

1. Early Years in Morocco (1900- 1921): Studies and Conversion to Salafism

1.1. Early years in Morocco

Muḥammad Taqī al-Dīn al-Hilālī was born in Sijilmāsa, in the Tafilālt region of southeastern Morocco in 1894. Al-Hilālī claimed to be a descendant of Al-Ḥusain ibn ‘Alī - the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad. As his name would indicate, Al-Hilālī’s origins could be traced back to the Banū Hilāl, one of the armed Arab tribes which migrated to North Africa in the ninth century, in the reign of the Faṭimid Caliph al-Muntaṣir, to help him quash the revolutionary forces threatening his authority. According to ancient tradition, one member of the Al-Hilālī family had travelled from the city of Qayrawān in the south of Tunisia to southern Morocco, where he made his home.¹ Al-Hilālī himself stated that he belonged to a family of *fuqahā*’ (religious scholars), his great-grandfather Al-Ṭayyib al-Hilālī, his grandfather Muḥammad Al-Hilālī and his father ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Hilālī were all well-known *faqīhs* but they were Sufis and had no knowledge of the *Sunna* of the Prophet.² Al-Hilālī describes his youth, taking a particularly critical view of the condition of religious life at the time, as follows:

I grew up in the region of Sijilmāsa and I memorized the *Qur’ān* when I was twelve years old. The people of my city were fervent followers of the Sufi Orders, one could hardly find anyone, be he a scholar or uneducated, who did not adhere to [one of] the Sufi brotherhoods. The disciples of those orders loved their *Shaykh* so deeply they would call on him for help in times of adversity and take recourse to him against calamities, and were unremitting in their praise of him. If good befell them, they would praise him for that; but were adversity to touch them, they would accuse themselves of not loving their Master truly and of the slackness of their adherence to the brotherhood, without even giving a thought to the fact that anything either in Heaven or on Earth was beyond [the powers of] their Master. In their eyes, the latter was able to do all things. Al-Hilālī emphasized that the people often repeated the saying: ‘He who does not have a *Shaykh*, will have the Satan for his *Shaykh*.’³

¹ Al-Majdhūb (1977), 183.

² Ibid.

³ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 7.

In Morocco the Tijaniyya Sufi orders can be divided into two groups. One group into which are recruited only the *shurafā'* (nobles) and the educated people, and another whose members are drawn from the populace in general.⁴ Al-Hilālī was rather fascinated by the first group. He had often heard his father say: 'I would have been a member of the Tijāniyya Order, if the latter did not prohibit visiting the shrines of all saints except that of the Messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him!), those of the Companions and the shrine of Shaykh Al-Tijānī and those of the of Tijani saints.'⁵ Expounding on this he said, he could not renounce visiting the shrine of his grandfather, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Hilālī, who was also a famous saint whose shrine, situated in the eastern part of southern Morocco, was visited regularly by people.⁶ Had this not been the case, he would have been happy to receive the Tijānī *wird*⁷ from the *muqaddam* (representative of the order).⁸ Al-Hilālī's own desire to receive the Tijānī *wird* was also very highly motivated and hence, when he reached puberty, he went to the *muqaddam* to ask him for the Tijānī *wird*. The representative of the order also gave him the *wazīfah* (the daily office: a similar formulaic prayer which is chanted in group).⁹ It should be noted that within al-

⁴ This statement is based on my own experience, as my father was *muqaddam* of the *Tijaniyya* (representative of the order in Tafilalt in southern Morocco, from 1960-1987).

⁵ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 7.

⁶ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 8.

⁷ The specific religious litany of the Tijaniyya Order repeated twice daily by its members, consisting of phrases from the Qur'ān, supplications and the like. The *wird* is as follows: *lā ilāha illā Allah* (there is no God save Allah), to be repeated a hundred times; *istiğfār* (the formula for beseeching the forgiveness of Allah), to be repeated a hundred times; *taṣliya* or saying prayers to honour the Prophet (peace be upon him), to be repeated a hundred times. Any form of the variants of the salutation is acceptable; but the *Ṣalāt al-Fātiḥ* (Prayer of the Opener) is the best. The latter begins as follows : O Allah! Bless our Master Muḥammad (pbuh) who opened what had been closed ... etc. See Al-Hilālī (2005b), 9.

⁸ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 8.

⁹ The *wazīfah* is made up of the following elements: (1) reciting the formula of penitence, *Astagfiru Allah al-'Azim alladhi lā ilāha illā huwa al-ḥayy al-qayyūm*" (I ask Allah for forgiveness, no one has the right to be worshipped but He, the Ever Living, the One Who sustains and protects all that exists) thirty times. (2) Reciting *Ṣalāt al-Fātiḥ* (Prayer of the Opener) fifty times. (3) Reciting *lā ilāha illā Allah* (there is no God save Allah) a hundred times. (4) Reciting *Jawharat al-Kamāl* twelve times. This supplication opens with the following words: 'O Allah, send benediction upon and salute the source of divine mercy...' However, one must not recite *Jawharat al-Kamāl* without having performed the ritual cleansing with water, not with dry earth (*tayammum*) . He who cannot perform ablutions with water, should recite *Ṣalātu l-Fātiḥ* in place of *Jawharat al-Kamāl*, twenty times . The reason ablution with water is compulsory while reciting this prayer is the common belief according

Tijāniyya only the word *muqaddam* (representative) not *shaykh* is used, because Shaykh Al-Tijānī forbade anyone else to become the master in the order. Were anyone else to be entitled to use the title of *shaykh* would have meant that that person could have changed the litanies of the order and made alterations to its foundational principles. This would be completely unthinkable, because, in the view of Al-Tijānī, the founder of this religious brotherhood had been the Prophet himself, who had taught Shaykh Al-Tijani all the teachings necessary to this order. Most cogently, this revelation had occurred while the latter was awake and not in a vision. Therefore, the first disciple of this order was Shaykh Aḥmad Al-Tijānī himself and it was the Prophet who had endowed him with sainthood. All those who had propagated the order or taught its litanies and the daily office were merely his representatives. Therefore, the order had one single source and one single Master and it was impermissible that it should have more than one source or more than one Master as is clearly stated in the literature of the Tijāniyya Brotherhood.¹⁰

Al-Hilālī himself stated that he performed the litanies twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening, in the state of religious purity required before performing the prayers. He would sit down while reciting his litanies, closing his eyes and imagining the figure of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī. The Tijanis believe that the *shaykh* was a white man, whose face had taken on a reddish hue, with a white beard¹¹. Each Tijani had to imagine that a beam of light emanated from the Shaykh's heart and pierced their own hearts. Furthermore, there was one more invocation which had to be recited a thousand times every Friday, precisely before sunset, namely: the formula *lā ilāha illā Allāh*.¹² Al-Hilālī continued to recite this *wird* in all sincerity, took part in the daily office (*wazīfa*), hereby abiding by the rules set up by the Tijani community and remained a member of the Tijaniyya for some nine years.¹³

In 1915, (when he was twenty-one years old), Al-Hilālī crossed the border into Algeria, settling in the city of Berkān, where he made his living as a junior *imam*. In that period, as he was travelling about the country a series of unusual experiences caused him to

to which the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the four orthodox Caliphs attended its recitation and remained there as long as it was recited. See Al-Hilālī (2005b), 9.

¹⁰ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 9.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

doubt his Sufi convictions for the first time.¹⁴ Once, when he was in Algeria with a companion, the latter asked him to take care of his camel. While he was taking his afternoon nap in one of the tents in the desert, the head-stall of the camel loosened and it ran away into the wilderness. Each time Al-Hilālī tried to recapture it, the camel would wait until he had almost caught it and then would run away again. It was extremely hot as it was the height of noon. Al-Hilālī sincerely began to ask his *Shaykh* to help him catch the camel; but in vain. In fact, he blamed himself for the fact that the *Shaykh* did not respond to his invocations and accused himself of insincerity and laziness. Al-Hilālī stated resolutely that he had not accused the *Shaykh* of being unable to help him fulfil his task.¹⁵

Against the advice of the Tijani scholars not to read anything about Sufism except their own books, Al-Hilālī had seized the chance to read the first volume of Al-Ghazālī's work *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of Religious Sciences). This book reawakened his interest in Sufism and he began to make great efforts to pray more often and with more dedication. It was now he began observing the night prayer, even when it was intensely cold. In this period he had an unusual experience, which he described as follows. Once, while he was praying beside his small tent at night, he suddenly saw a white cloud which filled the horizon like a high mountain. This white cloud began to move closer towards him from the East - the direction towards which the Muslims in both Algeria and Morocco should pray - until it came to a halt far away from him. Then, a person emerged from that cloud; this person walked until he came close to him when he began to join Al-Hilālī in prayer. His clothes were like those of a young girl; yet, because of the utter darkness, Al-Hilālī could not see his face properly. When the stranger began to lead him in prayer, he was utterly terrified to the point that he could not recite the *Qur'ān*, despite the fact that he had memorized it perfectly. The man prayed with him six *raka'āt* (units of prayer). Al-Hilālī did not want to talk to him because the literature of the order advised its brethren not to become engaged in anything which might happen to them until they should have reached a state of divine receptivity when the veils would be removed from their eyes and they would have access to the world of the Unseen¹⁶.

A few days later al-Hilālī saw the Prophet in a dream. He took his hand and entreated him: 'O Messenger of Allāh, show me the path to Allāh.' He was told: 'Acquire knowledge.' Al-Hilālī was perfectly well aware that he was in Algeria which was a French colony at that

¹⁴ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 9. See Also, Lauzière (2008), 88-89.

¹⁵ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 9.

¹⁶ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 11.

time. He recalled that the scholars of the region of Tafilālt used to accuse anyone who travelled to Algeria of unbelief; they even went as far as to order him to perform *ghusl* (the full ritual washing of his body) and embrace Islam once again when he came back. They also commanded him to make a new marriage contract with his wife.¹⁷ Al-Hilālī stated:

This was the Messenger of Allāh, peace be upon him, advising me to seek knowledge, while I was living in a country ruled by Christians. I might be either a sinner or an infidel. So how might I seek knowledge there? So I asked him: ‘Should I seek knowledge in a Muslim or in a Christian country?’ He told me: ‘The whole world belongs to Allāh.’ After which I entreated him: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, pray for me to die as a believer.’ The Messenger of Allāh raised his index finger to the sky and said to me: ‘That is with Allāh.’¹⁸

Al-Hilālī himself asserted that these instructions made such an impression on him, he followed them very closely for the rest of his life. The influence of this experience might, for instance, be traced in Al-Hilālī’s later favourable views about migrating to or settling in a non-Muslim land, a viewpoint which distanced him from his much stricter colleagues of Wahhābī orientation.¹⁹

However, since the Prophet had not condemned his affiliation with the Tijaniyya, the thought of abandoning Sufism never occurred to him. In Al-Hilālī’s mind, leaving his *ṭarīqa* was still tantamount to leaving Islam.²⁰ Therefore Al-Hilālī’s religious profile remained unchanged and continued to revolve around Sufism. He admits in his own words that: ‘He was caught up in a reckless disregard and in absolute error. He would even have considered leaving the Tijāniyyah Order as apostasy; which was the reason he had never imagined budging an inch away from this religious community.’²¹

Al-Hilālī’s teacher in this period was the local Algerian scholar Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb Allāh al-Shanqīṭī (d.1918), with whom he studied for at least three years. During this period, Al-Hilālī applied himself to studying Malīkīte jurisprudence and Arabic grammar. He also

¹⁷ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 13-14

¹⁸ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 14.

¹⁹ See our discussion of Al-Hilālī’s view on this matter in Chapter 9 of this dissertation.

²⁰ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 31; Lauzière (2008), 92.

²¹ Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 31.

developed his teaching skills, as he was frequently asked to stand in for Al-Shanqīṭī. Two years later, in 1921, he was given the opportunity to move back to his native country when Aḥmed Ibn al-Hājj Al-‘Āyyashī Skirij (1877-1944), a fellow Tijani and chief *qāḍī* (judge) of the city of Oujda, asked him to teach his son Arabic literature.

In Fes, he enrolled himself in al-Qarawiyyīn University. It was also in Fes, in November 1921, that Al-Hilālī had a discussion with the enlightened man of learning and Sufi leader ‘Abd Al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī (1884-1962), whom he had actually met earlier in Oujda.²² This scholar criticized the Tijāniyya Order and told Al-Hilālī that, ‘The foundations of the Tijāniyya Order are teetering on the brink of a precipice; therefore, no sane man should never be one of its disciples.’ Al-Kattānī accused the Sufi orders of falsehood and of being a thoroughly fraudulent industry, manipulating to consume the people's wealth unlawfully and enslave them.²³ Al-Kattānī added that he had not founded the order of which he himself was in charge (the Kattaniyya Order). It had been founded by somebody else. Moreover, he spent the money he was taking from his disciples to promote various social interests and he knew that other people would never have done what he did.²⁴ In his discussion of Al-Kattānī, Al-Hilālī mentioned that the former had even added that half of the book on which the Tijani Order was founded, namely the *Jawāhir al-Ma‘ānī* (Jewels of Meanings), ‘...and which you claim your Master had dictated to ‘Ali Ḥarāzīm had been plagiarized and that the true author of this book was Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ma‘an al-Andalusī (d. 1778), who is buried in Fes.’²⁵ Al-Hilālī said that when he compared the two books himself, he had discovered that the first

²² ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī was a famous Islamic scholar with a modernist vision and mission. He called for the foundation of a House of Representatives (Parliament) and a constitution in which the tasks of the king and other governmental institutions would be delineated. The most influential event in the life of this scholar was the death of his brother while in confinement. This can be seen in his book *Ma ‘Aliqa fī al-Bāl min ‘Ayyām al-‘Iṭiqāl*; ‘What was kept in mind from the days of imprisonment’. In 1954, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī, as the head of the religious brotherhood of the Kattaniyya, plotted with Pasha Thami Al-Glāouī, sometimes known in English-speaking countries as the Lord of the Atlas, to depose King Moḥammed V and replace him with a substitute ‘Alaouite, Ben Arafā. Later, he became the object of an enormous hostile propaganda campaign, alleging that he was a spy and loyal to the French, etcetera. In 1962, he passed away in exile in the city of Nice in France. See Al-Kattānī (2013), 102.

²³ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 18. See also Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 32.

²⁴ Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 32.

²⁵ Ibid.

volume of the *Jewels of Meanings* was indeed a complete plagiarism.²⁶

1.2. Conversion to Salafism

Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī (d.1964) was employed as a judge in Fes and Al-Hilālī avoided meeting him because the judge despised Aḥmad al-Tijānī and spoke evil of his order. However, a bookseller by the name of *Shaykh* ‘Umar ibn al- Khayyāṭ told al-Hilālī that he would forgo an enormous store of knowledge were he not to meet Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī. He stated categorically that, if Al-Hilālī was truly seeking knowledge, he had to be sufficiently tolerant to be able to meet people from different backgrounds. Were he to do so, he would expand his knowledge. Nevertheless, he should not imitate them blindly in all they claimed; on the contrary, he should accept what seemed to be plausible and refute what was nonsense.²⁷ Eventually, *Shaykh* ‘Umar ibn al- Khayyāṭ convinced Al-Hilālī to meet Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī at his home in Fes. During that meeting, Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī and some of his friends engaged in a discussion about the Kattaniyya and the Tijaniyya Orders, mocking their disciples. Consequently, Al-Hilālī was subjected to precisely what he had wanted to avoid, namely: being forced to speak ill of the Tijaniyya Order²⁸. Aḥmad Al-Tijānī had claimed that the Prophet had told him while he was awake (not in a vision) to order his disciples not to keep company with those who despised him because, by so doing they would harm him, the Prophet.²⁹ The upshot was that Al-Hilālī felt depressed. As a disciple of the Tijaniyya and bound to follow the orders of his *Shaykh*, it was impermissible for him to take part in a gathering at which people spoke ill of Aḥmad Al-Tijānī.³⁰

It was on this occasion that Ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī confessed to Al-Hilālī that he, too, had once belonged to the Tijaniyya; but he had left it he realized that it was worthless.³¹ He

²⁶ Ibid. On this issue it is worthy to note that one of the most influential figures in the Tijani Order, Aḥmed Ibn al-Hāj al-‘Āyyāshī Skirij (1877-1944), who has admitted in his book, *Tījān al ghawānī fī sharḥ jawāhir al - ma ‘ānī* (Crowns of Female Singers: Commentary on the Gems of Indications), the fact that nearly one- third of *Al-Jawāhir*, had been taken from *Al-Maqṣad al-Aḥmad*. See *Al-Qādirī* (1932). About the issue of plagiarism see further Loimeier (1997).

²⁷ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 19-20. See also Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1 33.

²⁸ Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 33.

²⁹ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 22-23.

³⁰ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 22-23. See also Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 33.

³¹ Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 33.

challenged al-Hilālī to a theological debate (*munāẓara*) about the soundness of his beliefs. Al-Hilālī later wrote that he was torn between abiding by his order in ignorance and imitation or accepting the challenge of the debate, thereby following the path of the great scholars who espoused dialectical reasoning. He chose the latter path and eventually embraced the principles of the Salafiyya. The first in what was to be a series of debates occurred on 12 November 1921.³²

The debate

The arguments Ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī put forward all revolved around one single question, which lies at the core of the Tijaniyya’s legitimacy namely: did the Prophet truly appear to Aḥmad al-Tijānī while the latter was awake rather than asleep?³³ (To understand the significance of this issue, it is important to bear in mind that the Tijaniyya, unlike other Sufi brotherhoods, believe that Aḥmad al-Tijānī obtained his mystical knowledge in 1782 through appearance vision of the Prophet which supposedly occurred when he was *yaqẓatan*, namely: while he was awake.³⁴ Ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī told Al-Hilālī:

I want to debate one single issue with you. If you can prove its veracity, the foundations of the Tijāniyya Order will not collapse. [This single issue is] ...the claim that Al-Tijani met the Prophet, peace be upon him, while awake and hence not in a vision, and has received from him the teachings of this order. Therefore, if this meeting can be proven, you are right and I am wrong. Turning back to the Truth is indeed right. If, however, his claim proves to be falsehood, then I am right and you are wrong, and you are the one who should reject falsehood and abide by the Truth. Then he asked Al-Hilālī: ‘Do you want to begin the debate or would you prefer that I commence it?’ The latter said to him: ‘Go ahead.’ He then told Al-Hilālī: ‘Indeed I do have arguments aplenty. Each one of these is sufficient to show that the claim of Al-Tijānī is actually false.’³⁵

The *first argument* with which Al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī confronted Al-Hilālī was that of the conflict arising from the succession to the Prophet which set the Meccans against the

³² Al-Hilālī (2005b), 20. See Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 30.

³³ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 24. See also Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 33.

³⁴ Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 31.

³⁵ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 24.

Medinans in 632. Ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī stated that the conflict between the two groups reached such proportions it prevented them from burying the Prophet. Indeed, the Prophet remained unburied for three days. This led Ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī to wonder why it was that the Prophet did not appear to the Companions to help them resolve the conflict by choosing his successor himself? How could he have left this big issue undecided? Truly, if the Prophet had spoken to any person in a normal state of wakefulness after his death, he certainly would have spoken to his Companions and made peace among them. This would have been far more important than appearing to the Shaykh al-Tijānī after 1,200 years. And why did he appear? To tell him that he was saved and that whomsoever received his word would enter Paradise without having to account for himself, in the company of his father, sons and wife, but with the exception of his grandchildren. How could the Prophet choose not to appear while they were awake and talk to the best people he had left behind him about very important issues, whereas he was prepared meet somebody was not the equal of the Companions in merit, only to talk to him about unimportant matters?³⁶ Al-Hilālī countered this by stating that Aḥmad had answered this objection during his own lifetime by stating that during his lifetime the Prophet was in the habit of meeting specific people for special reasons, and common people for general matters. After his death, however, meeting the common people for general matters had been interrupted but the meeting of specific people for specific reasons had continued. Therefore the *Shaykh* must have belonged to the latter category.³⁷ Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī rejected this claim which implied that the Sharī‘a might be divided up into general and specific matters. He firmly stated that there were only five categories of rules (*aḥkām*) in Islamic Law. If these litanies of the Tijaniyya were indeed part of the Islamic practice, they should either be compulsory or recommended, because they were said to be an act for which Allāh had designated a reward. However, the Prophet had taught his community all the obligatory and recommended acts before he died.³⁸ Ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī went on to argue by adducing the *ḥadīth*,³⁹ according to which ‘Alī had been asked: ‘Has the Messenger of Allāh given you, o family of the Prophet, something apart from the *Qur’ān*?’ Ali had replied: ‘I swear by the One who causes the seed of grain to burst and sprout and the One who has created mankind, the Prophet did not favour us with anything [extra], except for the power of

³⁶ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 26. See Also Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 34.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (3461).

understanding what has been bestowed (by Allāh) upon the Muslims (written) in this sheet.’ When they opened it, they found out that it contained writings related to the blood money to be paid by the killer to the relatives of the victim, the ransom for the releasing of captives from the hands of their enemies and the rule that no Muslim should be killed in *qiṣāṣ* (retribution) for the killing of an infidel. So, why was it that, whereas the Prophet did not favour his family and his successors with anything, meanwhile he would distinguish a man living towards the End of Time with something which contradicted the teachings of the *Qur’ān* and the *Sunna*?⁴⁰

The *second argument* put forward by Ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī hinged on the discussion between Abu Bakr and Fatima about her inheritance and whether she should have received some share in the legacy of her father, the Prophet. Surely, the situation of a beloved relative of the Prophet who felt that she had been deprived of her inheritance⁴¹ and had felt angry about this issue for six months after the death of her father (the Prophet),⁴² would normally have seriously troubled the thoughts of the Prophet. If he were to appear to anybody after his death for one reason or another, he would certainly have appeared to Abu Bakr to tell him: ‘No longer observe the statement I made during my lifetime; so give her her share of the inheritance’, or he would have appeared to Fatima to say to her: ‘O, my daughter, do not be angry with Abu Bakr; he has not done anything wrong, he has merely complied with my commands.’⁴³

The *third argument* adduced was that the Prophet could have also appeared at the Battle of al-Jamal, in Basra in 656 CE, to prevent the internecine conflict⁴⁴ and bloodshed in which many Companions and Successors were killed, even though just one word from him would have been enough to prevent the slaughter.⁴⁵ Yet, the Prophet did not do this.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 27.

⁴¹ According to Al-Bukhārī and Muslim, Abu Bakr had answered her that the Messenger of Allah had said: ‘We Prophets leave no inheritance, what we leave behind us is a voluntary charity.’ See Al-Bukhārī (2926), Muslim (1757).

⁴² According to Al-Bukhārī, the Prophet had clearly stated: ‘I can entrust neither my wealth nor myself to anybody except Abu Bakr.’ See Al-Bukhārī, (3454).

⁴³ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 27. See Also Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 35.

⁴⁴ This concerns the conflicts which took place between Ṭalha, Az-Zubayr and ‘Ā’isha, on the one hand, and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib on the other hand.

⁴⁵ Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī refers here to *Sūrat al-Tawba* (The Repentance) about the Prophet’s mercy for and pity on the believers, and his sorrow about the hardships that might afflict Muslims. Allah, May

The *fourth argument* which *Shaykh* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī used was based on the Prophet’s possible appearance in a vision to the leader of the Kharijites in broad daylight to order him to obey ‘Alī and thereby to prevent bloodshed. Yet again, such a vision never took place.⁴⁷

The *fifth argument* was in the form of a question which *Shaykh* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī posed to Al-Hilālī asking why the Prophet did not appear in a vision to intervene in the dispute which erupted between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiyah at a time at which the unity of the *umma* was clearly at stake. Ibn al-‘Arabī wondered how the Prophet could have refrained from appearing to the best of people after him, at a juncture at which his appearance would have been of enormous importance since it would have unified the Muslims and settled all matters of litigation among them. Furthermore, it would also have prevented that terrible bloodshed, especially when it is remembered that the Prophet is the one who best exemplifies the teaching of the *Qur’ān* which says: ‘The believers are nothing more nor less than brothers.’⁴⁸ So reconcile yourself with your brothers.’⁴⁹ Despite all these omissions the Prophet was supposed to have appeared to *Shaykh* Al-Tijānī towards the End of Time for the sake of a matter of trifling importance.⁵⁰

In each of the points he raised, *Shaykh* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī suggested that it would have been illogical for the Prophet to appear in broad daylight to Aḥmad al-Tijānī as he had never appeared thus in these afore-mentioned cases which were of far greater import.⁵¹ Throughout the debate, these arguments increasingly astonished Al-Hilālī. Each time Al-Hilālī answered that the fact that the Prophet had appeared and talked to *Shaykh* al-Tijānī was no more and no less than a reward of Allāh. Al-Hilālī himself admitted that such an event was irrational because it contradicted the text of the *Qur’ān* and the records of the *Sunna*. Nevertheless, despite the fact that he could not provide Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī with a

He Be Exalted says: ‘Verily, there has come to you a Messenger (Muḥammad) from amongst yourselves (who you know well). It grieves him that you should receive any injury or difficulty. He (Muhammad) is anxious about you; for the believers (he is) full of pity, kind and merciful.’ (Qur’ān 9: 128).

⁴⁶ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 22-23. Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 35.

⁴⁷ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 29. Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 35.

⁴⁸ (Qur’ān: 49:10).

⁴⁹ (Qur’ān: 8:1).

⁵⁰ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 29. Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 35.

⁵¹ Ibid.

plausible answer, he did not concede his arguments.⁵²

Al-Hilālī and Shaykh Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī met another seven times after this initial meeting. Each time, the meeting would begin after the sunset prayer and go on beyond the evening prayer. After seven meetings had been held, in Al-Hilālī’s own statement, he had become aware that he had been misguided and realized that he had been completely mistaken about Islam. He was rapidly convinced that all Sufī brotherhoods were misleading.⁵³ Al-Hilālī asked Ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī: ‘Who among the Moroccan scholars holds the view according to which all matters related to theology or jurisprudence should be examined in the light of both the *Qur’ān* and the *Sunna*, even though our knowledge of the former is limited, so that we should accept that which complies with them both and refute what contradicts their teachings?’ *Shaykh* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī replied: ‘The great scholar and representative of the Tijāniyya Order in Morocco agrees with me on this point, namely *Shaykh* Al-Fāṭimī Al-Sharā’idī,⁵⁴ who was one of the prominent scholars of the Tijāniyyah Order.⁵⁵ Subsequently, Al-Hilālī went to him and told him that *Shaykh* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī claimed that one should examine all religious matters, related either to the Creed or to jurisprudence, in the light of the texts of the *Qur’ān* and the *Sunna* and refute whatever, according to him, contradicts the *Qur’ān* and the *Sunna*, even if it was an opinion held by *Imam* Mālik or *Shaykh* Aḥmad Al-Tijani.’ *Shaykh* Al-Fāṭimī Al-Sharā’idī said:

I am a very old man and I can no longer fight. *Shaykh* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī is a young man; that is why he is ready to fight. However, you asked me in public about an important issue which should be addressed. But I could not answer your question in public. Anyway, you should be aware that what *Shaykh* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī has said is the truth about which there is no doubt. Indeed, I used to be a disciple of the Qadiriyya Order and then of the Wazzaniyyah Order for some time and finally I became a committed disciple of the Tijāniyya Order, I even became its representative. All the same, I found it was useless to adhere to these religious groups, so I distanced myself from them. I have kept only one thing from

⁵² Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1 36.

⁵³ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 30. Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1 35.

⁵⁴ Al-Hilālī praised the Qādī Al-Fāṭimī Al-Sharā’idī in 1921 in a poem entitled *Madḥ al-‘Allāma al-Faqīh Sīdī Al-Fāṭimī Al-Sharā’idī*. See Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 643.

⁵⁵ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 30. Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 35.

Sufism: look for a *Shaykh* to instruct who exalts the commands of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunna* in word and deed. In fact, if I had found such a *Shaykh* I would have surely become his disciple. Let me know if you meet a *Shaykh* to instruct whose moral qualities are high and who exalts the teachings of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunna* in word and deed when you travel to the East so as to meet him.⁵⁶

The *auctor intellectualis* of the arguments Al-Hilālī had to answer in his debate with *Shaykh* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī seems to have been *Shaykh* Abū Shu‘aib al-Dukkālī, the great Moroccan scholar and reformist who lived from 1878 to 1956. Al-Dukkālī had used those same arguments to silence Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī, thereby obliging him to quit the Sufi order of which he was a member at that time. The original debate between Al-Dukkālī and Ibn al-‘Arabī can be found in the book *Ghāyat al-amānī fī al-radd ‘ala al-Nabhānī* (The Foremost Objectives in Challenging Al-Nabhani), whose author is the ‘Iraqi Salafī scholar Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī Al- Baghdādī (1855-1923). It is a book in which the author challenges and attacks the Sufi orders.⁵⁷

The debate as it had taken place between Ibn al-‘Arabī and Al-Hilālī was included by the latter in his book *al-Hadiyya al-Hādiya ilā al-Ṭā’ifa al-Tijāniyya* (The Gift Guidance for the Tijaniyya Order) published in al-Madīna in 1972. Al-Hilālī says that the reason he wrote this book was to halt the spread of open and covert ‘polytheism’ and related heresies which he observed in all Muslim countries, at a time at which the number of scholars of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunna* calling people to Islam was falling and both the populace and the scholars were turning in droves to join the Sufi orders, especially the Tijāniyya Order whose followers could be counted in the tens of millions in the Islamic world. As an expert on this religious brotherhood, he informed *Shaykh* ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz ibn Bāz (1910-1999), head of the Islamic University in Medina, about some of the aberrations of the former group. Ibn Bāz urged him to write a book whose purpose would be to disclose the true nature of the Tijaniyya Order and the delusions into which it could lead. The book should be a warning to those who had not yet joined the group, as well as a wake-up call to those who were still living in a complete delusion on account of their membership of the Tijaniyya Order. ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz ibn Bāz took charge of the publication of the book.⁵⁸ He immediately printed and distributed 10,000

⁵⁶ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 32. Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 36.

⁵⁷ Al-Alūsī (1971), Vol.1, 225-227.

⁵⁸ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 5-6.

copies.⁵⁹

Al-Hilālī himself records that the certainty he had acquired in the wake of his debate with *Shaykh* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī gradually consolidated.⁶⁰ Al-Hilālī was extremely happy with the outcome of his conversion as ‘the darkness of polytheism and heresy’ had been stripped from him and the ‘path of monotheism’ had been opened up before him. He argued that, as the literature shows, the teachings of the Tijāniyya Order could never be compatible with the teachings of the *Qur’ān* and the *Sunna*.⁶¹ Al-Hilālī also revealed that after he had left the Tijaniya Order, his inner self whispered to him many things that he had read in the book *Jawāhir al-Ma‘ānī* (Jewels of Meanings) which are related to *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Tijānī. The latter is believed to have said: ‘He who abandons his litanies in favour of ours, complying with the teachings of our Tijaniya Order, he shall fear neither the anger of Allāh nor that of his Messenger, nor that of his Master, be he alive or dead. Yet, he who receives our litanies and then turn his back on them, calamity shall knock at his door in this world and the Hereafter and he will surely die as an infidel. This is what he [the Prophet] has told me in a state of wakefulness, not in a vision. The Master of mankind has also told me: ‘Your disciples are indeed my disciples and your students are my students, I am their Master.’⁶²

Al-Hilālī mentioned that he wrestled with the whisperings of his inner self using arguments from the *Qur’ān* and the *Sunna*. He claimed that in 1942 the Prophet once again came to him in his dream. Al-Hilālī stated that when he saw the Prophet,

It entered my mind to begin my talk with him by asking him to pray to Allāh to ensure that I die as a believer. I think the reader still remembers that I had asked the Prophet the same thing in the first vision; yet nevertheless, the Prophet did not make any supplication for me, but he raised his index finger into the sky telling me: ‘It is with Allāh.’ I told him this time: ‘O, Messenger of Allāh. Pray to Allāh for me ensure that I

⁵⁹ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 11.

⁶⁰ Al-Hilālī also mentions that , after completing his studies at al-Qarawiyyīn University, an unnamed scholar from Teṭouān is reported to have said that he asked Al-Fāṭimī Al-Sharā’idi to provide him with the litanies of the Tijāniyya Order. The former replied that that the Sufi order was worthless. How was it possible to memorize the *Qur’ān* and have studied the Islamic Sciences which help one to understand the *Qur’ān* and the *Sunna* of the Prophet, and yet demand such an innovation? Al-Hilālī (2006a), 37.

⁶¹ Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 38.

⁶² Al-Hilālī (2005b), 14; Al-Hilālī (2006a), Vol.1, 39.

die as a believer.’ He said to me: ‘Invoke Allāh yourself and I shall say Amen.’ The Prophet raised his hands; since then, those inner voices have no longer disturbed me.⁶³

Al-Hilālī commented that the period which had elapsed between these two visions he experienced was twenty years. He interpreted the different visions and the reason that the Prophet made a supplication for him in the second vision and not in the first as a sign of his own transition from polytheism to pure monotheism and of his compliance with the teachings of the Prophet.⁶⁴ On the basis of Al-Hilālī’s own declaration, it seems appropriate to use the term *conversion*. He himself wrote about his ‘exit’ from Sufism and his ‘entry’ into the Islam of the Salafiyya.⁶⁵

In 1921, he was offered a post as a judge by Aḥmad Ibn al-Hājj Al-‘Āyyāshī Skirij (1877-1944), the chairman of the judges in the district of Oujda in the west of Morocco.⁶⁶ Al-Hilālī says that he refused the post because Aḥmad Skirij would have to consult the French inspector (*Mufattish/Murāqib*) before deciding on important Islamic issues which were to be judged by *Shari’a* law.⁶⁷ Al-Hilālī had noticed that Aḥmad Skirij used to meet the French observer every Saturday to inform him about all the sessions which had taken place at the tribunal and seek his advice about everything, despite the fact that he was himself the chief justice of the supreme court, a member of the two Holy Mosques Endowment League and a great scholar. At the time of his conversion in 1921, Al-Hilālī wondered, in his words penned in the year 1947:

Despite Aḥmad Skirij’s majestic rank, he subordinated Islamic Law to the opinions of that unbeliever, so in what sort of a situation would I have found myself!? Actually, I would definitely be meeting a young inspector of my own age to whom I would expatiate the *Shari’a* of the Messenger of Allāh, may Allāh grant him peace, but I could not pronounce any verdict without his permission. Nonetheless, I would pretend to rule according to Islamic Law! Therefore, I did not accept the appointment as a

⁶³ Al-Hilālī (2005b), 15.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Al-Hilālī (2005a), 7.

⁶⁶ Al-Hilālī (2010b), 450.

⁶⁷ Al-Majdhūb (1977), 194.

judge.⁶⁸

Al-Hilālī was convinced that both scholars and writers had to be either the voice of the colonizer in the country or be prepared for punishment. Besides his ambition to widen the scope of his studies, this might also have been a contributory factor which prompted Al-Hilālī to leave Morocco at the age of twenty-eight.⁶⁹ Al-Hilālī claimed that the French utterly refused, without giving any reason, to grant him a passport until Aḥmad Skirij, the representative of the Tijāniyya Order in Morocco, offered to be his guarantor and had reassured them that he harboured no enmity towards France. Aḥmad Skirij also sent a letter to the official representative of France in Cairo in which he solicited his help in taking care of Al-Hilālī. When he arrived to Cairo in Egypt, he went to the diplomat concerned to give him the letter. The Minister warmly welcomed him and he invited him to drink coffee with him. While they were talking, he told Al-Hilālī:

If you want to assume any high position in Morocco, I shall instantly send a message in which it would be made known that I myself had designated you for that selected function.

Al-Hilālī answered that he would rather travel all over the world to meet scholars of *ḥadith* to learn from them and look for manuscripts connected to this science.⁷⁰ If we take into account the fact that Aḥmad Skirij helped al-Hilālī to get his passport and go to Egypt by sending a letter of recommendation to the official representative of France in Cairo, it might be inferred that he had not (yet) openly condemned the Tijaniyya *Tarīqa*, and that, in Morocco, he had remained circumspect about his conversion to Salafism. Therefore, when Al-Hilālī speaks about his ‘conversion’ immediately after the debate he had with Ibn al-‘Arabī al-‘Alawī, this should be understood as a private conversion which, he initially kept to himself. This assumption is also supported by the help he received from the Tijaniyya disciples during the early period of his stay in Egypt.

⁶⁸ Al-Hilālī, “Al-Islām yukāfīhu al-’Isti‘mār,” 1947, 6.

⁶⁹ Al-Hilālī probably also travelled to Egypt because all the great scholars of the time, as among them Abū Shu‘ayb al-Dukkālī and Aḥmad ibn al-Ṣeddīq and others, used to go to Egypt either to seek knowledge or to meet the great Al-Azhar scholars.

⁷⁰ Al-Hilālī, “Al-Islām yukāfīhu al-’Isti‘mār,” 1947, 10.