

## The Spiritual Legacy of Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb: The Founder of Maghribī Ṣūfism And His Lasting Influence on Islamic Mysticism

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the life, teachings, and enduring legacy of Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Andalusī (509–594 AH / 1115–1198 CE), a pivotal figure in Islamic mysticism and the founder of one of the most influential Ṣūfī traditions in the Maghrib and al-Andalus. Known as "Shaykh al-Mashāyikh" (The Master of Masters) and "Mu‘allim al-Mu‘allimīn" (The Teacher of Teachers), Abū Madyan’s contributions to Ṣūfism are monumental. Utilizing historical and textual analysis, this study examines his early life in al-Andalus, his educational journey through Fās and the Mashriq, and his settlement in Bijāya (modern-day Algeria), where he established a spiritual legacy that impacted scholars and practitioners across the Islamic world. The paper investigates Abū Madyan’s role in the propagation of Islamic mysticism, his spiritual methodology rooted in the teachings of al-Junayd and al-Ghazālī, and his impact on subsequent Ṣūfī orders, including the Shādhilīyah and the Bā‘Alawī. It also examines his theological contributions, as reflected in his writings (Anas al-Wahīd and Nuḥbat al-Murīd), and his poetic works, which offer profound insights into his mystical worldview. By analyzing historical accounts, including those of Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-Sha‘rānī, and Ibn Sa‘d, the study contextualizes Abū Madyan’s spiritual philosophy within the broader landscape of Islamic mysticism. Furthermore, it highlights his influence on key figures like ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashhūb and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, and explores the integration of his teachings into North African and West African Islamic practices. By situating Abū Madyan’s contributions within their historical and spiritual context, this study enhances our understanding of his role in shaping Islamic mysticism and his enduring impact on Ṣūfī traditions worldwide.*

### Introduction

Islamic mysticism, or Ṣūfism, has long served as a profound spiritual tradition within the broader Islamic framework, shaping the religious, cultural, and intellectual landscapes of the Muslim world. Among the towering figures of Ṣūfism, Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Andalusī (509–594 AH / 1115–1198 CE) holds a preeminent position (Al-Sharīf al-Ṭilīmsānī, 55–56; Al-Sharīf al-Ṭilīmsānī, 75). Known as "Shaykh al-Mashāyikh" (The Master of Masters) and "Mu‘allim al-Mu‘allimīn" (The Teacher of Teachers), he is celebrated not only as a Ṣūfī mystic and scholar but also as the founder of one of the most influential Ṣūfī traditions in al-Maghrib and al-Andalus. His teachings and spiritual legacy have left an indelible mark on Islamic thought, influencing subsequent Ṣūfī orders and fostering a rich tradition of mysticism across North Africa and beyond.

Born near Ishbīlyah (Seville) and later educated in Fās (al-Ṭilīmsānī, p. 75) and the Mashriq, Abū Madyan’s journey was one of relentless pursuit of knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. His eventual settlement in Bijāya (modern-day Algeria) marked a pivotal moment, as it was here that his teachings flourished, drawing a large following and establishing him as a key figure in the propagation of Islamic mysticism. Rooted in the methodologies of al-Junayd and al-Ghazālī, Abū Madyan’s approach to Ṣūfism was both rigorous and transformative, integrating theological depth with practical spirituality.

This study aims to illuminate the multifaceted contributions of Abū Madyan by achieving several key objectives. It begins by providing a comprehensive historical account of his life and educational journey, offering insights into the context that shaped his thought. Furthermore, it analyzes his theological and mystical contributions to Islamic thought, highlighting his role in advancing key Ṣūfī principles. In addition,

the study explores his influence on subsequent Ṣūfī traditions and their regional expansions, demonstrating the enduring impact of his ideas. It also examines his poetic works as a profound reflection of his spiritual philosophy, displaying the depth of his intellectual and artistic legacy. Lastly, it assesses the role of his legacy in shaping contemporary Islamic mysticism, emphasizing the relevance of his teachings in the modern era.

Employing a multidisciplinary approach, the paper integrates historical analysis through primary sources such as al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā and Shajarat al-Nūr al-Zakiyyah, and secondary studies on his enduring influence. Textual analysis delves into his preserved works and attributed poems, uncovering theological and mystical themes, while comparative analysis examines his methodologies alongside those of other Ṣūfī luminaries, including al-Junayd and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. Finally, a sociological analysis evaluates his role in shaping regional Ṣūfī practices and their integration into local cultures.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the academic understanding of Abū Madyan’s centrality in Islamic mysticism. His teachings, which continue to resonate across spiritual traditions, offer a unique perspective on interfaith dialogue, spiritual leadership, and religious transmission. By filling a gap in scholarly literature, this paper aims to demonstrate how Abū Madyan’s legacy serves as a bridge between classical Ṣūfism and its modern manifestations, highlighting his profound influence on Islamic thought and practice.

### *Historical Context of Abū Madyan’s Life*

#### *Early Life near Ishbīliyah (Seville) and Andalusian Influences*

‘Aḥfīf al-Dīn al-Ṭilimsānī, whose full name was Abū al-Rabī‘ al-‘Aḥfīf al-Dīn Sulaymān ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alī ibn Yāsīn al-‘Abdī, occupies a significant place in the history of Ṣūfism. While historical accounts occasionally vary on details of his life, his association with the Arab Kūmah tribe, which resided along the coast of Tlemcen, is widely accepted. His birthplace is often attributed to Tlemcen, though some sources mistakenly link him to Kufa (Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, n.d., 44). Born in 610 AH (or 613 AH according to some accounts), al-Ṭilimsānī demonstrated an early inclination toward Ṣūfism, becoming a disciple of Ibn ‘Arabī and later studying under Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī. His travels across the Muslim world earned him the title "Master of the Land of Spirit," reflecting his extensive influence and spiritual authority (Farrūkh, n.d., 656).

Parallel to al-Ṭilimsānī’s contributions to Ṣūfī thought, the life and teachings of Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb ibn al-Ḥusayn reveal a distinctive approach to spirituality. Born in 509 AH (1115 CE) in Qutniyyāna, near Ishbīliyah (modern-day Seville), Abū Madyan emerged from modest circumstances, working as a shepherd in his youth. This early life of simplicity and humility deeply shaped his spiritual outlook, fostering introspection and a connection to the natural world. Unlike the intellectual pursuits of Andalusian figures such as Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Ṭufayl, whose works integrated religious, philosophical, and scientific inquiry, Abū Madyan focused on inner transformation and practical spirituality rather than theoretical knowledge (Brockelmann, 1983, 458).

The Andalusian environment of Abū Madyan’s formative years, characterized by intellectual vibrancy, also contrasted with his deliberate detachment from political institutions. Figures like Ibn Bājja pursued their intellectual endeavors within courtly settings, whereas Abū Madyan’s path emphasized independence from worldly power and alignment with divine truth. His teachings prioritized spiritual awakening and direct experience over engagement with philosophical discourse, setting him apart as a leader whose legacy continues to resonate (Farrūkh, n.d., 656).

Both ‘Aḥfīf al-Dīn al-Ṭilimsānī and Abū Madyan embodied distinct yet complementary dimensions of Ṣūfī thought. While al-Ṭilimsānī advanced Ṣūfism through his travels and association with prominent teachers, Abū Madyan’s teachings reflected a deeply personal spirituality grounded in humility and transformative practice. Together, their lives underscore the diversity and depth of the Ṣūfī tradition in al-Andalus and the broader Islamic world.

*Educational Journey through Fās and the Mashriq*

Abū Madyan's quest for knowledge began with his migration from al-Andalus to Fās (Fez), a prominent center of Islamic learning in the Maghrib. Here, he immersed himself in the study of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and mysticism under renowned scholars. Among the most influential figures in his intellectual and spiritual formation was Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ḥirzihim, who introduced him to Ṣūfī ethics through foundational works such as *Kitāb al-Ri'āyah* by al-Muḥāsibī. This early exposure to spiritual self-discipline and introspection profoundly shaped his later teachings, emphasizing the importance of moral refinement and inner reflection. 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥirzihim hailed from the prominent Ibn Ḥirzihim family (var. Aḥrāzim), descendants of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, the third caliph of Islam. This family became well-known in Fez as early as the 11th century, especially for their support of the anti-Idrīsīd policies implemented by the Maghrāwah Berbers, who governed Fez as vassals of the Umayyads of Spain (Tamīmī, Mustafād, vol. 2, 15–28, nr. 1).

The legacy of the Ibn Ḥirzihim family continues today through the tomb of Sīdī 'Alī, a revered figure from their lineage. Situated about fifteen kilometers southeast of Fez at Sīdī Ḥarāzem, the site remains a focal point for pilgrimage and spiritual devotion, enriched by the presence of a hot spring renowned for its healing properties (Ibn 'Ayshūn, *al-Rawḍ al-'Aṭir*, 58–70; Bābā, *Nayl*, 309–310, nr. 389). This enduring site reflects the family's spiritual and historical significance, attracting visitors who honor their legacy and contributions to Islamic thought and practice (Ibn Abī Zar', *Anīs*, 265).

Fez, much like Ishbīliyah, was a city bustling with intellectual activity. Scholars such as Ibn al-Khaṭīb and al-Qarawīyīn's theologians were advancing Islamic scholarship in diverse fields. However, Abū Madyan distinguished himself through his commitment to integrating knowledge with action. Unlike many scholars who focused on intellectual mastery, he adhered to a principle of learning only what he could apply. For instance, when studying with Abū Ya'zā Yalnūr, a Ṣūfī renowned for his asceticism, Abū Madyan was tested on his sincerity and resolve, further solidifying his practical approach to spirituality.

His journey to the Mashriq for pilgrimage brought him into contact with scholars and mystics of the wider Islamic world, most notably 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, a Ḥanbalī scholar, preacher, and Ṣūfī leader based in Baghdad, and the eponymous founder of the Qādiriyya order. Shaykh Abdul Qādir Jīlānī made significant contributions to Islamic education and spirituality, notably founding the Madrasah al-Qādiriyya in Baghdad. This institution became a hub for learning, offering a curriculum that included the Qur'an, Ḥadīth, Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and Taṣawwuf (Ṣūfism) (Algar 1999, 103–106). His influence extended beyond academia, reaching political and military leaders such as Nūr ad-Dīn Zangī and Salah Uddīn Ayyūbī, who respected his teachings and incorporated his principles into their governance and reforms (Al-Qahtani 1997, 133).

The influence of al-Jīlānī, a figure celebrated for his synthesis of Ṣūfism and jurisprudence, can be seen in Abū Madyan's balanced approach to spirituality. Both shared an emphasis on humility, reliance on Allāh, and the importance of guiding others toward self-purification. While Shaykh Abdul Qādir Jīlānī operated in the bustling scholarly environment of Baghdad, making significant contributions to Islamic education and spirituality through the establishment of the Madrasah al-Qādiriyya, Abū Madyan preferred a more intimate, community-centered approach, eventually basing his teachings in Bijāya.

Abū Madyan emphasized a simpler, community-focused model of teaching, favoring smaller gatherings where he could directly engage with students and followers. This preference for a localized approach allowed him to foster close relationships and a profound spiritual influence within his community in Bijāya, distinguishing his methods from Jīlānī's institutionalized and widely-reaching approach.

*Settlement in Bijāya and Role as a Teacher and Spiritual Leader*

Abū Madyan's decision to settle in Bijāya (modern-day Béjaïa, Algeria) marked a turning point in his life. Bijāya, then a thriving center of trade and scholarship, provided an ideal setting for him to establish himself

as a teacher. His gatherings attracted students and seekers from across the Maghrib, drawn by his reputation for wisdom and piety.

In Bijāya, Abū Madyan taught a path of spiritual refinement rooted in the teachings of al-Junayd and al-Ghazālī, emphasizing the interplay between divine love, humility, and self-discipline. Unlike contemporaries such as Ibn Tumart, who used religious teachings to consolidate political authority as the founder of the Almohad movement, Abū Madyan maintained a clear separation between spiritual guidance and political ambition. This apolitical stance allowed his teachings to resonate across social and political divides, fostering a sense of unity among his diverse followers.

His approach to mentorship contrasted with the institutionalized settings of scholars like Ibn Rushd, whose works were deeply embedded in Andalusian academic traditions. Abū Madyan's teaching was less formal, prioritizing personal interaction and the cultivation of spiritual states. This emphasis on experiential learning helped his students internalize his teachings, laying the groundwork for the Ṣūfī orders that would later emerge from his legacy.

#### *Political and Social Dynamics of the Maghrib*

The Maghrib during Abū Madyan's time was a region of significant political flux. The Almohad dynasty, under leaders like 'Abd al-Mu'min and Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr, was actively consolidating power, promoting religious reform, and unifying the region under a strict interpretation of Islam (Huici Miranda 1986, 165). In this context, scholars and mystics often found themselves navigating a complex relationship with the state.

Abū Madyan's growing influence inevitably attracted the attention of political authorities. Summoned to Marrākush by Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr on suspicion of subversion, he began a journey that he would not complete, passing away near Tilimsān. His life exemplifies the delicate balance that many scholars of the time had to maintain—advancing their spiritual missions while avoiding entanglement in political conflicts.

This dynamic was notably different from figures like Ibn Tumart, who directly challenged existing authorities and established a political-religious movement (Nakamura 1974, 89–113). Abū Madyan's focus on individual transformation and community-building reflected his belief in the enduring power of spirituality over temporal authority.

#### *Contextual Reflections and Comparisons*

Abū Madyan's life and approach highlight a distinct path within the broader intellectual and spiritual currents of his era. While scholars like Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl engaged with philosophical explorations that often intersected with courtly politics, Abū Madyan prioritized the transformative potential of spiritual practice, choosing to work among common people rather than elite circles.

Similarly, his detachment from political structures sets him apart from reformist figures like Ibn Tumart, whose teachings were inseparable from their political ambitions. Abū Madyan's preference for spiritual independence ensured that his legacy was not tied to the fortunes of any single dynasty, allowing his teachings to endure across regions and centuries.

In summary, Abū Madyan's life reflects a profound commitment to spiritual growth and community-centered leadership. His ability to navigate the intellectual, social, and political complexities of his time, while maintaining a focus on divine truth, positions him as a unique figure in the history of Islamic mysticism.

*Theological and Mystical Contributions*

Abū Madyan holds a distinctive place in Islamic mysticism, where his teachings seamlessly blend theological precision with practical spirituality. Drawing on the traditions of al-Junayd, the "Master of Sober Mysticism," and al-Ghazālī, the great synthesizer of Islamic jurisprudence and Ṣūfī thought, Abū Madyan constructed a spiritual methodology that was both rigorous and accessible. His contributions are particularly noteworthy when compared to other figures in the Islamic tradition, as they reflect a deliberate effort to integrate mysticism with the lived realities of seekers across diverse social and cultural contexts.

*Abū Madyan's Approach to Ṣūfism*

Abū Madyan's approach to Ṣūfism was deeply rooted in the concept of *tawḥīd* (divine unity), which he viewed as the foundation of all spiritual practices. Inspired by al-Junayd, he emphasized the importance of sobriety (*saḥw*) in the mystical path, where the seeker maintains a disciplined connection to Allah without being overwhelmed by ecstatic states. In contrast to mystics like al-Ḥallāj, who embraced public expressions of ecstatic union, Abū Madyan advocated for restraint and humility, aligning more closely with al-Junayd's doctrine of a "hidden sainthood."

Abū Madyan also drew heavily on the ethical teachings of al-Ghazālī, particularly in his insistence that spirituality must be grounded in personal accountability and the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). While al-Ghazālī's works, such as *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, were primarily directed at the scholarly elite, Abū Madyan adapted similar principles to address a broader audience, including rural communities and non-elite students. This practical orientation made his teachings more universally accessible, contrasting with the courtly intellectualism of contemporaries like Ibn Rushd, whose focus was on reconciling philosophy with Islamic theology.

*Examination of His Works*

Abū Madyan's literary contributions reflect his ability to merge theology with spirituality, creating a comprehensive framework for the seeker. Two of his most influential works, *Anas al-Waḥīd* and *Nuzhat al-Murīd*, provide insight into his mystical philosophy: Among Abū Madyan's most influential works are *Anas al-Waḥīd* (The Solace of the Solitary) and *Nuzhat al-Murīd* (The Journey of the Seeker), both of which reflect his profound insights into the Ṣūfī path. These treatises not only articulate his spiritual philosophy but also provide practical guidance for seekers, highlighting his ability to blend theological depth with accessible mysticism.

Here's the revised version with in-text references and a final reference list:

*Merged and Revised Review of Anis al-Wahid wa Nuzhat al-Murid by Sidi Shu'ayb Abū Madyan*

*Anis al-Wahid wa Nuzhat al-Murid* by Sidi Shu'ayb Abū Madyan is a profound and timeless work that offers deep insights into Ṣūfī spirituality, blending practical guidance with philosophical reflection. This collection of sayings and teachings attributed to Abū Madyan, a cornerstone figure in classical Ṣūfism, addresses themes such as self-purification, humility, divine unity (*tawḥīd*), and the disciplined pursuit of spiritual truth (Abū Madyan, 19, 2013).

The text emphasizes the central role of *taṣawwuf* (Ṣūfism) in guiding seekers toward self-awareness and proximity to Allah. Its aphoristic style makes it both accessible and profound, delivering enduring lessons on servitude to God, reliance on divine grace, and detachment from worldly entanglements. For instance, Abū Madyan highlights the importance of vigilance and mindfulness in worship, stating: "A single breath of yours is your lifetime, so ensure it works for you, not against you" (Abū Madyan, 19, 2013). This statement encapsulates his focus on accountability and the value of every moment in a person's spiritual journey.

One of the hallmarks of the book is its practical orientation. Abū Madyan provides a guide for seekers, addressing real-world concerns such as maintaining humility, interacting with spiritual mentors, and avoiding arrogance or superficial religiosity. His warning, "The harm of keeping company with an ignorant scholar, a clueless Ṣūfī, or a flattering preacher is among the gravest dangers," reflects his nuanced understanding of spiritual pitfalls and emphasizes the importance of choosing trustworthy influences wisely (Abū Madyan, 19, 2013).

Another notable dimension of *Anis al-Wahid wa Nuzhat al-Murid* is its psychological depth. Abū Madyan masterfully delves into the inner struggles of the soul, offering insights into overcoming the ego and relying on divine assistance. He stresses the transformative power of repentance and surrender, remarking: "Whoever relies on God fully is freed from false claims and empty pursuits" (Abū Madyan, 19, 2013). This demonstrates his profound awareness of human frailty and the need for divine reliance in navigating spiritual challenges.

In addition to its practical teachings, the text is rooted in a robust spiritual philosophy. Abū Madyan emphasizes the concept of finding solace in Allah alone, presenting *tawḥīd* as an experiential state that transforms both the heart and actions of the seeker. Unlike later mystics such as Ibn ‘Arabī, who expanded on *tawḥīd* through the metaphysical framework of *wahdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being), Abū Madyan’s approach is markedly practical and grounded. His teachings focus on aligning the seeker’s daily life and inner self with divine will, which made his work accessible and applicable to a wider audience, from ordinary seekers to advanced Ṣūfī practitioners (Abū Madyan, 19, 2013).

This pragmatic orientation does not diminish the depth of his philosophy. In *Anis al-Wahid*, Abū Madyan encourages detachment from worldly dependencies, urging seekers to place their trust and hope solely in Allah. He provides a roadmap for attaining this state, guiding individuals toward spiritual refinement and alignment with the divine (Abū Madyan, 19, 2013).

*Nuzhat al-Murīd*, on the other hand, serves as a guide for spiritual aspirants, outlining the *maqāmāt* (stations) and *aḥwāl* (states) that constitute the Ṣūfī journey. Abū Madyan, like al-Ghazālī in his *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, emphasizes the importance of self-discipline and spiritual awareness as foundational to progress on the path. However, Abū Madyan’s perspective is distinct in its focus on *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) and *tawakkul* (reliance on Allah), practices deeply rooted in his Maghribi context. His engagement with local communities shaped a spirituality that was both practical and communal, providing seekers with tools to navigate their inner and outer lives amidst the challenges of their time (Abū Madyan, 19, 2013).

Together, these works embody Abū Madyan’s unique contribution to Islamic mysticism. While they draw from the broader Ṣūfī tradition, their emphasis on practical spirituality and their grounding in the socio-cultural realities of the Maghrib set them apart. Through *Anis al-Wahīd* and *Nuzhat al-Murīd*, Abū Madyan not only articulated a vision of divine unity but also provided a roadmap for living it—a legacy that continues to resonate in the Ṣūfī tradition.

#### *Key Mystical Concepts and Integration of Theology and Spirituality*

Abū Madyan’s teachings emphasized core Ṣūfī principles, offering a distinctive and holistic approach to spirituality. Central to his method was the integration of theology and practice, bridging abstract doctrinal principles with tangible, lived experiences. Unlike figures such as Ibn Rushd, who engaged with reconciling philosophy and theology for an intellectual audience, Abū Madyan’s teachings were accessible to both scholars and laypeople, focusing on inner transformation rather than political or intellectual abstraction.

One of Abū Madyan’s foundational principles was *tawakkul* (reliance on Allah), which he framed as a deeply personal and transformative surrender to divine will. Drawing on al-Ghazālī’s ethical frameworks, he regarded *tawakkul* not as passive resignation but as an active spiritual state that empowered seekers to detach from worldly ambitions. This apolitical focus on *tawakkul* set him apart from reformist leaders like Ibn Tumart, aligning his teachings with individual spiritual growth rather than external power dynamics.

The concept of fuqara (poverty of spirit) was another cornerstone of Abū Madyan's philosophy. Rooted in the socio-political realities of the Maghrib, where instability and upheaval were common, fuqara symbolized complete dependence on Allah. While this idea echoed al-Junayd's emphasis on detachment from material concerns, Abū Madyan contextualized it for his followers, offering simplicity and spiritual grounding as solutions to their turbulent environment.

Central to Abū Madyan's practice was dhikr (remembrance of Allah), which he viewed as essential for achieving spiritual purity and fostering communal bonds. Encouraging both silent meditation and collective gatherings for dhikr, he highlighted its role in transforming the heart and creating unity among followers. This practical, communal approach distinguished his teachings from philosophical mystics like Ibn Ṭufayl, whose work leaned toward intellectual abstraction.

Equally important was ikhlāṣ (sincerity), which Abū Madyan placed at the heart of the mystical journey. For him, a pure heart was necessary to reflect divine light, ensuring that all actions aligned with the seeker's ultimate goal of closeness to Allah. While al-Ghazālī incorporated sincerity into his broader ethical discussions, Abū Madyan elevated ikhlāṣ as a fundamental virtue underpinning the entire spiritual path.

Through this integration of theological principles and practical spirituality, Abū Madyan contextualized the teachings of predecessors such as al-Junayd and al-Ghazālī for his time and place. His focus on humility, sincerity, and accessible practices made his path resonate deeply with individual seekers and broader communities. By uniting theology with practice, he left a lasting legacy that continues to inspire Ṣūfī practitioners worldwide.

#### *Influence on Subsequent Ṣūfī Traditions*

The impact of Abū Madyan extends far beyond his lifetime, as his teachings served as the foundation for some of the most influential Ṣūfī orders in the Islamic world. Through his emphasis on humility, reliance on Allah, and practical spirituality, Abū Madyan's legacy became a cornerstone of mysticism in the Maghrib and beyond, inspiring generations of seekers and shaping the trajectory of Ṣūfī practice.

At the heart of Abū Madyan's enduring influence is his pivotal role in inspiring later Ṣūfī orders, most notably the Shādhilīyah and Bā'Alawī traditions. These orders, which became prominent across North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, carried forward the principles articulated by Abū Madyan. His teachings on ikhlāṣ (sincerity), tawakkul (reliance on Allah), and dhikr (remembrance of Allah) provided a spiritual framework that the Shādhilīyah refined into a formalized path of inner discipline and communal worship. Similarly, the Bā'Alawī tradition in Hadramawt drew upon his universal principles, adapting them to its local context while preserving their spiritual depth.

This influence is particularly evident in the spiritual lineage connecting Abū Madyan to some of the most celebrated figures in Islamic mysticism. Among his notable students was 'Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh, a Moroccan Ṣūfī master and ascetic, who played a pivotal role in transmitting Abū Madyan's teachings. Ibn Mashīsh, in turn, became the spiritual guide (murshid) of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, the founder of the Shādhilīyah order. This lineage—from Abū Madyan to Ibn Mashīsh and then to al-Shādhilī—demonstrates how his teachings not only survived but flourished, evolving into a structured tradition that influenced spiritual communities across the Islamic world (Le Tourneau, 1986, 91).

Ibn Mashīsh's life, though shrouded in mystery, reflects his ascetic devotion and spiritual legacy. Born to the Banū Arūs tribe near Jabal al-'Alam, he is said to have traveled east at the age of 16 to pursue knowledge. On his return to Béjaïa, he became a disciple of Abū Madyan, adopting his practical spirituality before retreating to his native region to live a life of asceticism. While little is known about him, his impact is evident through his only recorded disciple, al-Shādhilī, who incorporated Abū Madyan's teachings into his order, ensuring their accessibility to diverse audiences and making the Shādhilīyah one of the most widely

practiced Ṣūfī paths. Tragically, Ibn Mashīsh was assassinated in 1227/1228 by the anti-Almohad rebel Ibn Abī Tawajin, yet his teachings left an enduring legacy (Le Tourneau, 1986, 91).

The spread of Abū Madyan’s teachings across North and West Africa further underscores his profound influence. His approach to Ṣūfism, which emphasized inner transformation and reliance on Allah, resonated deeply with communities navigating the challenges of political instability and cultural diversity. As his disciples carried his teachings into new regions, they adapted his principles to local traditions, creating a dynamic spiritual heritage that remains vibrant to this day. In areas such as Mali, Senegal, and Sudan, Abū Madyan’s emphasis on humility, sincerity, and communal worship became integral to the spiritual fabric of these societies.

Beyond his theological contributions, Abū Madyan’s influence can also be seen in the sociological dynamics of Ṣūfī communities. By emphasizing personal accountability and spiritual egalitarianism, he created a model of spirituality that transcended class and ethnic divisions. His teachings fostered unity within Ṣūfī communities, encouraging individuals from all walks of life to engage in practices like dhikr and murāqabah (spiritual self-awareness). This inclusivity ensured the longevity of his legacy, as his principles were embraced and adapted across diverse contexts.

Abū Madyan’s influence is a testament to the transformative power of his teachings. By inspiring figures like Ibn Mashīsh and al-Shādhilī, and by shaping the development of major Ṣūfī orders, he left an indelible mark on Islamic mysticism. His ability to combine profound spiritual insights with practical guidance ensured that his legacy would endure, enriching the lives of countless seekers and cementing his place as one of the great luminaries of Ṣūfism. Through his teachings, Abū Madyan not only shaped the spiritual landscape of his time but also laid the foundation for a tradition that continues to thrive across the Islamic world.

#### *Poetic Works and Spiritual Philosophy*

Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb ibn al-Ḥusayn’s contributions to Islamic mysticism extend beyond his teachings and writings; they find vivid expression in his poetry, which reflects the depth of his mystical worldview. His verses, rich with spiritual insight and emotional intensity, serve as both a testament to his inner experiences and a medium for communicating complex mystical ideas to his followers. Through his poetry, Abū Madyan articulated themes central to Ṣūfism, such as divine love, self-purification, and the quest for union with Allah, making these concepts accessible and inspiring for practitioners across diverse contexts.

#### *Abū Madyan’s Poetry: Bridging Spiritual Philosophy and Human Experience*

Abū Madyan’s poetry reflects the essence of his spiritual philosophy, presenting tawḥīd (divine unity) as not merely an intellectual construct but an experiential reality deeply embedded in the human condition (Kroum, 2004). His verses explore the profound tension between the seeker’s yearning for the divine and the distractions of the material world, illustrating the transformative journey of the soul. By intertwining Ṣūfī principles with poetic expression, Abū Madyan’s work bridges abstract theological ideals and the lived experiences of his audience, creating a unique blend of accessibility and depth.

The poem provided exemplifies Abū Madyan’s ability to make profound spiritual truths tangible and relatable. Its opening lines, “What joy in life exceeds the poor’s embrace, / True kings and lords, they hold a noble place,” echo the Ṣūfī emphasis on humility and the value of asceticism. In line with Abū Madyan’s teachings, these verses celebrate the poor not as destitute but as those detached from material concerns and deeply connected to God. This elevation of the poor to a noble station mirrors Abū Madyan’s accessible spiritual aesthetic, which resonates with both scholars and lay seekers (Qurīn, 2008).

Unlike contemporaries such as Ibn ‘Arabī, whose poetic expressions often lean toward metaphysical and esoteric themes, Abū Madyan’s poetry is grounded in practical and emotional dimensions. The poem’s advice to “Keep silence, save when asked, and humbly say: / ‘I know not,’ veil your ignorance this way,”



reflects Abū Madyan’s pedagogical approach, which emphasizes humility and the active cultivation of self-awareness. This guidance aligns with the universal struggles of aligning the self with divine will, a central theme in his poetry, making it a potent tool for spiritual education (Kroum, 2004).

Ṣūfism, as embodied in Abū Madyan’s poetry and sayings, also functions as an educational discipline deeply intertwined with human psychology (Belkhiter, 2018). The poem illustrates this psychological insight through lines such as, “See not the fault in others but in thee, / A hidden flaw, though plain for all to see.” Here, Abū Madyan directs the seeker to focus on self-purification rather than judgment of others, emphasizing the inner work required for spiritual transformation. This inward focus forms the foundation of Ṣūfī practice, where intentions rooted in the psyche determine the authenticity of worship and spiritual acts.

The poem’s exhortation to “Bow down thy head, seek pardon without cause, / Stand firm in justice, though it give thee pause” embodies Abū Madyan’s spiritual psychology, where humility and justice are seen as pathways to divine alignment. As Muḥammad Hannā’ī notes, Abū Madyan’s teachings provided both diagnostic and prescriptive tools for addressing the ailments of the human soul, guiding individuals toward self-purification and harmony with the Creator (Hannā’ī, 2023). Through such verses, Abū Madyan demonstrates how Ṣūfī practice addresses universal psychological struggles, offering a roadmap for navigating human frailty and striving for transcendence.

The authenticity of Abū Madyan’s poetry, as explored in Boumediene Kroum’s critical study, highlights the integration of Ṣūfī principles with poetic expression. Kroum examines the tension between authentic works and later attributions, emphasizing how Abū Madyan’s clarity and spiritual depth made his verses a vehicle for oral transmission and broader Ṣūfī education (Kroum, 2004). The line “May God unite me with their noble band, / And grant forgiveness by His guiding hand” encapsulates the communal and aspirational elements of Ṣūfī practice, reinforcing the collective nature of spiritual advancement while maintaining an intimate connection to the divine.

Similarly, Boumediene Belkhiter’s exploration of Abū Madyan’s psychological insights underscores how his poetry offers practical guidance for managing the ego and aligning the soul with divine principles. Lines such as, “If error springs from thee, admit thy blame, / And humbly strive to mend thy tarnished name,” reflect the transformative power of self-awareness and accountability in Ṣūfī teachings. By combining spiritual depth with psychological acumen, Abū Madyan’s poetry provides a timeless framework for seekers navigating the complexities of human experience (Belkhiter, 2018).

This integration of spiritual philosophy and human experience distinguishes Abū Madyan’s poetry as both diagnostic and prescriptive. Through the poem’s exhortations to humility, service, and constant striving—“Serve him with zeal, and never grow fatigued, / In pleasing him, by God thou art believed”—we see how his verses align with the broader Ṣūfī goal of transcending the self in pursuit of divine unity. These teachings remain relevant, offering insights for contemporary seekers on how to balance the demands of the material world with the soul’s longing for transcendence.

In addition to Abū Madyan’s contributions, works such as ‘Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī’s *Ma’ānī al-Asmā’ al-Ilāhiyyah* further enrich the Ṣūfī literary tradition. Al-Tilimsānī’s exploration of the Divine Names mirrors Abū Madyan’s focus on the interconnectedness of human experience and divine principles. Together, these figures illustrate how classical Ṣūfī literature uses poetry not only as a means of spiritual instruction but also as a medium for navigating the deepest dimensions of the human psyche (Kiswit, n.d.).

In sum, Abū Madyan’s poetry, as exemplified in the verses provided, bridges the abstract ideals of Ṣūfism with the tangible struggles of the human condition. By addressing questions of humility, self-awareness, and divine alignment, his work continues to inspire seekers across cultures, demonstrating the timeless relevance of his spiritual philosophy.

*Thematic Depth and Mystical Philosophy in Abū Madyan's Poetry*

Central to Abū Madyan's poetic works are recurring themes that encapsulate the essence of Ṣūfī thought: divine love, self-purification, and the quest for union with Allah. These themes collectively reflect the foundation of his mystical philosophy and offer profound insights into the spiritual journey. His verses vividly portray the transformative power of these elements, guiding seekers toward divine closeness.

Divine love emerges in Abū Madyan's poetry as the driving force of the seeker's journey, embodying an intense and transformative relationship between the lover (the seeker) and the beloved (Allah). This relationship is characterized by yearning, selflessness, and an unwavering pull toward the divine, likened to the lover's complete surrender to the beloved. For Abū Madyan, divine love is not merely an emotional state but a spiritual force that transcends worldly attachments and dissolves the ego, leading to a state of complete union and self-purification. As Muhammad Bazī notes, Abū Madyan often uses chaste love as a Ṣūfī metaphor to symbolize a pure, divine longing that elevates the seeker above physical desires and material distractions, reflecting the ultimate spiritual connection (Bazī, 2022).

This concept is vividly captured in Abū Madyan's poetry, including the following lines: "You have taken possession of my mind, my sight, and my hearing,

/My soul, my heart, and my entire being." These verses express the total surrender of the seeker to the beloved, Allah. The imagery of complete possession underscores the transformative power of divine love, which consumes the seeker entirely, leaving no room for worldly attachments or self-interest.

Abū Madyan's poetry also reflects the seeker's inner turmoil, as seen in:

"You bewildered me with the beauty of your radiance,/ And I no longer know where I stand in love's orbit." Here, the seeker's journey is likened to an overwhelming pull toward divine beauty, resulting in a loss of self-awareness and a profound state of longing. This intense yearning mirrors the transformative nature of divine love, which propels the seeker toward Allah, dissolving ego and cultivating humility and selflessness.

The theme of divine love as a purifying force is further emphasized in the lines:

"When my patience faded and my strength diminished,/ Sleep left me, and rest was forbidden from my bed." These verses highlight the trials and sacrifices involved in the seeker's journey. The sleepless nights and restless state symbolize the seeker's unrelenting devotion and the hardships endured for divine proximity. This aligns with Abū Madyan's broader teachings that true love for Allah requires detachment from comforts and worldly concerns, reflecting a pure and selfless devotion.

Moreover, the poem reveals the paradox of divine love, where the beloved feels simultaneously near and distant: "How strange that I long for them,/

And ask about them while they are here with me." This paradox encapsulates the mystical union sought by the Ṣūfī. While Allah is ever-present, the seeker's yearning reflects the deeper realization of divine closeness, where the soul must transcend its limited perception to fully grasp the presence of the beloved.

Abū Madyan also portrays divine love as a source of empowerment in moments of separation and hardship: "If they imprison me in the cells of their rejection,/I will enter upon them with the interceding intercessor." Even in the face of spiritual trials and separation, the seeker finds strength in divine intercession and grace, symbolizing the ultimate reliance on Allah's mercy and love.

Through this poetry, Abū Madyan illustrates the transformative journey of the seeker driven by divine love. His use of vivid imagery and profound metaphors underscores the intensity of the soul's longing for Allah, a yearning that dissolves the ego and elevates the seeker to spiritual proximity. As Bazī (2022) notes, this

chaste love transcends physical desire, aligning with Abū Madyan's emphasis on self-purification and the complete surrender of the soul to the divine.

Alongside love, self-purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) plays a prominent role in Abū Madyan's works. He emphasizes that spiritual progress requires refining the heart by abandoning worldly distractions, purifying intentions, and embracing humility. His verses encourage seekers to identify and overcome the internal barriers obstructing divine proximity, presenting inner cleansing as a prerequisite for genuine spiritual transformation.

The culmination of Abū Madyan's mystical path lies in the union with the divine. This union, depicted not as a literal merging but as the realization of the soul's intrinsic connection to its Creator, represents a state of indescribable joy and clarity. His poetry captures the paradoxical nature of this union: both the ultimate goal and an ever-present reality unfolding as the seeker's awareness deepens.

These themes are masterfully expressed in two of Abū Madyan's most renowned compositions, the *Lāmiyyah* and the *Nūniyyah*. The *Lāmiyyah* lyrically explores the seeker's longing for Allah and the trials encountered on the path to divine union. Through evocative imagery, Abū Madyan portrays the struggles of self-discipline and the rewards of surrendering to Allah's will. The poem integrates core *Ṣūfī* principles such as reliance (*tawakkul*), remembrance (*dhikr*), and the purifying power of love, offering both guidance and inspiration to seekers.

In contrast, the *Nūniyyah*, often described as a "poem of intoxication," delves into the ecstatic states experienced by the soul in its quest for Allah. Employing metaphor and allegory, Abū Madyan depicts the dissolution of the self in divine love, illustrating the awe and joy that accompany the realization of Allah's presence. This composition stands as a testament to Abū Madyan's ability to convey the ineffable, providing readers with a glimpse into the mystical experiences defining the *Ṣūfī* path.

Abū Madyan's influence extends beyond his own poetry, resonating within broader *Ṣūfī* traditions and modern interpretations. His use of chaste love as a metaphor continues to inspire, as noted in Muhammad Bazi's *Migratory Texts*, where his themes find intertextual parallels in contemporary *Ṣūfī* poetry (Majallat al-'Irfān, 2022). Similarly, his works have been integrated into the analysis of mystical poetry, as highlighted in Mustapha Medjahdi's study on 'Afif al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī. Medjahdi critiques the over-classification of al-Tilimsānī's poetry under the "philosophy of the unity of existence," urging fresh readings detached from philosophical constraints. The symbolic use of wine and intoxication in al-Tilimsānī's works, reflecting spiritual ecstasy, aligns with Abū Madyan's portrayal of divine love as transformative and transcendent (Medjahdi, 2005).

Al-Tilimsānī's *Dīwān*, edited by al-'Arabī Daḥū, further emphasizes mystical themes, blending Akbarian *Ṣūfism* with broader theological and metaphysical ideas. His sophisticated commentary on the Divine Names (*Ma'ānī al-Asmā' al-Ilāhiyyah*), edited by Yūsuf Kiswit, illustrates how divine attributes permeate all levels of existence. These contributions enrich the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of classical *Ṣūfī* literature, offering insights that complement Abū Madyan's poetic legacy (Kiswit, n.d.).

Through their combined literary and mystical contributions, Abū Madyan and al-Tilimsānī have shaped the *Ṣūfī* tradition, leaving behind a timeless legacy of spiritual guidance and philosophical inquiry.

#### *Poetry as a Tool for Teaching and Inspiration*

Abū Madyan's poetry played a crucial role in popularizing his teachings, making complex mystical ideas relatable and inspiring for a wide audience. His verses, often recited in gatherings of *dhikr* and reflection, created a sense of shared spiritual purpose among his followers. By embedding his teachings in poetic form, Abū Madyan ensured their transmission across generations, as poetry's rhythm and imagery made it easier to remember and internalize.

The communal recitation of his poetry also reinforced the values of humility, reliance, and divine love that he championed. In this sense, his poetry was not merely a personal expression but a pedagogical tool, designed to guide seekers on their spiritual journeys.

Through his poetic works, Abū Madyan transcended the boundaries of intellectual discourse, offering a medium that touched both the mind and the heart. His verses, rich with themes of divine love, self-purification, and the quest for union, continue to inspire Ṣūfī practitioners and illuminate the timeless relevance of his spiritual philosophy. By combining profound insights with evocative language, Abū Madyan ensured that his poetry would remain an enduring testament to his role as a master of Islamic mysticism.

### *Legacy and Veneration*

Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb ibn al-Ḥusayn’s legacy continues to resonate deeply within Islamic spirituality, transcending time and geography. His teachings, spiritual authority, and the veneration of his shrine in Tilimsān have cemented his position as one of the most revered figures in Ṣūfī tradition. Both historical accounts and contemporary practices attest to the enduring impact of his life and philosophy, reflecting his significance as a spiritual guide and a unifying figure in Islamic mysticism.

### *The Shrine in Tilimsān*

One of the most visible aspects of Abū Madyan’s legacy is his shrine in Tilimsān (Tlemcen, Algeria), which remains a site of pilgrimage and spiritual devotion. Built by the Marinid dynasty, the shrine serves as both a memorial to his life and a center for Ṣūfī practices. Pilgrims from across the Islamic world visit the shrine to seek blessings, reflect on his teachings, and connect with the spiritual energy associated with his life.

The enduring significance of the shrine lies in its role as a focal point for the transmission of Abū Madyan’s teachings. It has fostered a sense of community among his followers and preserved the rituals and practices associated with his spiritual path. The communal gatherings for dhikr (remembrance of Allah) and the recitation of his poetry at the shrine ensure that his legacy continues to inspire new generations of seekers.

### *Perceptions in Historical Accounts*

Abū Madyan’s influence is well-documented in historical accounts, where he is often portrayed as a paragon of spiritual excellence. Ibn al-‘Arabī, the great Andalusian mystic, referred to Abū Madyan as "Ṣultān al-Wāriṭhīn" (The Sultan of Spiritual Heirs), acknowledging his unparalleled authority in the spiritual realm. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s recognition highlights Abū Madyan’s pivotal role in shaping the mystical traditions that influenced figures across the Islamic world.

Similarly, al-Sha‘rānī, a renowned Egyptian Ṣūfī scholar, praised Abū Madyan as a master of Ṣūfī wisdom, whose teachings transcended the limitations of time and place. Al-Sha‘rānī’s writings emphasize Abū Madyan’s ability to balance rigorous spiritual discipline with a compassionate understanding of the human condition, making his teachings universally relevant.

These accounts not only validate Abū Madyan’s spiritual authority but also situate him within a lineage of revered Ṣūfī masters whose influence shaped the development of Islamic mysticism.

### *"Qutb al-Aqṭāb" and Spiritual Authority*

Abū Madyan is often described as a "Qutb al-Aqṭāb" (Pole of Poles), a title that underscores his spiritual preeminence in Ṣūfī tradition. This designation reflects the belief that he was a central figure in the divine hierarchy of saints, responsible for guiding and sustaining the spiritual order of the world.

His portrayal as a Qutb highlights not only his personal spiritual achievements but also his role as a source of inspiration and guidance for other Ṣūfī masters. Figures such as ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, who drew from his teachings, further solidify his status as a pivotal figure in the spiritual lineage of Islamic mysticism.

### *Contemporary Relevance*

The relevance of Abū Madyan’s teachings extends into contemporary Islamic spirituality and interfaith dialogue. His emphasis on humility, reliance on Allah, and the purification of the heart provides a timeless framework for addressing the spiritual challenges of modern life.

In an increasingly interconnected world, his teachings offer a bridge between spiritual traditions, emphasizing common values such as love, sincerity, and devotion. The universality of his message makes it particularly relevant for fostering understanding and dialogue between diverse religious and cultural communities.

Moreover, his life serves as a model of spiritual leadership that prioritizes personal transformation over political or material ambitions. This focus resonates with contemporary efforts to reclaim spirituality as a means of personal and communal renewal, underscoring the enduring power of his legacy.

Through his shrine, historical accounts, spiritual authority, and universal teachings, Abū Madyan remains a luminary in the world of Islamic mysticism. His life and works continue to inspire those who seek a path of sincerity, humility, and love, ensuring that his legacy endures as a beacon of spiritual guidance in both traditional and modern contexts.

### **Conclusion**

Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb ibn al-Ḥusayn stands as a towering figure in the history of Islamic mysticism, whose teachings and spiritual legacy continue to shape the Ṣūfī tradition. His life, marked by humility, sincerity, and a profound commitment to divine unity (tawḥīd), laid the foundation for a mystical path that seamlessly integrated theology and practice. From his early years in al-Andalus to his spiritual journey through Fās and the Mashriq, and ultimately his establishment in Bijāya, Abū Madyan’s contributions reflected a dedication to personal transformation and communal upliftment.

Among his most enduring contributions are his principles of reliance on Allah (tawakkul), self-purification (tazkiyat al-naḥs), and the remembrance of Allah (dhikr), which became hallmarks of his teachings. His literary works, including *Anas al-Waḥīd* and *Nuzhat al-Murīd*, and his evocative poetry, such as the *Lāmiyyah* and *Nūniyyah*, encapsulate his spiritual philosophy, providing both inspiration and guidance for seekers. His influence on major Ṣūfī orders like the *Shādhilīyah* and *Bā‘Alawī*, and his spiritual lineage through figures like ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, underscores his pivotal role in the development of Islamic mysticism.

Abū Madyan’s legacy bridges the classical Ṣūfī tradition and its modern manifestations. His teachings, deeply rooted in the socio-cultural realities of the Maghrib, continue to offer insights into spiritual leadership, personal growth, and communal harmony. In an era increasingly marked by materialism and fragmentation, his emphasis on humility, love, and divine reliance remains profoundly relevant, providing a timeless framework for spiritual renewal.

Despite the substantial body of work on his life and teachings, there remain avenues for further research. Future studies could explore the practical application of Abū Madyan’s principles in contemporary contexts, particularly in interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution. Additionally, a deeper analysis of his poetic legacy and its reception across different regions could illuminate the broader cultural impact of his mysticism. Comparative studies examining his influence alongside other major Ṣūfī figures like ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī or Ibn ‘Arabī would also enrich our understanding of his unique contributions to the Ṣūfī tradition.

Abū Madyan's life and works remind us that spirituality is not confined to a particular time or place but is a living tradition capable of inspiring transformation across generations. His legacy, as both a master of mysticism and a guide to practical spirituality, ensures his continued relevance in the ongoing quest for divine truth and human connection.

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