’y fīl-fitna)*; Aḥmad (both wordings), *Musnad* 34:130 no. 20490 and 34:54 no. 20412. Cf. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 13.

37. Narrated from al-Ḥasan by Aḥmad, *Musnad* 29:496 no. 17979.

38. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan (al-Sunna, bāb: mā yadull ‘alā tark al-kalām fīl-fitna)*.

39. Narrated from Ibn Sīrīn by ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A‘ẓamī, 2nd ed., 11 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1304/1983) 11:357 no. 20735; al-Khaṭṭābī, *Uzla*, p. 74; al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, 4 vols. (Hyderabad: Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1334/1916; rept. Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 1986) 4:440. For examples of *Ṭābi‘īn* who also chose to distance themselves from the civil wars see Dreher (note 60 below), pp. 217-218.

40. Narrated from Abū Dharr by Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan (al-Sunna, bāb: al-Khawārīj)*. Cf. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 12.

Inter-Muslim chaos: Kharijism and *takfīr*

Other hadiths provide added incentive for staying aloof in the prediction that the divine punishment of the entire Muslim *Umma* consists in this-worldly internal strifes: “Verily my *Umma* is a mercied *Umma*; its punishment was made to be inflicted by its own hands in this world....”⁴¹ Another wording states: “Allah has made their punishment take place among themselves.”⁴² Another wording confirms that the greater harm of the Community will not originate from an external enemy but from among themselves:

Allah has folded up the earth for me and I saw its easts and its wests. ... and I have asked my Lord on behalf of my *Umma* that He not cause it to perish through a general famine nor let prevail over them any enemy from other than themselves plundering their midst. My Lord said: “O Muḥammad! Verily, once I have decreed something, it can never be turned back. Verily, I have given you, for the benefit of your Community, that I will not cause them to perish through a general famine, and I will not let prevail over them any enemy from other than themselves plundering their midst, even as those inside their own regions gather up against them until they destroy one another and enslave one another.”⁴³

Another wording of the latter hadith adds that such strifes will fester until the end of times: “Once the sword is used amidst my Community it shall never be lifted from it until the Day of resurrection.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, the chief characteristic of internecine strifes is identified as *takfīr* or anathema, the wrongful levelling of the verdict of apostasy by Muslims against other Muslims. In such a scenario the tongue is just as harmful as the sword, and harm is feared from every brother and every neighbor:

- “Verily there will be a strife that will decimate the Arabs. All those killed in it are in the fire. The tongue in it will be more brutal yet than the sword.”⁴⁵

41. Narrated from Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī by al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, 8 vols. in 4 (Hyderabad Deccan: Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1361/1942; rept. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.) 1:37-38 and al-Rūyānī, *Musnad*, ed. Ayman Abū Yamānī, 3 vols. (Mu‘assasat Qurṭuba, 1416/1995) 1:313-314 no. 467.

42. Narrated from Abū Mūsā by Aḥmad, *Musnad* 32:427 no. 19658 and others.

43. Narrated from Thawbān by Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ (al-Fitan wa-ashrāt al-sā‘a, bāb: halāk hādhih al-umma ba‘dihim bi-ba‘d)*.

44. Narrated from Thawbān by al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan (Fitan, bāb: mā jā’ fī ittikhādih sayf min khashab fīl-fitna; ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ)*; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan (al-Fitan wal-malāḥim, bāb: dhikr al-fitan wa-dalā’ ilihā)*; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan (Fitan, bāb: mā yakūn min al-fitan)*; Aḥmad, *Musnad* 37:78 no. 22395 and 37:117 no. 22452. Cf. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 10.

45. Narrated from ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr by al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan (Fitan, bāb: kayfa*

- “Verily there will be a strife, a deaf, dumb, blind strife! Whoever confronts it, it will confront him. The tongue’s role in it will be like the blow of the sword.”⁴⁶
- “Those who are killed in it are all in the fire. Those are the days of chaos, in which a man cannot expect safety from the one sitting next to him. At that time hold your tongue and stay your hand. Be one of the saddle-cloths of your house!”⁴⁷

‘*Uzla* as *takfīrī* jihad against Muslims: Sayyid Qutb and radical Salafism

The anathemizing (*takfīrī*) interpretation of the doctrinal divide referred to in the verses of reclusion (al-Kahf 18:16, Maryam 19:48-49, al-Dukhān 44:21)—and implicitly in other verses mentioning the root *h-j-r* for “shunning” (Maryam 19:46, al-Muzzammil 73:10, and al-Muddaththir 74:5)—is at the root of neo-Khariji movements, some of whom replaced al-Ḥākim’s dichotomy of bodily ‘*uzla* vs. heart-‘*uzla* with their own terminological doublet of ‘*uzla makāniyya* (spatial isolation) and ‘*uzla shu‘ūriyya* (affective isolation). Both Shukrī Muṣṭafā’s (1942-1978) Jamā‘at al-Takfīr wal-Hijra (Group of Excommunication and Emigration) and the Jamā‘a al-Salafiyya al-Muḥtasiba (Salafi Group that Commands Right and Forbids Wrong) headed by Juhaymān al-‘Utaybī (1936-1980)—a student of the influential Salafi-Wahhabi hadith scholar Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Albānī (1914-1999)—were labeled “rejectionist Islamism characterized by withdrawal from society” as opposed to “reformist Islamism, exemplified by the Saḥwa [which] consisted of prominent academics well integrated into the system.... such as Salmān al-‘Awda.”⁴⁸

yakūn al-rajul fīl-fitna); Abū Dāwūd, (*al-Fitan wal-malāḥim, bāb: fī kaff al-lisān*); Ibn Mājah, *Sunan (Fitan, bāb: kaff al-lisān fīl-fitna)*; Aḥmad, *Musnad* 11:562 no. 6980. Cf. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 13.

46. Narrated from Abū Hurayra by Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan (al-Fitan wal-malāḥim, bāb: fī kaff al-lisān)*. Cf. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 13.
47. Narrated from Ibn Mas‘ūd and Khuraym b. Fātik by Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan (al-Fitan wal-malāḥim, bāb: al-nahy ‘an al-sa’y fīl-fitna)*. Cf. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 13. Also narrated—but broken-chained—from Ḥudhayfā b. al-Yamān by Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Tanbih al-ghāfilīn*, ed. Yūsuf ‘Alī Budaywī (Beirut and Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1421/2000), p. 576 no. 925.
48. Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, “Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-‘Utaybi Revisited,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 39 no. 1 (Feb. 2007), pp. 117-118. See also Roberto Marín-Guzmán, “The doctrines of al-‘uzla al-shu‘ūriyya and al-hijra among Egyptian Muslim fundamentalists: ideals and political praxis,” *Islamic Quarterly*, No. 48 (2004), pp.182-220 and Nabīl ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ, *al-Muṣḥaf wal-sayf: širā‘ al-dīn wal-dawla fī Miṣr* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, [1984]). On al-Albānī see Gibril

Such movements are of course rooted in the anathemizing principles forwarded by the leading radical ideologue of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), in his magnum opus *Fī ṣīlāl al-Qurʿān* (In the shade of the Qurʿān) and his 1966 manifesto *Maʿālim fīl-ṭarīq* (Milestones), which got him executed by the Egyptian government:⁴⁹

We are surrounded by Jahiliyya today... what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought, are also constructs of Jahiliyya!... All the societies existing in the world today are Jahili... all the existing so-called Muslim societies are also jahili societies.... Islam considers all these societies unIslamic and illegal.... the home of hostility (Dar-ul-Harb).... there is no Islam in a land where Islam is not dominant and where its Shariah is not established; and that place is not Dar-ul-Islam where Islam's way of life and its laws are not practised.... It is not the function of Islam to compromise with the concepts of Jahiliyya which are current in the world or to coexist in the same land together with a jahili system!⁵⁰

The above ideology was denounced by another Ikhwānī ideologue, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926), in his 1991 *Priorities of Islamic Activism in the Coming Phase*, as the reason for the regress of Islamic centrism (*wasatīyya*) in modern times:

The books of the martyr Sayyid Qutb's last phase brim over with the *takfīr* of society and the call for "affective isolation" (*ʿuzla shuʿūriyya*) from society, severing all ties and declaring offensive jihad against all people. ... Thus did rigidity and fanaticism take over Islamic thought, and the spirit of lenient, tolerant centrism retreated for some time.⁵¹

In the foundational discourse on *ʿuzla* documented and/or discussed by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, al-Marzubānī, al-Khaṭṭābī, al-Bayhaqī and al-Ghazālī, and as many cases illustrate,⁵² neither *takfīr* nor any doctrinal difference in belief was necessary for *ʿuzla* to take place—even less, of course, armed action

Fouad Haddad, *Albani and His Friends: A Concise Guide to the "Salafi" Movement*, 2nd ed. (Birmingham: al-Qurʿān wal-Sunna Association, 2009).

49. See Kenneth Cragg, *The Pen and the Faith: Eight Modern Muslim Writers and the Qurʿān* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 55.

50. Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1398/1987) pp. 32, 148, 152, 155, 221, 239, 242.

51. Al-Qaraḍawī, *Awlawiyyāt al-ḥarakat al-Islāmiyya fīl-marḥalat al-qādīma* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1991), p. 117.

52. Such as the Prophetic and Companion reports as well as the examples of Abū Dharr, Abū al-Dardāʾ and al-Ghazālī which we mention further below.

against alleged excommunicates. Abū Dharr, Abū al-Dardā' and al-Ghazālī clearly did not imply any *takfīr* of those whom they were deserting. As for jihad, although the Zaydi Ibn al-Wazīr (775-840/1374-1437) has claimed that it was compatible with 'uzla (in the penultimate chapter of his monograph on 'uzla entitled "The obligation of jihad"⁵³ nevertheless such a claim contradicts the hadiths and the literature on the subject as presented by the vast majority of the authorities, besides the fact that jihad was never meant as a *takfīrī* assault on Muslims in the first place.

'Uzla as a safe distantiating from the harms of others and oneself

Neither al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in his *Nawādir al-uṣūl* nor Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (333-373/945-984) in *Bustan al-ʿarifīn* devote any chapter to 'uzla, while Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) begins the 27th section of *Qūt al-qulūb*, entitled "The foundation of seekers" (*asās al-murīdīn*), by making the quitting of all evil company (*hajr qurana' al-sū'*) the sign *sine qua non* of one's resolutely embarking on obeying Allah. He then discusses silence and abnegation at length and concludes with reclusion, which he calls *khalwa* as well as 'uzla: "Khalwa is among the greatest salutarities (*ʿawāfi*)... it has been narrated: "Uzla away from people is haleness (*ʿāfiya*)."⁵⁴ Al-Qushayrī (376-465/986-1073), however, in the chapter on 'uzla in his famous *Risāla*, considers *khalwa* to entail a far stricter regimen:

The seeker, in the early stages, must practice 'uzla away from his human kind. Then, in the final stages, he must practice *khalwa* because he has realized his intimacy [i.e., with Allah]... Abū 'Uthmān al-Maghribī said: "Whoever chooses *khalwa* over companionship must be devoid of any kind of remembrance other than the mention of his Lord."⁵⁵

Abū Ṭālib's aphorism that reclusion is curative is based on a saying of the caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, "Seclusion is a respite from bad associates,"⁵⁶ which al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) made the title of a chapter in the "Book of heart-softening reports" (*riqāq*) of his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. The chapter contains only two Prophetic

53. Ibn al-Wazīr, *Uzla*, p. 93.

54. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb fī muʿāmalat al-maḥbūb wa-wasf al-riq* *al-murīd li-maqām al-tawḥīd*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Raḍwānī, 3 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1422/2001) 1:273-279.

55. al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, beginning of chapter on *khalwa* and 'uzla. Cf. al-ʿArūsī, *Ḥaṣhiyat al-ʿallāma Muṣṭafā al-ʿArūsī al-musammāt Natāʾij al-afkār al-qudsiyya fī bayān maʿānī Sharḥ al-Risālat al-Qushayriyya li-Shaykh al-Islām Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Wārith ʿAlī, 2nd ed., 2 vols. in 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1428/2007) 2:217, 221.

56. Ibn Wahb, *al-Jāmiʿ fīl-ḥadīth*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥasan Abū al-Khayr, 2 vols. (Damnām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1416/1996) 2:526 no. 418; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf* 7:98 no. 34477; al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, p. 93 no. 118.

hadiths, both of them narrated from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī:

1. A bedouin came to the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—and said, “Messenger of Allah, who are the best of people?” He replied: “Someone who made *jihad* with life and property and someone in some mountain gorge worshipping his Lord, sparing people his evil.”
2. I heard the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—say, “People will see a time when the best property will be sheep. One will graze them on mountaintops and rainbelts, fleeing for dear religion away from strifes.”⁵⁷

The first version above is also in Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* with a telling addition: “and someone *isolated* (*muʿtazilun*) in some mountain gorge...,” and the latter version is the first hadith in al-Bayhaqī’s (384-458/994-1066) chapter on *ʿuzla* in his *Kitāb al-zuhd al-kabīr*.⁵⁸ It is noteworthy that in the first hadith above, one is sparing others one’s own harm while in the second, one seeks safety from the harm of others. Thus *ʿuzla* is a praiseworthy act with reflexive benefits, and aims to preclude both one’s own harm to society and society’s harm to one as well. It is one of the many marks of al-Bukhārī’s economy in his book that he clarifies that reflexive meaning by elucidating the chapter-heading through the chapter’s contents and vice-versa. (Something similar is also narrated from Abū Hurayra, Ibn ʿAbbās, Umm Mubashshir al-Anṣāriyya and Ibn Masʿūd.)⁵⁹ A fresh reading of Abū Ṭālib and ʿUmar’s aphorisms in light of the above also shows that the cure and the respite that are expected from reclusion are as much from oneself as from others: reclusion curbs, and ideally does away with the egotism that social interaction fosters.

Reclusion as distinct from asceticism

The only purportedly systematic study on *ʿuzla* to date, Joseph Dreher’s “Étude sur l’origine et le sens du mot *ʿuzla* dans la littérature ascétique et mystique,” would have been more aptly called a study on asceticism (*zuhd*) for the most part, as it lumps the two together with other sub-themes of sufism—such as devotionism (*tanassuk*)—without distinction other than to serve the author’s focus on virtue, religiosity and scripturalism.⁶⁰ It is not our task here

57. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, (*Riḳāq, bāb al-ʿuzlatu rāḥatun min khullāṭi al-sūʾ*). Cf. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *ʿUzla*, pp. 57 no. 15, 164 no. 198; al-Khaṭṭābī, *ʿUzla*, pp. 65-66; Ibn al-Wazīr, *ʿUzla*, pp. 36-37.

58. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (*Imāra, bāb: faḍl al-jihād wal-ribāʿ*); al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, p. 92 no. 117.

59. In *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, the *Sunan* and others; cf. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *ʿUzla*, pp. 55 no. 12, 59 no. 18, 84 no. 67; al-Khaṭṭābī, *ʿUzla*, p. 67; Ibn al-Wazīr, *ʿUzla*, pp. 35 no. 4, 37 no. 6.

60. See Joseph Dreher, “Étude sur l’origine et le sens du mot *ʿuzla* dans la littérature ascétique et mystique,” *Mélanges de l’Institut Dominicain d’Études Orientales du Caire* 23 (1997), pp. 197-238.

to determine whether *zuhd* is a subset of *ʿuzla* or vice-versa; it is enough to say that, although the two are interwoven, they are not one and the same. The above study revolves around the eight great ascetics of the *Ṭabīʿin* Abū Nuʿaym lists as the founders of *zuhd* in Kufa (Uways al-Qaranī, al-Rabīʿ b. Khuthaym, Masrūq, al-Aswad) and Basra (ʿĀmir b. ʿAbd al-Qays, Ḥarīm b. Ḥayyān, Abū Muslim al-Khawlanī and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī), none of whom qualifies as a recluse except al-Rabīʿ. Likewise, of the many recluses cited in our own study, very few stand out as figures of *zuhd*.

Reclusion together with faith, charity, and wealth

The reports in the previous section mention the desirability of geographical remoteness for certain reasons connected to societal ills; other hadiths, however, justify it as a desirable state in itself, provided it is accompanied by faith:

- “Your exalted Lord admires a shepherd on some mountain-top that raises the call to prayer and prays. Allah shall say to His angels, ‘Look at that servant of mine raising the call to prayer and establishing prayer because he fears me! I call you to witness that I have forgiven him and entered him into paradise.’”⁶¹
- “Truly the most admirable of people to me is a man who believes in Allah and His Prophet, establishes prayer, remits charity, improves his property (*yuʿammiru mālah*), guards his religion, and shuns people (*yaʿtazilu al-nās*).”⁶²
- “Shall I tell you of the best of people after the one who holds the reins of his horse in the path of Allah? He who lives in isolation amid some small property of his, adducing the right of Allah.”⁶³
- “People are about to see a time when it will be best for each of you to be in some mountain gorge amid a small property, establishing prayer, remitting obligatory charity, and worshipping Allah without associating anything to Him until death.”⁶⁴
- “How god-fearing he is! How God-fearing he is! How God-fearing

61. Narrated from ʿUqba b. ʿĀmir by al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan (Adhān, bāb: al-adhān li-man yuṣalli waḥdah)* and Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan (Ṣalāt, bāb: al-adhān fīl-safar)*. Cf. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *ʿUzla*, p. 159 no. 191.

62. Narrated from Sahl b. Saʿd al-Saʿidī by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-ʿUzla*, p. 51 no. 5. Cf. al-Nābulusī, *ʿUzla*, p. 6.

63. Narrated from Abū Hurayra by al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan (Faḍāʾil al-jihād, bāb: mā jāʾa fī ayyi al-nāsi khayrun)*, also in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ (Imāra, bāb: faḍl al-jihād wal-ribāt)*. Cf. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *ʿUzla*, p. 59 nos. 17-18; al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, first hadith of the chapter on *ʿuzla*.

64. Narrated from Abū Hurayra by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *ʿUzla*, pp. 153 no. 180 and 163 no. 195.

he is! A shepherd on a mountain-top who establishes prayer right there.”⁶⁵

The major Medinan *Tābiʿī* Ibn al-Musayyib even equated *ʿuzlā* with prayer; al-Walid b. al-Mughīra said: “Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib told me: ‘You must practice *ʿuzla* for it is worship.’”⁶⁶

“With and apart at the same time”: Neither dissension nor assimilation

Al-Khaṭṭābī opens his book on reclusion with a warning that praiseworthy isolation does not constitute societal division or contravention of the divine commands to stay united in such verses as *Hold fast to the rope of Allah, all together* (Āl ʿImrān 3:103). Rather, he says, “division (*furqa*) is of two types: division of views and creeds, and division of people and bodies.” Only the first is forbidden. Similarly, “congregation (*jamāʿa*) is of two types: with the heads of state and leaders (*al-aʿimmatu wal-umarāʾ*) on the one hand, and with the commonality and the masses (*al-āmmatu wal-dahmāʾ*) on the other.” Again, only the first is enjoined. “Nor do we mean, by our chosen type of *ʿuzla*, that we should keep away from people in their gatherings and *Jumuʿas* or disregard their rights in acts of worship [e.g., *zakāt* and *ṣadaqa*] or giving and returning greetings... all we mean is to shun superfluous company (*fuḍūl al-ṣuḥba*).”⁶⁷

Similarly al-Ghazālī refutes the view that *ʿuzla* violates the hadiths that forbid parting with the congregation (*mufāraqat al-jamāʿa*) or shunning one’s brother more than three days, because the former concern dissension and rebellion, not reclusion, and the latter denote anger; in addition, “shunning (*al-hajr*) above three days is permissible in two cases: if one deems it beneficial for the one being shunned, and if one deems it the way to his own safety.”⁶⁸ Such excuses are charitably deemed to have applied to some famous examples of unresolved dodges, such as ʿUthman b. ʿAffān’s lifelong shunning of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf, Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ’s lifelong shunning of ʿAmmār b. Yāsir, ʿĀisha’s lifelong shunning of Ḥafṣa (after the demise of the Prophet—upon him and his family blessings and peace), and Ṭāwūs’s lifelong shunning of Wahb b. Munabbih (due to the latter’s Qadarism).⁶⁹

ʿUzla and desistance from commanding good

The eminently social activities of commanding good and prohibiting wrong,

65. Narrated from Abū Umāma by al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī, 2nd ed., 25 vols. (Baghdad: Wizārat al-Awqāf, 1984-1990; rept. Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, n.d.) 8:197-198 no. 7707.

66. al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, p. 94 no. 121.

67. al-Khaṭṭābī, *ʿUzla*, pp. 53-59.

68. al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 2:322.

69. al-Khaṭṭābī, *ʿUzla*, pp. 94-95.

moreover, are categorical obligations; nevertheless al-Ghazālī agrees entirely with al-Khaṭṭābī that if one is incapable of carrying them out then one should retire from social and public life rather than risk neglecting such duties.⁷⁰ Indeed most of the historical examples of *ʿuzla* cited by al-Nābulusī in the penultimate section of his book show that orthodox asociality consisted at most in self-imposed house arrest rather than shunning all human contact. He includes in that section disclaimers similar to al-Khaṭṭābī's and Ghazālī's. All three aim to reconcile the hadiths enjoining solidarity with the congregation (such as "The hand of Allah is with the group") and the discouragement of solitude (such as "The devil is with the loner but keeps farther from the pair") with the hadiths on *ʿuzla* which apply, they say, to a time when corruption is too widespread. In such a time, "dignity lies in reclusion, and humiliation lies in mixing."⁷¹

Nearly all the historical examples of *ʿuzla* cited in the literature also show that orthodox reclusion can be just an approved—and convenient—way to select whom one wishes to keep company with, rather than shun all company indifferently, as can be inferred from those who continued to teach large student circles even after they became recluse. Al-Rabīʿ b. Khuthaym (d. 65/685)—the intimate companion of Ibn Masʿūd—explained why he never left his home with reasons that Mālik might have used in his wake in addition to fear for one's life:

"I fear lest some man is wronged and I do not support his cause; or that some man lie concerning another, and I am then asked to testify against him; or that some man greet me and I do not return his greeting; or that the load of some animal falls from its back and I do not hoist it back on; or this; or that." Al-Shaʿbī said: "We used to visit him in his house."⁷²

Mālik b. Anas (93-179/712-795) reputedly did not pray in congregation for 25 years:

Mālik used to come to the Mosque and pray the prayers and the *Jumuʿa* as well as funeral prayers. He used to visit the sick and sit in the Mosque where his companions would come and see him. Then he quit sitting there; instead he would pray and leave, and he quit attending the funeral prayers. Then he quit everything, neither attending the prayers nor the *Jumuʿa* in the mosque. Nor would he visit anyone who was sick or other than that. The people bore with it, for they were extremely fond of him and respected him too much. This lasted until he died. Asked about

70. See Dreher, "Origine," pp. 230-231.

71. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, pp. 25-26.

72. Narrated by Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād in his addenda to Ibn al-Mubārak's *Kitāb al-zuhd*, pp. 5-6 no. 21.

it, he would say: “Not everyone can mention his excuse.”⁷³

Ibn al-Mubārak (118-181/736-797) once answered a questioner, “How can I feel lonely in my house when I am with the Prophet and his Companions?”⁷⁴ The pious and erudite al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-ʿAṭṭār al-Hamadhānī (488-569/1095-1174) “turned down every *madrassa* and *ribāṭ* appointment and would teach from home.”⁷⁵ Likewise, the strictly scrupulous Hanafī jurist Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Qūnawī (d. 788/1386) “would not leave his house at all, whether for congregational or *Jumuʿa* prayers.”⁷⁶

The “recluse teachers” category of includes many other famous scholars besides the few al-Nābulusī mentions, such as those who reputedly chose celibacy and the pursuit of knowledge over married life,⁷⁷ although many of the latter do not qualify as recluses since they were prominent teachers such as al-Jamal, al-Ushmūnī, al-Afghānī, al-Ālūsī and al-Kāfī, held judgeships such as al-Jūndī and al-Khālīdī, or due to their involvement in public affairs such as Aḥmad b. Taymiyya and Saʿīd al-Nūrsī (see Table 1).

73. Narrated through al-Wāqidi by Ibn Saʿd in *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* 7:574 (sixth layer of the Medinan *Tābiʿīn*) and Ibn Qutayba, *al-Maʿārif*, ed. Tharwat ʿUkāsha, 4th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981) pp. 498-499; cf. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 30. “When asked, ‘What is preventing you?’ Mālik said, ‘Lest I see something reprehensible and be obligated to change it.’” al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn ʿAmrāwī, 19 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996) 7:395. Another narration from Abū Muṣʿab states: “After Mālik left the [Prophet’s] Mosque he used to pray in his house with a congregation that followed him, and he would pray the *Jumuʿa* prayer alone in his house.” al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* 7:424.

74. al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, pp. 96-97 no. 133. Meaning: teaching Hadith to students.

75. al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wuʿāt fī ṭabaqāt al-lugharwiyyīn wal-nuḥāt*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1399/1979) 1:494-495. Cf. *Takmil*, p. 29.

76. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 28.

77. See ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, *al-ʿUlamāʾ al-ʿuzzāb al-ladhīna ātharū al-ʿilma ʿalā al-zawāj*, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1416/1996).

Table 1. Quietist and/or Celibate Scholars

Recluse and married	Recluse and unmarried	Unmarried but public life
	Ibn Abī Najjīh (d. 131/ 749), exegete	
Dāwūd al-Ṭā'ī (d. 160 or 165/782), jurist, sufi		
	Yūnus b. Ḥabīb (90-182/ 709-798), grammarian	
Mālik b. Anas (93- 179/712-795), jurist		
Ibn al-Mubārak (118- 181/736-797), HM		
	Ḥusayn al-Ju'fī (119-203 /737-819), Hadith master	
Ibrāhīm b. Rustum (d. 210/825), HM		
	Bishr al-Ḥāfī (150-227/ 767-842), Sufi scholar	
	Hammād b. al-Sarī (152- 243/769-857), HM	
Abū al-‘Abbās al-Birtī (d. 280/893), HM		
	Al-Ṭabarī (224-310/839- 923), exegete	
Ibn al-Ḥabāb al-Mālikī (246-322/860-934), HM		
	Ibn al-Anbārī (271-328/ 884-940) grammarian, HM	
Abū Ja'far al- Hinduwānī (d. 362/973), jurist		
Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Rāzī al-Warrāq (d. 376/986), jurist, exegete		

	Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī (288-377/901-987), Qur’ān scholar, grammarian	
	Abū Naṣr al-Sijzī (d. 444/1052), HM	
		Abū Sa‘d al-Sammān (d. 445/1053), HM
	Karīma al-Marwaziyya (363-463/974-1071), Hadith scholar	
		Abū Ishāq al-Shirāzī (393-476/1003-1083), jurist
al-Imām al-Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111), jurist		
	‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Anmāṭī (462-538/1070-1144), HM	
		al-Zamakhsharī (467-538/1075-1144), exegete
al-Pazdawī (471-557/1079-1162), jurist		
al-Dāmaghānī (483-540/1090-1145), qadi		
	Ibn al-Khashshāb (492-567/1099-1172), grammarian	
	Ibn al-Mannī (501-583/1108-1187), jurist	
Muslim al-Nufay‘ī (d. 600?/1204?), blind jurist		
Muḥ. b. Muḥ. Samarqandī (d. 621/1224), jurist		
		al-Wazīr Abū al-Ḥasan al-Qifṭī (568-646/1173-1248), philologist
		Ibn al-Nafīs (610-686/1213-1287), physician

	al-Imām al-Nawawī (631-676/ 1234-1277), jurist	
Yūnus al-Ṣarkhadī (d. 697/ 1298), grammarian		
Abū Bakr Ibn Qāsim al-Mursī (d. 718/1319), Qurʾān scholar, grammarian		
		Saʿd b. Aḥmad al-Juwandī (640-722/ 1243-1322), qadi
		Aḥmad b. Taymiyya (661-728/1263-1328), jurist
	Saʿd al-Tujībī (681-750/ 1282-1349), physician	
Ibn Damsīn al-Zabidī (d. 752/1351), grammarian		
Shams al-Dīn Muḥ. b. Yūsuf al-Qūnawī (d. 788/1386), jurist		
Aḥmad al-Rabaʿī (d. 795/ 1393), jurist		
		ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Jamāʿa (749-819/1348-1416), jurist
	Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Ṣalīhī (d. 942/1536), HM	
	Ibn Ṭūlūn (880-953/ 1475-1546), HM	
		Sulaymān al-Jamal (d. 1204/1790), jurist
		al-Ushmūnī (1218-1321/ 1803-1903), jurist
		ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm al-Afghānī (1251-1326/ 1835-1908), jurist
		Ṭāhir al-Jazāʾirī (1268-1338/1852-1920), jurist

		Bashīr al-Ghazzī (1274-1339/1858-1921), mufti
		Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī (1272-1342/1856-1924), jurist
		Khālīd al-Khālīdī (1282-1360/1865-1941), qadi
		Sa‘īd al-Nūrsī (1293-1379/1876-1960), theologian
		Muḥammad al-Kāfi (1278-1380/1862-1960), jurist
	Abū al-Wafā’ al-Afghānī (1310-1359), jurist	

Wise misanthropes vs. bestial renegades

“Run away from people as you would run away from a lion!” advised Dāwūd al-Ṭā’ī.⁷⁸ The story is told of the Syrian ascetic Mālīk b. Dīnār who was observed walking with a dog in his trail. Asked about it, he replied: “This dog is better than an evil companion” (*hādha khayrun min jalīs al-sū*).⁷⁹ The Perso-Arab scholar Ibn al-Marzubān (d. 310/922) references this report and its wisdom in the very title of his book *Faḍl al-kilāb ‘alā kathīr mimman labisa al-thiyāb* (The superiority of dogs over many of those who don clothes). This work is one of the earliest known on ‘uzla⁸⁰ with Ibn Abī al-Dunyā’s (d. 280/893) *al-‘Uzla wal-‘infirād*, the chapters on ‘uzla in al-Muḥāsibī’s *Waṣāyā*—discussed above—and Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād’s (d. 228/843) addenda to Ibn al-Mubārak’s compilation entitled *Kitāb al-zuhd*. Another report mentions sheep instead of dogs.⁸¹ Ibn Abī Laylā and Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī, the *Tābi‘i* jurists of Medina and Iraq respectively, related the prophecy that “A time will dawn on people named the

78. Narrated by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *‘Uzla*, p. 29 no. 40; al-Khaṭṭābī, *‘Uzla*, p. 18; al-Dūlābī, *al-Kunā wal-Asmā*, ed. Naẓr al-Fāryābī, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1421/2000) 2:601 no. 1076; Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilya* 7:342, 345.

79. al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-awsaṭ*, ed. Ṭāriq b. ‘Awaḍ Allāh and ‘Abd al-Muḥsin b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥusaynī, 10 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 1415/1995) 1:200, no. 641. Cf. al-Khaṭṭābī, *‘Uzla*, p. 146; al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, p. 101 no. 158.

80. Abū Bakr b. Khalaf al-Marzabān [sic], *Faḍl al-kilāb ‘alā kathīr mimman labisa al-thiyāb*, ed. Ḥamdī Zamzam (Damascus: Dār al-‘Imān, 1411/1990) p. 28.

81. al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, p. 94 no. 123.

Time of the Wolves. Whoever, at that time, is not a dog, they will eat him!”⁸²

The topoi of sapiential misanthropy and the insufferable dissolution of morals parallel the Qurʾānic representation of the degradation of belief into apostasy, where the primordial “best frame” (*aḥsani taqwīm*) became “the lowest of the low” (*asfala sāfilīn*) (al-Ṭīn 95:4-5). Unbelief is bestial: *Recite unto them the tale of him to whom We sent Our signs, but who sloughed them off... he clung to the earth and followed his own lust. So his likeness is as that of a dog* (al-Aʿrāf 7:175-176), even sub-animal as in the continuation of the same verse, *having hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. These are as cattle—nay, but they are worse!* (al-Aʿrāf 7: 179). Another verse observes, *Or do you think that most of them hear or understand? They are but as the cattle, nay, they are farther astray!* (al-Furqān 25:44). The recurrent images of animality—first, the snake implied in the skin sloughing off, then the dog, then cattle—culminating in sub-animality all point to the “evil associate” which the *ʿuzla* hadiths advise to shun.

Although these verses, like the *ʿuzla* verses of shunning cited earlier, were all meant for the early naysayers at the beginnings of the Prophetic call to Islam, they also provided timeless archetypes for what similar Hadith texts on *ʿuzla* and latter-day tribulations (*fitna*) foretold as the pre-apocalyptic turning of values upside down, the corruption of human hearts into those of beasts, and the endtime misrepresentation of truth, particularly by corrupt Muslim scholars:

- “The Qurʾān will wear out in the chests of many large groups the same way a garment wears out and falls apart. They will still recite it, but will find no taste nor pleasure in it. They will don the garb of sheep on top of wolves’ hearts. Their deeds are all presumptions untempered by fear!”⁸³
- “There will come out at the end of time men who scheme for this world at the price of religion. They will disguise themselves as sheep for people to think they are soft. Their tongues will be sweeter than sugar and their hearts will be the hearts of wolves. Allah will say: ‘Is it Me you are trying to fool? Is it Me you dare challenge? I swear by Myself that I will certainly cast on those a strife such as will make even their clever ones demented.’”⁸⁴
- Another version has, “their hearts are as the hearts of wolves, their

82. al-Khaṭṭābī, *ʿUzla*, p. 184; al-Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, p. 127 no. 229.

83. Narrated as a saying of Muʿādh b. Jabal by al-Dārimī, *Sunan (Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān, bāb: fī taʾāhud al-Qurʾān)*.

84. Narrated from Abū Hurayra and Ibn ʿUmar by al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan (Zuhd, bāb: mā jāʾ fī dhahāb al-baṣār)*.

tongues sweeter than honey, and their souls more bitter than cactus.”⁸⁵

- “O Allah! May I not live to see a time—or: may you all not live to see a time—in which the learned will be ignored and the forbearing will inspire no shame! Their hearts will be the hearts of dumb beasts (*al-‘ājim*) and their tongues the tongues of Arabs.”⁸⁶ *A‘ajim* of course includes the double-entendre of non-Arabs.
- “There will be, towards the end of time, anti-Christ arch-liars who shall bring you sayings neither you nor your forefathers ever heard before. Beware of them and keep away from them! Do not allow them to lead you astray nor seduce you.”⁸⁷
- “There will come a time when nothing shall remain of Islam except its name, and nothing shall remain of the Qur’ān except its writing. Their mosques will be heavily attended (*‘āmira*) but in reality they will be ruins devoid of guidance. Their scholars will be the worst of all that is under the sun at that time. Out of them dissension came forth, and it shall return back to them!”⁸⁸

Conclusion: self-accounting and self-struggle

“Bury your existence in the earth of obscurity,” Ibn ‘Aḩā’ Allāh wrote in the *Hikam*, “for whatever sprouts forth without having first been buried, does not mature” (*Hikma* 12). “Nothing serves the heart better than a reclusion (*‘uzla*)

85. Narrated from Abū al-Dardā’ by Ibn ‘Asākir, *Dhamm man lā ya‘mal bi-‘amalih*, ed. Muḩammad Muḩī‘ al-ḩāfiḩ (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1399/1979) and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi‘ bayān al-‘ilm wa-faḩlih*, ed. Abū al-Ashbāl al-Zuhayrī, 2 vols. (Dammam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1414/1994) 1:656 no. 1139, p. 35 no. 8; and as a saying of Walīb b. Munabbih by al-Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab al-īmān*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Alī ḩāmid, 14 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1423/2003) 9:216 no. 6558 and Ibn Bishrān, *Amālī*, ed. ‘Adil al-‘Azzāzī (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṩan, 1418/1997), p. 304 no. 695.

86. Narrated from Sahl b. Sa‘d by Aḩmad, *Musnad* 37:518 no. 22879 and al-Rūyānī, *Musnad* 2:234 no. 1117; from Abū Hurayra by al-ḩākim, *Mustadrak* 4:510 and al-Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab* 10:179 no. 7346.

87. Narrated from Abū Hurayra by Muslim, *Ṣaḩīḩ (Muqaddima, bāb: fīl-du‘afā’ wal-kadhdhābīn)* and Aḩmad, *Musnad* 14:252-253 no. 8596.

88. Narrated as a saying of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalīb by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-‘Uqūbat*, p. 23 no. 8; al-Dīnawarī, *al-Mujālasa wa-jawāhir al-‘ilm*, ed. Mashhūr ḩasan Salmān, 10 vols. (Baḩrayn: Jam‘iyyat al-Tarbiya al-Islāmiyya and Beirut: Dār Ibn ḩazm, 1419/1998) 2:359 no. 519; al-Dānī, *al-Sunan al-wārida fīl-fitan wal-sā‘a wa-ashrāṩihā*, ed. Riḩā‘ Allāh al-Mubārakfūrī, 6 vols. in 3 (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Āṣima, 1416/1995) 3:454 no. 236; al-Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab* 3:317-318 no. 1763.

through which it enters the fray of thought” (*Hikma* 13).⁸⁹ Such aphorisms form a call to self-diagnose and medicate the heart from the ills of innate bad character and attraction to sensory pleasures.⁹⁰ In the first aphorism Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh compares the aspirant to a seed that is buried in the soil and dies to itself, only to give fruit more effectively in the end. In the second he uses the term *mūdān*, “field, arena” to represent meditation as an act of military bravery, a reference to self-struggle (*jihād al-naḥs*) which is the hardest, longest and most harrowing of all jihads. For the ego is the worst of all bad companies and remedying it is the actual target of reclusion, rather than spatial isolation—a concept already broached in al-Muḥāsibī’s advice to “shun people with the hearts and keep in touch with them with salaam” and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī’s “heartful shunning away from the concerns of egos,” which culminates in the *Risāla Qushayrīyya* and the Central Asian Khwajagan masters’ rule of “seclusion in the crowd” (*khalwat dar anjuman*):

It is incumbent for the servant of Allah who prefers ‘*uzla* to firmly believe that it will ensure the protection of others from his own evil, not his own protection from theirs.... ‘*Uzla* in reality is the shunning (*i‘tizāl*) of abominable traits; so the desired effect is a transformation of attributes, not distance away from nations. Hence the knower is described as “present but separate” (*ka‘in bā‘in*); that is, present with creation but separate from them in his heart.⁹¹

Thus ‘*uzla* is at the same time reclusion, meditation, medication, repentance, self-accounting and struggle for self-improvement, as in the exhortation attributed to the second rightly-guided caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, to “Take account of yourselves before you are brought to account.”⁹² Rather than a solution, it is a regimen intended to address ills that are both social and intimately personal; on the one hand widespread corruption and irrepressible strifes, but also inveterate personal vices and heedlessness. Its primary Prophetic texts and commentaries reflect deep awareness of human flaws with respect to destructive human behavior, and of the limitations of remedial alternatives short of retreat when no good *ṣuḥba* remains. Even the obligatory “commanding of good and prohibition of wrong” are superseded by ‘*uzla* once the negative conditions of endtime strifes become prevalent, for

89. See Paul Nwiya, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh et la naissance de la confrérie ṣāḍilīte: Edition critique et traduction des Hikam*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq, 1990), p. 89.

90. Ibn ‘Abbād, *Sharḥ al-Hikam*, 2 vols. (Cairo: ‘Isā Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1338/1920) 1:15.

91. al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, cf. al-‘Arūsī, *Ḥāshiya* 2:218-220.

92. Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilya* 1:88 no. 135; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣāfiya*, ed. Ṭāriq ‘Abd al-Mun‘im, 2 vols. (Alexandria: Dār Ibn Khaldūn, n.d.) 1:88.

the sake of preserving one's religion. "Whoever leaves *ʿuzla* in our time and mixes with people, his *islām* and *īmān* are but a claim devoid of reality in the heart, like the *islām* of the hypocrite."⁹³ *ʿUzla* is thus a lawful response to the soul's distress call in dark times, a call back to nature and simple living both in the literal sense and in that of a last wall of protection against the irreversible unravelling of values and virtues.

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93. al-Nābulusī, *Takmil*, p. 22.

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