Chapter III: The Intellectual Response of Indonesian Majlis Dhikr Groups to Some Aspects of Their Ritual Practices

Although the Majlis Dhikr groups that I have studied cannot be categorised as recognized tarekat (tarekat mu’tabarah), their ritual practices have been strongly influenced by tasawuf teachings. For example, the dhikr ritual practised by these groups is similar to the ritual that has long been practised by other tarekat groups. It is important to note that the members and the leaders of these Majlis Dhikr groups claim that although the dhikr that they recite do not possess a chain of transmitters (A., sanad) like the dhikr ritual in other Sufi groups (I., tarekat), their aim is similar, namely, to attain close proximity to God and to gain tranquillity of heart. Moreover, they argue that the rituals practised by these groups have a strong basis in the Qur’an, hadith and the notions of Muslim scholars. Apart from the dhikr ritual, these groups also teach and practise some aspects of tasawuf which have been written and practised by earlier Muslim Sufi. Therefore, instead of accusing these groups of introducing innovation (I., bid’ah) within Islam and performing syncretic practices, I argue that they can be regarded as groups that still preserve and maintain the continuity of Sufi practices in Islam. As a result, their practices and rituals fall within the framework of Islamic Sufi practices and Islamic traditions. To support my argument, this chapter will explore how and to what extent these groups interpret and respond theologically to certain aspects of their ritual practices. Several topics discussed in this chapter will answer whether the belief and the ritual of Majlis Dhikr are relevant to the Islamic teachings and Islamic Sufi practices. Furthermore, these topics will give an understanding of the common ritual practised in the Majlis Dhikr groups.

3.1. Šalawāt As a Means to Approach God

In Islamic traditions, tašliyyat or Šalawāt means the invocation of God’s blessing upon the Prophet Muhammad. Some Muslim scholars argue that the word Šalawāt can be translated differently according to the subject of Šalawāt. For example, if the subject of Šalawāt is to God, Šalawāt implies that God will give His blessing and mercy. On the other hand, if the subject of Šalawāt is Angels, Šalawāt means they will pray and ask God to forgive the Prophet; while if the subject of Šalawāt is people, it could mean that they are asking God to give His
blessing to Muhammad (Shihab 2006:333). More broadly, the word Ṣalawāt or taṣliyyat can be used to refer to the repetition of a blessing phrase, sALLAWĀHU ʿalaIHI WA SALLAM, God bless him and give him peace. This blessing formula is always recited whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned (Robson 1936:365; Schimmel 1985). This practice is strongly recommended by the Prophet who said that those who do not recite the blessing formula when his name is mentioned can be regarded as extremely stingy (A., bakhil). As a result, Muslims recite the blessing phrase after the name of Muhammad is mentioned to avoid being regarded by their Prophet as not generous with their practice.

The place of Ṣalawāt among pious Islamic practices is important. Unlike other prayers, it is clearly mentioned in the Qur’an and is performed by God and His Angels for the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur’an says that God and His Angels send blessings to the Prophet, ‘O! you who believe! Send your Ṣalawāt to Muhammad and salute him respectfully’ (33:56). Based on this verse, even though there are thousands of prayers and poems intended to obtain Muhammad’s intercession, the most efficacious is to ask God to bless Muhammad and his family by reciting the Ṣalawāt just as God and His Angels did. It is actually believed that a prayer to God without this invocation is useless. In other words, Ṣalawat is considered to be necessary for the granting of a prayer request.

There are numerous records of Prophetic sayings (hadith) that strongly stress the importance of reciting Ṣalawāt. For example, the Prophet said, ‘He who sends blessings on me once, Allah sends blessings on him ten times and removes from him ten sins and raises him by ten degrees.’ The Prophet also mentioned that the persons who will be closest to him on the Day of Judgment are those who give Ṣalawāt most to him. On another occasion, the Prophet said that whoever sends blessings to him ten times in the morning and ten times in the evening will have his intercession on judgment day. Moreover, the Prophet said that he will be able to hear someone’s Ṣalawāt to him in his tomb, and God will support his worldly and other worldly affairs and the Prophet will be his witness and intercessor on the Day of Judgment. These hadith all indicate that sending blessing to the Prophet will result in great rewards for the reciters.

\[\text{قال: "بكلمة من ذكرت عده وخرج أحمد والترمذي عن الحسني بن علي رضي الله عنه أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: "ولستا نذكر في الدنيا ولا في الآخرة إلا كذكرينا للفاتنين، وإن كانا من صلوي عني."}}\]
As far as these rewards are concerned, Muslim theologians have argued that they can be achieved by Muslims if they send blessings to the Prophet with sincerity and full consciousness (A., khudur al-qalbi) and without neglect. In contrast, other Muslims theologians and Sufi, such as ‘Abd Wahhab al-Sha’rani (b. 898/1493), pointed out that ten merits achieved as result of sending blessings to the Prophet could also be achieved by those who recite Salawat with neglect. Nevertheless, those who recite Salawat with full consciousness will obtain many more rewards known only by God (al-Nabhani, n.d.: 57).

However, the importance of Salawat in the Islamic tradition prompted questions about the usefulness of sending blessings for the Prophet since his status was already perfect (al-Nabhani, n.d.: 44). Muslim theologians have responded differently to this question. Al-Nabhani argued that after adzan (the call to daily prayers) has been performed, the Prophet asked Muslims to pray for him so that God would give him eternal rights of intercession and raise him to the highest rank as God had promised. If this prayer is granted by God, al-Nabhani argued, then God will give the Prophet eternal rights of intercession and raise him to the highest rank. Therefore, al-Nabhani concluded, the Prophet will benefit from the blessings given by Muslims to him.

However, Ahmad bin Mubarak argued that God commands Muslims to send blessings to the Prophet Muhammad for the benefit of themselves, not for the benefit of the Prophet. Mubarak likened this to a generous man who gives his servants a piece of land to cultivate without asking for any reward. All the harvest thus goes to the servants. In a similar way, all rewards of Salawat are for those who send the blessing, not for the Prophet himself. However, these rewards can only be achieved by the reciters of Salawat because of their pure faith (imam), which results from the Prophet’s light (A., nur Muhammad). In other words, all the rewards attained by Muslims come from the Prophet himself. Mubarak made an analogy to the ocean and rain. The process of rain begins with the evaporation of water from the ocean. Then, rain falls on the continent and flows back into the ocean via the rivers. The rain water flowing into the ocean does not, therefore, add to the volume of the oceans water (al-Nabhani, n.d.: 45).

Another theme related to Salawat is whether it is lawful or not to add the word sayyidina (our Lord) in the blessing phrase, such as Allhumma salli ‘alay sayyidina Muhammad. Ibn Taymiyyah (1263 – 1328) did not support the practice of adding the word sayyidina before the name Muhammad, either in daily prayer or other prayers, because the Prophet never said that should be done. In contrast, other Muslim theologians, such as al-Suyuti (1445-1505), urged Muslim to add sayyidin before the name of Muhammad. Al-Suyuti stated that
even though the prophet, in his hadith prohibited his Companions from doing this, the prohibition was mainly due to his modesty. The Prophet expressed his dislike of arrogance in his hadith which stated, ‘I am a sayyid of the sons of Adam and I am not arrogant.’ As a result, when his Companions asked him how to send blessing to him, he taught them the blessing phrase without the word sayyidina before his name. Nevertheless, al-Suyūṭi argued that one of the ways Muslims can show their respect for the Prophet is to send the blessings phrase to him by adding the word sayyidina before his name. This is partly because God has prohibited Muslims to address the Prophet without a title. Al-Suyūṭi cited the verse of the Qur’an which said that, ‘make not the calling of the Messenger (Muhammad) among you as your calling one of another (al-Nūr 24: 63). In addition to this verse, al-Suyūṭi also cited the well-known statement attributed to Ibn Mas’ud, the Prophet’s Companion: ‘Beautify your blessing to your Prophet’ (al-Nabhani, n,d: 39-40). Therefore, the use of the word sayyidina in the blessing is supported by the Qur’an and the practices of the Prophet’s Companions.

In addition to the text of the Ṣalawāt blessing taught by the Prophet, there have been various other versions throughout Islamic history, recorded not only by his Companions but also by other pious Muslims. Al- Nabhani categorized the first kind of Ṣalawāt as Ṣalawāt ma’thuṭrat that were taught by the Prophet as reported in his hadith, while he categorized as ghair ma’thuṭrat all the texts of Ṣalawāt not taught by the Prophet (al-Nabhani, n.d: 344). Muslims theologians have questioned which of these two categories of Ṣalawāt conveys more rewards. Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy (1904-1975), argued that all Ṣalawāt taught by the Prophet through his words are more valued than other texts because they have been taught directly by the Prophet. He maintained that these Ṣalawāt are more prominent than those composed by others. For Hasbi, other Ṣalawāt composed by other Muslims can be considered to be innovations (bid’ah) because they not only contain exaggerated adoration of the Prophet but are not mentioned in hadith. Therefore, if Muslims recite these kinds of Ṣalawāt, they cannot be regarded as reciting Ṣalawāt and thus will not be able to obtain any rewards and benefits from their recitation. To support his argument, Hasbi cited the view of al-Suyūṭi saying that the best Ṣalawāt to recite was the Ṣalawāt usually recited on the occasion of tashahhud (sitting position of the second unit of prayer). If people recite this Ṣalawāt, they can be regarded as having recited Ṣalawāt but if they recite anything else, it will be doubtful whether they have recited Ṣalawāt (Ash-Shiddieqy 1964:70). In other words, any texts of Ṣalawāt which were not taught by the Prophet cannot be regarded as Ṣalawāt.

Other Muslim theologians like al-Sakhāwī (831-902) were opposed to this view, arguing that the Prophet has taught many ways to send blessing to him as
recorded in different hadith. According to his Companions and the Successors of His Companions (A., tābiʾīn) this indicates that neither the way to send blessing nor the text of the blessing is confined to the texts taught by the Prophet. Therefore, al-Sakhawi argued, those who have been endowed by God with eloquence of language are allowed to compose Ṣalawāt that describe the Prophet’s dignity. In this matter, al-Sakhawi based his opinion on the well known statement attributed to the Prophet’s companion, Ibn Mas’ūd, who said, ‘beautify the blessing upon your Prophet, because you do not perhaps know this blessing was offered to the Prophet’ (al-Nabhani n.d: 346).

In explaining his agreement with al-Sakhawi’s view on this matter, al-Nabhani said that the objective of Ṣalawāt or sending blessings to the Prophet is to glorify him because he still needs the mercy and blessing of God, despite his highest rank in the eyes of God. In this sense, al-Nabhani argued that the texts composed by his Companions and other Muslim scholars (A., ulama’) should contain exaltation and glorification of the Prophet to meet the objective of Ṣalawāt. Therefore, al-Nabhani believed that these texts of Ṣalawāt would indeed lead to an increase in reward because of the glorification as well as the recitation of the Ṣalawāt itself. When someone asked al-Nabhani which one of the two kinds of Ṣalawāt lead to more rewards, he answered that this question was difficult to answer categorically because both are likely to provide rewards. Both have their own merits. According to al-Nabhani, one of the benefits of sending Ṣalawāt composed by the Prophet’s Companions and Muslim scholars is to increase the eagerness of reciters to glorify the Prophet as well as to remember his beautiful characteristics. Al-Nabhani considered that this eventually would lead the reciters to increase their reciting of Ṣalawāt to the Prophet as well as their love of the Prophet. According to al-Nabhani, these are the greatest benefits of reciting those texts of Ṣalawāt. Moreover, most of the texts composed by Muslim scholars (A., ‘ulama’) were dictated by the Prophet in visions either in their dreams or while awake. Al-Nabhani pointed out that because the Prophet had guaranteed that people can have dreams about him and that if they see the Prophet in a dream, he must be the real Prophet because Satan is unable to resemble him, the texts of Ṣalawāt dictated by him in dreams are legitimate because they must be from him (al-Nabhani, n.d: 347).

The recitation of Ṣalawāt also has a significant role in Sufi practices. It is believed that the blessing phrase of Ṣalawāt can be used as a means for Muslims to attain wusul or maʿrifatullah (the knowledge of God) and to obtain spiritual experiences. As mentioned by ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muṣṭafā al-Idrūs, ‘it is difficult to find authoritative Sufi masters (A. murshid) who are able to help disciples (I., murid) to attain wusul or maʿrifatullah at the end of this age.’ For al-Idrūs, the only possible way for Muslims to achieve wusul is by reciting
Ṣalawāt. Al-Idrus argued that unlike other virtues, which might be granted or might not be granted by God, requests made by reciting Ṣalawāt must be granted by God; the Prophet will reply with the same prayer whether it is recited in a conscious or an unconscious state (Sa’id 2004:6). Moreover, like reciting the Qur’an, the reciting of Ṣalawāt can give rewards to its reciters even if they do not understand the meaning of the text. Ahmad Šāwī stated that Ṣalawāt can be used as a means to approach God without any particular masters or transmitters (A., isnād) because the master of Ṣalawāt and its transmitter is the Prophet himself. By contrast, litanies such as dhikr and wirid, which are recited with the purpose of approaching God in some Sufi orders require the guidance of masters who have attained the highest Sufi states. If these dhikr are recited without the guidance of a master, the devil will interfere, so people will not derive any benefit from the practice at all (Sawi n.d:287).

3.1.1. Majlis Dhikr Groups’ Understanding of Ṣalawāt

The members of Majlis Dhikr groups in Indonesia also believe that it is obligatory for Muslims to recite Ṣalawāt as an expression of their love and their gratitude to the Prophet. For them, the Prophet has sacrificed his life and time bringing his followers from the age of darkness (A., jahiliyyat) to the age of lightness and in bringing them from sadness to happiness in this world and the hereafter. In other words, according to them, the Prophet was the most loving person toward his followers. Moreover, they argue that if it was not for him, there might be no other lives in this world. As a result they feel that they are immeasurably in debt to the Prophet. This notion arises from their understanding of a well-known statement attributed to God who said to Adam, ‘If it were not for Muhammad, I would not have created you.’ It is in this sense that they should ask blessing from God by reciting Ṣalawāt to the Prophet; rewards will then be given not only to the reciters of the Ṣalawāt but also to other people surrounding them as well as other creatures such as jinn.4

Therefore, for Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups, the reciting of Ṣalawāt is not simply an oral recitation of the blessing phrase for the Prophet but should be seen as a means to communicate spiritually with the Prophet (A., ta’alluq bi jānibi al-nabi). For example, according to a member of the Wāḥidiyyat group, communicating with the Prophet can be performed in two ways: ta’alluq sūriyy (outward relationship) and ta’alluq ma’nawiyy (spiritual relationship). The former can be achieved by, firstly, completely following what the Prophet has ordered and completely avoiding what he has forbidden as well as maintaining

a good relationship with other people, and all human beings. Secondly, by experiencing the state of oneness in the love of the Prophet by reciting Ṣalawāt, continuously remembering the Prophet’s fine qualities followed by love and longing and the recitation of the life stories of the Prophet together with poems which can help people to increase their love for him. The second way (ta’alluq ma’nawīyy) can be done, firstly, by visualizing the image of the Prophet. Of course, this way of communicating can only be done by those who have experienced a visionary dream of the Prophet or have met him when awake. Those who have not experienced this simply imagine his fine personality followed with full of passion and compliments. If they have performed the hajj, they can imagine historic places in Mecca and Medina where the Prophet used to teach his followers. After this, they should internalize the concept of Biḥaqqat al-Muḥammadiyah, which means that the origin of all creatures is from the Light of Muhammad (Nūr Muḥammad). This notion is based on the statement attributed to God that ‘I (God) created you (Muhammad) from My light and I created creatures from your light.’ To internalize this concept, people should imagine that anything they smell, see, and touch consists of Nūr Muḥammad. If they fail to visualize this concept, it is believed their mind’s eye must be veiled by the dirt of passion (I., nafsu). Moreover, for the Wāḥidiyyah group in particular, the simplest way to implement the concept of communicating with the Prophet is by increasingly reciting the phrase, yā sayyidī yā rasulullāh, which helps people remember the Prophet (Anonymous 1999:36-40).

In order to show respect to the Prophet, the Majlis Dhikr groups add the word sayyidinā before the name of Muhammad when they recite the Ṣalawāt phrase. Some of them argue that it is considered stingy if Muslims mention the name of the Prophet of Muhammad without adding sayyidinā, whereas when they address the president, they always add his title before his name such as Mr. President (I., bapak presiden). They believe that adding the word sayyidinā before the name of Muhammad in the Ṣalawāt phrase is a courtesy (I., sopan santun), which is preferable to complying with the command. They also base their notion on the Prophetic tradition that Abū Bakr refused the order of the Prophet who asked him to lead prayers. In courtesy, Abū Bakr requested that the Prophet be the leader. Based on this story, members of Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups add the sayyidinā before the Prophet’s name, as a courtesy, ignoring the Prophet’s prohibition of the practice.

From the perspective of Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups, the recitation of Ṣalawāt is an important aspect of their ritual practices. They fully understand that Ṣalawāt is a necessary condition for the granting of a prayer request. In other words, every prayer directed to God without adding Ṣalawāt is considered to be meaningless. It is for this reason that those groups include the blessing
phrase of Șalawāt in their ritual practices. Some Majlis Dhikr groups urge that Șalawāt be read hundreds of times. One group has even singled out Șalawāt for their practice, and believe that the Șalawāt is the easiest way to achieve wusul (maʿrifah) with God without requiring a perfect master (A., kāmil al-mukammil), especially in the current situation where a perfect master is difficult to find. Another reason to recite Șalawāt relates to the suggestion by Muslim scholars that Șalawāt removes intense emotion, while other litanies (dhikr), can result in intensifying the emotion of the reciters. Adding Șalawāt among other litanies according to these scholars, can therefore balance the effect of those other litanies.

As far as the benefits of Șalawāt are concerned, Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups, in common with other Muslim scholars, consider that reciting Șalawāt can be used for worldly purposes and non-worldly purposes. More specifically, they argue that Șalawāt can be used as a means to ask for the Prophet’s intercession in this world and the hereafter. In this world, the members of these groups ask for the Prophet’s intercession so that the Prophet can help them to succeed in their worldly endeavours. In this respect, one Majlis Dhikr group composed Șalawāt for particular purposes and performed special rituals to obtain their particular needs. Moreover, they also believe that some Șalawāt composed by Muslim scholars have particular benefits. For example, Șalawāt Nariyat can be used to improve one’s livelihood (I., rizki); while Șalawāt Munjiyat can be used for safety purposes. In the hereafter, they believed that the Prophet will give his shafaʿat (intercession) to those who recite Șalawāt and hence save them from trials of the hell.5

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

Since the meaning of Șalawāt itself is prayer or supplication, it cannot be considered to be bidʿah if Muslims compose texts of Șalawāt and recite the texts of Șalawāt which were not taught by the Prophet. Like prayer, the Prophet only asked Muslims to pray, but he did not ask them to pray any particular prayers. In other words, the Prophet gave them the freedom

5 Interview with Gus Latif, Kediri, September, 2004.
to recite various prayers. Furthermore, none of the Prophet’s hadith asked Muslims to recite Ṣalawāt as taught by the Prophet. God and His Prophet only asked Muslims to recite Ṣalawāt. The Prophet never asked them to recite only the texts of prayers from him. In this case, as long as they have ability, people can write their own beautiful texts of Ṣalawāt. However, I admit that the Ṣalawāt and prayer taught by the Prophet are more excellent than others.

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

It is clear that on the matter of Ṣalawāt and related topics, Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups have based their arguments on what has long been pointed out by the Prophet through the interpretation of other Muslim scholars. While following these Muslims scholars’ notions of Ṣalawāt, they also have creatively adapted those notions in relation to the context of their culture. The process of adaptation, however, cannot be regarded as a violation of the main teaching of Islam itself, since Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups still refer to the Prophet tradition. What Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups have done can thus be regarded as maintaining the Islamic tradition, a term used by Nashr to refer to something which incorporates both the message received by the Prophet Muhammad in form of the Scripture as well as that Islam, as a religion, absorbed according to its own genius and made its own through transformation and synthesis (Muhaimin 1995:13).

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6 Interview with Marzuki, Malang, March, 2005
With this definition, they believe that what they practise is justifiable by the text of Qur’an and hadith.

3.2. The Concepts of Sainthood (Wali) and Miracle (Karamah)

The concepts of sainthood and karamah are another topic which has drawn Sufi groups and Muslim scholars into vigorous debate. Despite strong criticism from reformist Muslims toward these concepts, they have had an important meaning in Muslim religiosity. In order to look at their significance, this section will discuss these two concepts among Sufi theorists and Muslim scholars, and how Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups have responded to and applied these concepts in their religious practices.

Radtke (1996:124) has argued that the existence of a special category of saints (waliyullah) who have a close relationship with God is nowhere mentioned in the Qur’an and the hadith. Although it might be true to say that a coherent and systematic theory of sainthood cannot be found in either the Qur’an or in the Prophetic period. I would argue that the Qur’an and the explanation of the Prophet have inspired a clearly articulated Islamic doctrine of sainthood introduced by early Muslim Sufi. In other words, the comprehensive and systematic theory of saint and sainthood was developed several centuries after the death of the Prophet. Nevertheless, the Qur’an mentions the word wali in many places, with various meanings including friends, protectors, supporters and close relatives. This word, for instance, is not only applied to God, who is the believers’ friend (7:196, 2:257 and 41:31), but also to Satan, whose attributes contrast with the attributes of God. The Qur’an also mentions the characteristics of waliullāh (friend of Allah) or auliyaullāh (pl. friends of Allah) who need not fear nor grieve (10:63). However, in the discussion of the concept of wali in Islam, some Muslim scholars seem to discuss only the definition and the meaning of the later, auliyaullāh.

To understand the meaning of the waliullāh as mentioned in the Qur’an, many Muslim interpreters of the Qur’an refer to the explanation of the Prophetic sayings (A., hadith) on this matter. For example, commenting on the word auliyaullāh in verse 10:63, al-Ṭabārī (d.310 H) in his book, Jāmi’ al-Bayān fi Tafsīr al-Qur’ān, referred to two different hadith. Firstly, he noted that auliyaullāh (friends of God) are those who, when they are seen, cause people to think of God. Secondly, al-Ṭabārī pointed out that, when the Prophet’s Companions asked the Prophet about the identity of the friends of God mentioned in the
Qur’an, the Prophet answered that ‘they are servants of God who are envied even by prophets of God and martyrs. They love one another purely for God’s sake without any consideration of material gains. Their faces will glow with the light of faith and they will be seated on the podium of nur (Divine light). They will be without fear and grief when all people will be steeped in fear and grief.’ Then the Prophet recited the verse, ‘Behold! the friends of Allah are such that they need not fear nor grieve’ (10:62). Other Muslims exegetes (A., *mufassir*) like Al-Zamakhshārī (d. 538) in his book *al-Kashshaṛf*, and Ibn Kathīr (d.774) in his book *Taṣfīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, followed the definition of wāli given by al-Ṭabarī. In contrast, referring to ‘Aḥī ibn Abī Ṭalīb, Al Qurtūbī (d.671), in his book *al-Jāmi’ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* defined auliya (plural form of wāli) as people whose face is pale due to wakefulness, whose eyes look bleary because of crying, whose stomach is empty because of hunger, whose lips are dry because of chanting dhikr.

Based on their understanding of waliyullah derived from the Qur’an and the hadith, early Muslim Sufi specifically developed the idea of the friend of God (A., waliullah) in much detail. Al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī (d. 898) is regarded as the first Muslim scholar to introduce the entire concept of the friend of God and friendship with God. Al-Tirmidhī was convinced that the ‘ulamā’ are responsible for preserving the validity of orthodox theology of Islam, while preserving the spiritual heritage of Islam has been entrusted to the saints of Islam (A., auliya’ullah). When the prophethood ended, the latter came to be considered as God’s representatives on earth. According to Al-Tirmidhī, God chose forty elected auliya’ who divided into abdāl, šiddiqin, umanā’ and núṣahā’ to administrate and control the world after the death of the Prophet. Through these auliya’ the world exists. Whenever one of them dies, another follows after him and occupies his position so the number remain at forty. This succession will continue until the end of this world (Radtke and O’kane 1996:109). These forty saints have a chief who has the seal of friendship (A., khātim al-auliya’) from God. He is the highest and the most perfect among the friends of God (Radtke and O’kane 1996:101). Elaborating this concept, al-Tirmidhī argued that God has chosen His prophets from His servants, and God has given preference to certain prophets over others. Among them, Muhammad is the seal of the Prophet (khātim al-anbiya’). In this manner, God also has chosen one of His friends (auliyā’) above others. This concept of khātim al-auliya’ was new and had never been mentioned by previous Muslim Sufi, which made the work of Tirmidhī famous in later centuries (Schimmel 1978:57). Al-Tirmidhī’s concept of khātim al-auliya’ was further developed by Ibn al-‘Arabī.

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Al-Tirmidhî defined two distinctive classes of friends of God, the \textit{Wali haqqu llah} and the \textit{Waliullah}. Those categorized as \textit{Wali haqqu llah} will be able to achieve nearness of God by undertaking worship of God and obedience to Him constantly without any intervening rebelliousness. In contrast, a \textit{Waliullah} is attracted to God by God and is a \textit{majdhub}, a person who is drawn from the place of divine closeness up to God Himself, to the highest of God’s realms (Radtke and O’kane 1996:124). This definition is based on the Qur’anic verses that state ‘And He takes possession of the righteous’ (7:196). This latter class of saints is called \textit{murad} (the sought). While, the former class is called \textit{murid} (the seekers). These two categories of saints, as Tirmidhi argued, have different journeys to approach God. The ascent of \textit{Wali haqqu llah} will end at God’s throne. They can approach God but not reach God Himself. In contrast, \textit{Waliullah} are able to reach beyond God’s throne (Gibb 1996:110).

However, al-Qushayri (b.376/986) argued that a true saint must have two qualities. The saint has to fulfil completely obligations to God, while being under the continuous protection and safeguard of God in good and bad times. Therefore, although a \textit{wali} is not sinless (A., \textit{ma'sum}), he or she is preserved from sin (A., \textit{mahfuz}). Based on this definition, al-Qushayri stressed the significance of Muslim saints acting in a manner that is not in conflict with the divine law (Dahlan n.d: 16).

Muslim scholars such as al-Jurjâni (d.1413) and Ibn al-Mudâbighî defined saints (\textit{wali}) as those who have achieved the Gnosis of God (\textit{ma’rifat}), worship constantly, and avoid disobedience, and lower desires (Dahlan n.d: 16). In line with this, al-Yusi pointed out that no one could achieve the position (\textit{maqam}) of \textit{wali} without meeting four conditions: Firstly, they have to understand Islamic theology so that they can distinguish between the creator (A., \textit{khalîq}) and the created (A., \textit{makhluq}). Secondly, they should understand Islamic Law, either based on tradition or based on understanding of the Qur’an and the texts of Prophetic tradition. Thirdly, they should have good qualities such as sincerity (A., \textit{ikhlas}) and carefulness (A., \textit{wara}). Fourthly, they should be in a continual state of fear and never feel secure because they do not know whether they will be put in the group of fortunate people or unfortunate people in the hereafter.

It is clear from these conditions that saints should strictly observe the laws of \textit{shari’at} and other Islamic teachings. Therefore, if people claim to be \textit{wali} but do not abide by \textit{shari’at}, most Muslim scholars do not consider them to be \textit{wali}. For example, if such people were able to perform miracles, such as walking on water, flying in the air, travelling distances over the earth with supernatural
speed (A., *tayy al-ard*), these miracles might be attributed to black magic and the assistance of jinn and the like (al-Hujwiri 1997:227). Of such people, the 12th century theologian, al-Ghazâli said:

Undoubtedly, it is considered necessary to kill people who claim that they have a special relation with God which allows them to be free from observing the five daily prayers and allowing them to drink liquor and use the possessions of other people, as claimed by Sufi. Killing this type of persons is more preferable than killing a hundred infidels, because those people are much more dangerous than infidels (Bakri n.d:139).

One of the reasons why *wali* should abide by the laws of *shari’at* is to warn people against those who pretend to be *wali* by performing miraculous deeds (A., *khâriq al-‘âda*), showing fine manners and fine talk (Dahlan n.d: 16).

The discussion of sainthood in Islam raises the question of whether or not saints realize that they are saints. In his book, al-Qushairi mentioned the disagreement among Sufi as to whether or not people are able to know that they are *wali* or not, but did not clarify his view on this matter (Dahlan n.d:16). However, al-Tirmidhi discussed the disagreement among Sufi and all of their arguments. In his own opinion, the friends of God are able to know that they are saints. He was strongly opposed to some Sufi who argued that it is not possible because if saints knew that they were *wali*, they would be sure of their salvation in the hereafter, which would result in a lack of willingness to worship. On this point, al-Tirmidhi pointed out that believers (*mukminûn*) must know that they are believers but do not know whether they will be sure of their salvation. In the same manner, saints know that they are saints, but they are not sure of their salvation in the hereafter. Moreover, al-Tirmidhi was opposed to those who asserted that saints did not know that they were *wali* because if they did, they would become victims of arrogance. On this matter, al-Tirmidhi argued that because of their position as saints of God, they would be protected by God from falling prey to arrogance (al-Hujwiri 1997:224-225). Other Sufi have argued that saints must be able to know their sainthood because God endows sainthood on His servants. Therefore, sainthood is a blessing from God and may be known to the recipient to increase his gratitude to God (Kalabadzi 1985).

Sufi have also discussed the question of whether or not saints know each other. Abdullah Ibn Sahl argued that although saints are veiled from the eyes of the common people, they are supposed to know each other (Sa’id 2004:27). Schimmel maintained that they recognize fellow saints without ever having met them (1978:202). In line with this, Abdullah Ibn Sahl argued that God only gives information about people’s sainthood to other saints and to those
who are able to obtain benefit from those saints. As a sign of God’s mercy to humankind, He veils His friends from the eyes of common people and keeps saints concealed from the public. This is not only because it is considered to be an infidelity if people recognize saints and then deny them, but also because it is considered sinful if people ignore saints after they recognize them (Sa’id 2004:27). In contrast to previous scholars, however, Abû Bakr claimed that no one is able to recognize people as saints of God during their life except God Himself. Nevertheless, Abû Bakr argued that people can be regarded as saints if during their life, those people have proper faith and show sincere conduct according to the Qur’anic and Prophetic tradition, and die in a state of faith (mukmin). In addition, if such people perform miracles, they can be considered to be wali and Muslims should respect them (Abu Bakar 2004:21-47).

The hierarchical rank of saints is well known in the Sufi traditions. There are different numbers of saints in each rank, orders of rank in the hierarchy and names of saints in the hierarchy. Among some of the hierarchies discussed in the Sufi tradition are the ‘outstanding’ (A., akhîr), the ‘substitutes’ (A., abdîl), the ‘devoted’ (abrîr), ‘the poles’ (A., autâd), the ‘chiefs’ (A., nuqabâ’) and the ‘axis’ or ‘pole’ (A., qutb), also referred to as the ‘source of help’ (A., ghauth). Sufi theorists agree that the highest saint in the hierarchy becomes the leader of the saints. In the Sufi tradition the highest ranking saint is called the qutb (plural: aqtâb) or ghauth which some writers call al-qutb al-ghauth. He or she is the centre of the spiritual pole on whom other people depend. There is only one qutb or ghauth at any time. If that saint dies, he or she will be succeeded by another saint below him or her (Sa’id 2004). In this sense, the concept of qutb is similar to that of khâtîm al-auliyâ’ put forward by al-Tîrmîdî.

Abd al-Wâhhab al-Sha’râni argued that the characteristic of this qutb is that his or her heart and mind always circles around (A., tâwaf) God just as a pilgrim walks around the Ka’ba on a pilgrimage in Mecca. Moreover, he or she constantly witnesses God in every direction. However, this does not necessarily mean that God exists within this qutb. In addition, the qutb is believed to be the first person to face either calamity or receive the aid (I., pertolongan) given by God before it is given to the people. Al-Sha’râni believes that the qutb bears such a heavy burden that he or she always has a headache. The qutb bears this heavy burden, distributes it among other saints below him, before it is finally distributed to other Muslims. As a result of this, people on this earth can exist. If the burden was not previously distributed by the qutb to his or her fellow saints and other Muslims, those who suffered from the calamity would vanish. Al-Sha’râni’s view on this matter derives from his interpretation of the Qur’anic verse saying ‘And did not God check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief, but Allah is full of bounty to all the worlds (2:251) (Sa’id 2004:30-31).
Whereas the theory of the hierarchy of saints was developed in the Sufi tradition, Ibn Taymiyyah was strongly opposed to it, arguing that this theory is based on invalid Prophetic sayings (hadith). He claimed that this theory could be considered an innovation (bid’ah) within Islam that should not be tolerated. Therefore, Ibn Taymiyyah proposed a different classification of saints which is taken from the Qur’an (al-Wāqī‘a chapter). According to his classification, there are two hierarchies of saints: the highest is al-muqarrabūn and the second is aṣḥāb al-yamīn. The first hierarchy includes those who are brought close by God. These saints always observe the worship of God, avoid His prohibitions, and perform all kinds of recommended deeds (A., nawāafil). The second category includes those who observe obligations and avoid God’s prohibitions but do not pay attention to recommended deeds. Ibn Taymiyyah thus argued that wali could be drawn from Muslim scholars, workers, holy warriors (A., sabīlillah), traders and farmers as long as these people do not practise innovation (bid’ah) (Taymiyyah n.d-a:179).

The topic of saints in the Sufi tradition is closely related to the topic of miracles (I., karamah). Most Muslims theologians believe in the existence of karamah which encompasses supernatural deeds, miracles or extraordinary powers performed by saints who strictly observe the laws of shari’at. In this sense, as Taylor argued, every karamah always demonstrates a dramatic transformation and fantastic occurrence which human beings cannot possibly perform without the intervention of God’s power (Taylor 1998:128). However, Muslim theologians give different names to miracles performed other than by Muslim saints. For example, when such miracles or extraordinary powers are performed by prophets to support their mission, Muslim theologians classify them as mu’jiza. When such supernatural deeds are performed by pious Muslims, they call ma’ūnah. However, when such miracles are performed by those who do not abide by shari’at, such as infidels, impostors or impious people, these miracles are called istidrāj. This last type of miracles is deliberately given by God in order to show that these people are on wrong path.

Ibn Taymiyyah argued that sainthood has nothing to do with extraordinary deeds (khāriq al-‘ada) or miracles. Although it is possible for Muslim saints to perform karamah, not all saints have this ability. Some saints might not be able to perform and to possess such karamah, and God does not bestow the ability on them (Taymiyyah 1999:15). Therefore, the performance of karamah is not a prerequisite of sainthood in Islam. According to Abu Ḥasan al-Shādhili, karamah cannot be sought either by chanting special dhikr or prayers; it is believed to be a blessing from God. In other words, saints are not the primary cause of miracles, but miracles can be performed with the intervention of God. In addition to this notion, if some one can perform karamah, this will not affect
the status of a person’s sainthood in the eyes of God. In other words, they do not necessarily achieve a higher status in the eyes of God than others who are unable to perform miracles. Some wali bestowed with this gift by God still feel cautious and ask God for refuge because this ability may make them subject to slander.

Most Sufis agree that instead of seeking karamah, people should make efforts to achieve steadfastness to improve their worship (A., istiqāmat). It is commonly accepted in the Sufi tradition that istiqāmat is better than a thousand karamah. According to al-Suhrawardi, for instance, seekers should accept this notion because many worshippers might be inclined to seek karamah because they have heard of the miracles performed by their predecessors as described in many hagiographical books. Sometimes, because they are unable to achieve karamah, they lose hope and begin to question the validity of their deeds. Al-Suhrawardi, therefore, argues that istiqāmat is very important in order to guide seekers to achieve the most essential objective of their worship and belief in God. In order to enhance the belief, God sometimes bestows miracles on His saints. However, al-Suhrawardi pointed out that it is probably because of their steadfastness, God unveils secrets and gives strong faith to seekers and saints, which can lead them to avoid passion (nafs) rather than giving them karamah. Miracles are therefore no longer needed because these saints have achieved the ultimate objective of their mystical path (Taymiyyah 1999:44-45).

3.2.1. The Concepts of Sainthood (Wali) and Miracle (Karamah) As Understood by Majlis Dhikr Groups

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

As argued by Gus Latif, a leader of Majlis Dhikr group Ihsāniyyat in Kediri, East Java, believing in the existence of saints (auliyyā’) is compulsory for Muslims, since God and his Prophet spoke about these saints and their miracles in the Qur’an and in hadith. For Indonesian Majlis Dhikr, wali are generally understood to be those who are loved by God and are entrusted to be His
representatives on this world. Abdul Latif Madjid, a leader of Wāhidiyat, pointed out that a wali is a person whose role is to improve the condition of this world. The heart of a wali is always connected to God. As a result, a wali is not only able to spread the light of God (A., *nūr Allah*) over the world but also to help others to approach God.  

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

Like other Sufi, Indonesian *Majlis Dhikr* groups agree that the consistency of worship (I., *istiqa>mat*) is a primary requirement for *wali*. As a result, Muslims who do not undertake active worship (I., *ibadah*) and who commit sins cannot be considered as *wali*. In other words, as pointed out by *Kyai* Misbah, a major indicator of sainthood is the extent to which Muslims abide by Islamic Law. If they fail to follow the law, Muslims cannot be considered to be *wali*, even if they are able to perform miracles. *Kyai* Misbah told me that this is explained by most ‘ulama’in order to prevent people from wrongly identifying *wali*. For him, the appearance of *khāriq al-āda* (lit. violates habits) and the popularity of a person but without constant ibadah cannot be regarded as signs of sainthood. *Kyai* Misbah stressed this important aspect because many people misunderstand *wali*. They think a *wali* is a person bestowed with supernatural powers whose guests ask for blessing. In addition to constant *ibadah*, Gus Latif added that people cannot be considered as true *wali* until they die with a *ḥusn al-kha>timat* (a good ending). In line with this, *Gus* Latif argued that unlike prophets, the status of saint can be removed by God, if they do not abide by *shari’at*. He stated:

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8 Interview with Gus Latif, Kediri, January, 2005.
9 Interview with Abdul Latif Madjid, Kediri, February, 2005.
10 This is reminiscent of the two distinct classes of *wali haqqullah* and *waliullah* mentioned previously.
11 Interview with Kyai Misbah, Kediri, January, 2005
The status of prophets cannot be lost because they have received their status as prophet from the time they were born and God protects them from sins (ma’shum). In contrast, since God does not protect wali from sins, God can remove their status. This can be described with this analogy: if I love someone, but he or she does not respect me, I will not love him or her anymore. The same is true if God loves or chooses persons as His wali (friends), but they never respect Him, God will not love those saints.12

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

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

Zainuddin argued that in order to help people to approach God, these qutb should not meet people directly. Despite never meeting, these qutb are believed to be capable of bringing people to approach God and to know God (ma’rifa billah). Zainuddin explained that if these ghauth live at the place of sunset and people live at the place of sunrise, the ghauth are still able to teach people how to approach God.

Zainuddin, and his Majlis Dhikr members generally believe that if those ghauth have disciples, they must be able to give their spiritual light (A., nadrat, I., pancaran batin) to their disciples (I., murid) without meeting them. However, in

12 Interview with Gus Latif, Kediri, January, 2005
order to receive this *nadrat* (spiritual light), disciples should be ready to accept it, by reciting particular prayers taught by their master. Zainuddin described the process of spreading *nadrat* (spiritual light) as follows:

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

The ability of the *ghauth* to give their *nadrat* is illustrated by the following story. Zainuddin told me that when he married his wife, Ima, he asked her to practise a specific ritual (I., *mujahadah*) for forty days, a precondition for any new member of the *Wāhidiyat* group. However, his wife was unable to complete the forty days *mujahadah*. Later, she dreamed one night that Abdul Latif Madjid, a leader of *Wāhidiyat*, visited her. In her dream, he asked Ima whether she had finished. She said that she had not yet finished the *mujahadah*. After this occurrence, Ima completed the forty days *mujahadah* because she was worried that Abdul Latif would ask again about it. Zainuddin maintained that this event is evidence that Abdul Latif Madjid, who is believed by *Wāhidiyat* members to be a *ghauth*, is able to give his *nadrat* to his chosen disciples. As well as helping people to achieve the Gnosis of God (*ma’rifat billah*), *ghauth* are believed, especially among *Wāhidiyat* members, not only to be capable of attracting, lifting and strengthening people’s belief but also of withdrawing and weakening people’s belief.¹⁴

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

When asked whether saints know that they are saints, *Majlis Dhikr* members have different views. Kyai Mughni believes that saints do not know that God has chosen them as His saints.¹⁵ They do not realize that they themselves are saints. Kyai Mughni’s counterpart, Kyai Misbah, believes a notion prevalent

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¹⁴ Interview with Zainuddin, Kediri, September, 2004.
¹⁵ Interview with Kyai Mughni, Kediri, February, 2005.
in Sufi tradition that since sainthood is a secret matter, no one knows saints, including the saints themselves, except other saints of the same status. He quoted the familiar phrase: \textit{lā ya’rifū al-wāli illa al-wāli}(No one knows a saint except another saint). This is a strong belief in the pesantren tradition. Kyai Misbah made the following analogy:

No one knows \textit{wali} except another \textit{wali}. It is fair that students should be tested with students and car mechanics should be tested with other car mechanics.\footnote{Interview with Kyai Misbah, Kediri, January, 2005.}

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

In contrast, although he quoted the same phrase as Kyai Misbah cited, Zainuddin interpreted it differently. He argued that no one knows a saint except the saint himself or herself. Zainuddin based his view on the fact that some Muslim saints such as Shaikh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī and Ibn ‘Arābī knew that they were saints. According to him, some saints were even given the right to reveal their sainthood, some should conceal their sainthood, while others can choose either to expose or conceal their sainthood. Despite this, Hasyim Asy’ari, a founder of Nahdlatul Ulama, strongly condemned those who proclaimed themselves to be \textit{wali} as happened in many Sufi orders. He maintained:

\begin{quote}
One of the temptations which could ruin Muslims in general is self-announcement of \textit{murshid}(I., \textit{guru tarekat}) and self-announcement of saints of God, even \textit{wali qutb} or \textit{imam mahdi}. When people proclaim themselves as \textit{wali}, but never abide by the Prophet’s laws (\textit{shariah}), they are liars. Those who proclaim sainthood are not real saints, they are only fake saints (J., \textit{wali-walian}) because they reveal a specific secret (\textit{sirr al-khusūsiyyat}) (Qomar 2002:49)
\end{quote}

The discussion of sainthood among \textit{Majlis Dhikr} members is inseparable from the discussion of \textit{karamah}. Members of \textit{Majlis Dhikr} are concerned with \textit{karamah} because this term has often been linked with other terms such as \textit{ilmu karamah}, \textit{ilmu hikmah}, \textit{kadigdayan karamah}, and \textit{karamah sejati}, which have been used and advertised widely in particular Indonesian media. Responding to this issue, Gus Latif explained to me that there are two kinds of \textit{karamah}. The first \textit{karamah} is natural and is possessed by devout Muslims because of their intense devotion to God. This \textit{karamah} happens merely because of God’s
blessing and cannot be sought by Muslims. The second type of karamah is sought (I., yang dicari). For example, when devout Muslims practise and recite particular prayers and are then able to perform miracles (I., ilmu putih), this can be categorized as the second type of karamah. In contrast, if these miracles are performed by bad people (I., orang yang durhaka), this kind of miracle can be categorized as black magic (I., ilmu hitam or ilmu musyrik). Therefore, Gus Latif concluded that if those karamah discussed by the Indonesian media are sought and practised by good Muslims, then they can be categorized as ilmu putih.17

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

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

### 3.3. The Concept of Tawassul

Seeking mediation (A., I., tawassul) has become a significant practice in the rituals conducted by Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups as well as within Indonesian tarekat in general. It is not an exaggeration to say that without

17 Interview with Gus Latif, Kediri, January, 2005.
understanding this concept, people might not be able to understand the essence of the rituals conducted by Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups. As observed by Millie (2006:98-108) in West Java, tawassul is a constituent part of many of these groups’ religious observances such as manakiban, the ritual reading of the signs of Allah’s favour (A., karamat) upon ‘Abd Qādir al-Jailānī, supplicating at graves (I., ziarah) and in some cases, religious study groups (I., pengajian). This concept has become a theological issue that has attracted hostile debates between proponents and opponents for centuries. Those who are opposed to the concept of tawassul vigorously attack and accuse the supporters of tawassul of practising bid’ah (innovation within Islam) and even, polytheism (A., shirk). In this section, I will explore how the concept of tawassul has been discussed and understood by its opponents and proponents. The understanding of tawassul among Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups will also be discussed in order to reveal their intellectual and theological response to this concept.

The word wasīlat is mentioned twice in the Qur’an in chapter 5 verse 35 and chapter 17 verse 57 (al-Hilali 1996:124 & 320), and can be translated as ‘a means that can be used to gain nearness to God.’ Following this general meaning, tawassul or tawassulan means the use of wasīlat to obtain nearness to God. In fact, most Muslim theologians agree that a means (A., wasīlat) is needed in order to approach God. Nevertheless, when they come to the question of what kind of means can be sought, Muslim theologians cannot reach consensus. While the majority have agreed that in order to approach and invoke God, people are allowed to seek a means (tawassul) through their good deeds, including their prayers, fasting, and reciting of the Qur’an in hope of securing divine assistance, there is no consensus on wasīlat sought in other ways such as through the person of the Prophet himself, his dignity, or other pious Muslims (saints). More specifically, the debate on this matter revolves around the question of whether or not it is permissible to make the Prophet, after his death, the means of supplication with such phrases as allāhumma inni> asaluka bi-nabiyyika (O Allah! I beseech You through Your Prophet), or bi-jåhi nabiyyika (By the dignity of Your Prophet), or even bi-Haqqi nabiyyika (For the sake of Your Prophet), and whether or not it is permissible to call on deceased pious Muslims or Muslim saints, other than Prophet, as the means of supplication.

Some Muslim theologians have denied the permissibility of seeking a means through the person of the Prophet himself after his death. Taqiyyu al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), his students, Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyah (1292-1350), and the Salafi group, for example, regard this as shirk because no dead can be asked to invoke God. The case would be different if the Prophet were still alive. For Ibn Taymiyyah, to request the Prophet’s prayer during his lifetime and seek
a means (tawassul) through his prayer was a sign of good virtue and strongly recommended (Taymiyyah n.d-b:201-202). In this sense, Ibn Taymiyyah defines tawassul as seeking the Prophet’s prayer during his lifetime and his intercession (A., shafā’at) in the hereafter as well as seeking a means through pious Muslims’ prayer during their lifetime. Ibn Taymiyyah believed that this would not lead people to polytheistic behaviour because they would not worship the Prophet during his lifetime and he would forbid people from worshipping him. However, Ibn Taymiyyah worried that appealing to the Prophet, as a wasilatto supplicate God after his death would lead people to make the Prophet the associate of God as well as the object of worship as Christians do when they worship Jesus Christ (Taymiyyah 1987:220-21). Ibn Taymiyyah was convinced that after the death of the Prophet, his Companions no longer sought a means to God through his person. To support his opinion, Ibn Taymiyyah presented the Prophetic hadith which said that ‘Umar ibn Khathṭāb used to seek tawassul through the Prophet, but when the Prophet died, ‘Umar ibn Khathṭāb sought tawassul through the prayers of ‘Abbās. Ibn Taymiyyah used this as evidence that tawassul can only be sought through the prayers of living persons, not through the prayers of deceased persons. If seeking tawassul through the person or the position of the Prophet was allowed, Ibn Taymiyyah argued, why did ‘Umar seek tawassul through the Prophet’s uncle, not directly through the Prophet whose status was higher than his uncle. (Taymiyyah n.d-b:201).

However, Ibn Taymiyyah still allowed people to supplicate God by mentioning the names of the Prophets, pious Muslims or saints whose dignity is high before God, providing that the petitioners emulate their pious deeds and follow instructions that are sanctioned by God. In this sense, Ibn Taymiyyah did not specifically require that those mentioned in supplication be living persons or dead persons. He pointed out that people are allowed to supplicate God by saying, ‘O Allah! I beseech You by Your Prophet, by the dignity of Your Prophet and by your saints.’ However, Ibn Taymiyyah argued that God did not grant the supplication because of the position of these pious Muslims. Instead, mentioning the dignity of those people was only meaningful if the supplicants complied with their teaching, which derives from God (Taymiyyah 1987:79-80).

The same argument was put forward by the prominent Salafi scholar, Muḥammad Naṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d.1999), who strongly opposed seeking

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18 Annas narrated: Whenever drought threatened them, Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb used to ask Allah for rain through the mediation of al-‘Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib. He [Umar] used to say: “O Allah! We used to ask you through the means of our Prophet and You would bless us with rain, and now we ask You through the means of our Prophet’s uncle, so bless us with rain.” And it would rain.

19 In addition to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Abd Allāh bin Bāz (d. 1999), Muhammad Naṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999) was an influential Salafi scholar whose fatwa (legal advice) has been referred by the contemporary Wahhabi authorities and the Salafi group. For his autobiography and his works and legal opinion (A., fatwa), refer to his website, http://www.alalbany.net/albany_serah.php, viewed 25 December, 10:54 am.
a means through the person and status of the Prophet. Like Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Albānī defines *tawassul* as seeking a means through the prayers of living persons by requesting them to pray. Therefore, seeking a means through the Prophet after his death is not proper. For al-Albānī, the Prophet can no longer hear and answer his followers who request him to petition God because he has moved to a place whose situation is not the same as in this world (Al-Albānī 1975:52-3). Although some hadith indicate that all the prophets of God are still alive in their graves and perform prayers, their place, according to al-Albānī, has particular laws and forms which do not follow the laws in this world and are known only by God. Therefore, al-Albānī claimed that the life of Prophet Muhammad before he died and after he died is different (Al-Albānī 1975:60-1). Like his predecessors, al-Albānī used the Prophetic tradition to support his argument. Based on this, he argued that *wainna natawassalu ilaika bi ammi nabiyyika* (Now we ask you through the means of the Prophet’s uncle) a phrase in the hadith, must not be translated as seeking a means through the person or the status of the Prophet’s uncle. Instead, the word should be added to make the last part of the phrase read: *bi (du‘ā) ammi nabiyyika*, which means through the prayers of Prophet’s uncle.

Al-Albānī also used the following Prophetic hadith to reject the permissibility of seeking *tawassul* through the person and status of the Prophet:

A blind man came to the Prophet and said: “Invoke Allah for me that God help me.” The Prophet replied: “If you wish I will delay this, which would be better for you, and if you wish I will then invoke Allah the Exalted (for you).” The blind man said: “Then invoke God.” The Prophet said to him: *idhhab fa tawadda*, *wa salli rak`atayn thumma qul* -- “Go and make an ablution, pray two rak`at, then say: “O Allah, I am asking you (as’aluka) and turning to you (atatwajjahu ilayka) with your Prophet Muhammad (*bi nabiyyika Muhammad*), the Prophet of mercy; O Muhammad (ya Muhammad), I am turning with you to my Lord regarding my present need, I am asking my Lord with your intercession concerning the return of my sight (*inni ata`wajjahu bika ila`la rabbi fi hajati hadhī). Another version has: *inni astashfju bika alarabbit fi raddi basari* so that He will fulfil my need; O Allah, allow him to intercede (with you) for me (allahumma shaffju fiyya)” (narrated by Turmudhi and Ibn Mājah).

For al-Albānī, this hadith can not be regarded as a basis for allowing supplicants to seek a means through the person of the Prophet, even though this hadith contains the term *binabiyyika Muhammad* (with Your Prophet, Muhammad). This phrase, al-Albānī argued, should be read and interpreted as the prayers of the Prophet (*bidu‘ānabiyyika Muhammad*) for several reasons. First, the blind man came to the Prophet to request his prayer to God on his behalf because he
knew that the Prophet’s supplication was much more powerful than others. If the blind man had intended to seek a means through the person or the status of Prophet, he would not have come to meet the Prophet; and it would have been better for him to stay at home. Secondly, when the Prophet gave options, the blind man chose to ask for the Prophet’s prayer, as we can be read in the text of the hadith. Thirdly, the blind man again asked the Prophet to supplicate God for him. Fourthly, this hadith is commonly included by hadith scholars in a particular chapter on the miracles of the Prophet and his granting of prayers. Because of the Prophet’s prayer to God, the blind man could see again. Therefore, al-Albānī claimed that the blind man could not have recovered because of his supplication alone without Prophet’s prayer. If prayers alone were enough, other blind persons would use a similar prayer and be healed. However, the secret of the blind man’s recovery was the Prophet’s supplication (Al-Albani 1975:69-75).

Like his predecessors, Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, the proponent of the Salafi movement in Indonesia, argues that *tawassul* using the person of the Prophet is unlawful. Therefore, he condemns those who supplicate God by saying, ‘O my Lord! with the Elect One (Muhammad) make us attain our goals, and forgive us for what has passed (Ya rabbi bi al-mustafā ballīgh maqāṣidana, wa ighfir lanā mā maḍā yā waṣį’a al-karami). According to him, adding the phrase ‘with the Elect one’ (*bi al-mustafā*) can be regarded as taking an oath (I., *bersumpah*). Jaiz maintains that invoking created beings, such as angels, prophets and apostles, or places in making an oath while supplicating God is not permitted and can be considered as practising polytheism (A., *shirk*). Only the name of God should be used in taking oaths (Jaiz 1999:158).

By contrast, other Muslim scholars have supported the practice of seeking *tawassul* not only through the person of the Prophet but also by means of his dignity and the dignity of pious Muslims even if they have died. Ja’far Subhani, a Muslim scholar, for instance, wrote a whole book which focuses on defending *tawassul* practices from legal attacks conducted by Ibn Taymiyyah and Wahhabi groups. In this book, Subhani states unequivocally that seeking *wasilah* through the person of the Prophet and his dignity is lawful. Like the opponents of this kind of *tawassul*, Subhani used the hadith about the blind man to support his argument. He points out that the phrase in the hadith, ‘with your Prophet Muhammad’ (*bi nabiyyika Muḥammad*) should be interpreted as meaning that the blind man sought a means through the Prophet, not through his prayer. To convince his readers of this, Subhani referred to another phrase in the hadith, ‘I am turning with you to my Lord’ (*Ya Muḥammad innī tawajjahu bika ilā rabbi*). He argued that ‘turning with you’ can be used as evidence that the blind man used the person of the Prophet as a means of his *tawassul* (Subhani 1989).
The proponents of the notion that one can use the person of the Prophet as a means state unequivocally that although the Prophet has died, people are allowed to seek a means through his dignity and prayer to supplicate God. To support their argument, they present some examples of tawassul using the person of the Prophet that were conducted by the Prophet’s Companions after his death. Al-Maliki (1946-2004), an hadith scholar who lived in Mecca, for instance, cited hadith narrated by prominent Companions of the Prophet. One of the traditions cited states that when a person had difficulty seeing Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, the fourth Caliph, a Prophetic Companion called Uthmān ibn Hunaif taught this person a prayer similar to the one taught by the Prophet to the blind man. The prayer is as follows (Al-Maliki 1993:70-1):

O Allah, I am asking you and turning to you with your Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of mercy; O Muhammad, I am turning with you to your God so fulfil my need…

After reciting the prayer, the person was able to meet the Caliph to convey his need. For al-Maliki this tradition suggested that people should still seek a means to supplicate God through the Prophet, even though he had died.

Another Prophetic Companion’s tradition cited by al-Maliki is as follows:

It is narrated by Mālik al-Dar, Umar’s treasurer, that the people suffered a drought during the successorship of Umar, whereupon a man came to the grave of the Prophet and said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, ask for rain for your Community, for verily they have almost perished.’ After this the Prophet appeared to him in a dream and told him: ‘Go to Umar and give him my greeting, then tell him that they will be watered. Tell him: You must be clever, you must be clever!’ The man went and told Umar, who said: ‘O my Lord, I will spare no effort except what is beyond my power!’

Al-Maliki was convinced that the transmitter of this tradition was regarded as sound by Ibn Ḥajr al-Asqalānī, a prominent hadith scholar whose reputation in this field is outstanding. Furthermore, al-Maliki gave more evidence from an hadith as follows (Al-Maliki 1993:76-7):

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20 His full name is Sayyid Prof. Dr. Muhammad ibn Sayyid ‘Ala‘ī ibn Sayyid ‘Abbās ibn Sayyid ‘Abd al-‘Aziẓ al-Maliki al-Ḥasani al-Makki. He was born in Mecca in 1365/1946. He finished his PhD at the Al-Azhar University, Cairo. He taught in the King Abdul Aziz University and The University of Ummul Qura, Mecca. He resigned after several years teaching in these universities. He then opened class in his own house and established an Islamic boarding school. He provided free education for his students. He also received students from many pesantren in Indonesia, most of which were affiliated with NU. He was regarded as the important figure by kyai and ulama NU in Indonesia because he was not proponent of Wahabism.
No sooner does one greet me than Allah sends back my soul so that I could return their greeting. (Narrated by Abu Hurarirah).

My life is an immense good for you: you bring up new matters, and new matters are brought up for you. My death, also, is an immense good for you: your actions will be shown to me; if I see goodness I shall praise God and if I see evil I shall ask forgiveness of Him for you.

Al-Maliki regarded these two hadith and the companion tradition as evidence that seeking *tawassul* through the Prophet after his death is legal. Al-Maliki believed that the Prophet is not only alive in his grave but also is able to pray to God for the benefit of his followers and can reply to their greeting. To convince his readers about the life of the Prophet after his death, Al-Maliki cited the verse of the Qur’an relating to the life of martyrs’ souls after their death. If people do not believe the Qur’anic verses about the life of the martyrs’ soul, they must distrust the Qur’an. If they do believe in the life of the martyrs’ souls, Al-Maliki said, why do they not believe that the Prophet and his Companions, whose status is much more higher than martyrs, are still alive (Al-Maliki 1993:117-8).

However, the vast majority of Muslim scholars warn people at the outset of their works not to believe that the Prophet himself can give benefit to, or harm others, in the same way as God while practising *tawassul*. Al-Maliki for example pointed out that to regard the Prophet as capable of this can be considered polytheism (Al-Maliki 1993:59). *Kyai* Hasyim Asy’ari (1871-1947), a leading Indonesian Muslim scholar and the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama, stated unequivocally that *tawassul* or *wasi‘lat* is just one of the ways to invoke God. *Tawassul* or *wasi‘lat* is mediation to approach God, and its ultimate purpose is to invoke God Himself rather than to invoke the object of *tawassul* (Asy’ari 2005:140). Similarly, Alā al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn Dāwūd al-‘Aṭṭār (d.1324), a prominent Shafi’ite hadith scholar, pointed out that asking for God’s help through the mediation and assistance of the Prophet is fine as long as people are careful not to ask the Prophet himself to resolve the problem because only God has the authority and power to do this (Taylor 1998:213). Even the supporters of *tawassul* state that people should not believe that the Prophet, with his own power and strength, can change the predestination of God (I., *takdir*) (Abu al-‘Azayim 1981:24). Therefore, the proponents of this kind of *tawassul* warn that to prevent people from invoking a deceased person directly, laypeople should be guided by an expert to practise *tawassul* in a proper way.

From debates about *tawassul*, I can conclude that both sides base their ideas about the practice of *tawassul* in the Qur’an. To support their arguments, both sides also used similar hadith. However, they interpret the text of these hadith
differently and, as a result, the conclusions derived from the text differ. In these debates the proponents of tawassul through the person and the dignity of the Prophet also cite particular hadith which they regarded as sound, while the opponents of such tawassul regarded these same hadith as weak.

3.3.1. Understanding the Concept of Tawassul Among Majlis Dhikr Groups

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

In the discussion with me in his office about this topic, Zainuddin criticized those who have rejected tawassul through the dead. On this matter, he cited the Prophetic hadith relating to Adam who asked God for forgiveness by seeking a means through the Prophet Muhammad long before he was born. Zainuddin asked why people rejected the permissibility to seek a means through the Prophet after his death, while the Prophet Adam himself performed tawassul through the Prophet Muhammad, even though the Prophet Muhammad did not yet exist. Zainuddin maintained that Adam sought his tawassul through Muhammad’s spirit (I., ruh) not through his body. He thus stated unequivocally that this implied that the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad was alive both before his birth and after his death. Therefore, Zainuddin argued, following the practice of Adam, tawassul can be performed through the spirit of the Prophet after his death, even though his body no longer exists.

Zainuddin also criticized those who have confined tawassul to pious acts and have rejected tawassul through the person of the Prophet and his dignity. In his

21 The Prophet said on the authority of Umar: ‘When Adam committed his mistake he said: O! my Lord, I am asking you to forgive me for the sake of Muhammad. Allah said: O! Adam, and how do you know about Muhammad whom I have not yet created? Adam replied, O! my Lord, after You created me with your hand and breathed into me of Your Spirit, I raised my head and saw written on the heights of the Throne: La Ilaha illa Allah Muhammad al-Rasulullah I understood that You would not place next to Your Name but the Most Beloved One of Your creation. Allah said: O! Adam, I have forgiven you, and were it not for Muhammad I would not have created you.’
view, people seek wasilat through the person of the Prophet because of their love of him. Since, love (A., mahabbat) of the Prophet is a pious act, Zainuddin argued that seeking wasilat through the person of the Prophet is similar to performing tawassul through a pious deed (I., amal saleh).

Zainuddin strongly supported such tawassul because this is the main practice of his Majlis Dhikr group. Tawassul practiced by this group, he noted, is to ask the intercession (A, shafā’at) of the Prophet Muhammad either in this world or in the hereafter, and to ask him to supplicate God on behalf of the supplicant. This practice of tawassul is performed in the group by reciting the following phrase: ‘Yā Sayyidi yā Rasulallāh’ (Oh My Lord and Prophet of God). For Zainuddin, the purpose of this exclamation is to seek the intercession of the Prophet because he is the person created by God as the place to call on (I., mengadu). Zainuddin described the process of tawassul as follows:

According to an hadith, the Prophet said: ‘God has chosen a servant to become a place to call on, and the Prophet is the perfect person to be called on. He said that, ‘I will give my intercession to my umat who always call me.’ Calling the Prophet does not mean that we worship him and the supplication is not being made to the Prophet whose name is invoked, but to Allah. Just as when people come to a kyai asking him to supplicate God on their behalf. In this case, we do not consider the kyai whom we asking to be God.22

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

What is meant by wasilah here is that we believe that only God will help us and so we ask only Him for help. If we do not have such a conviction, our tawassul can be considered as idolatry (shirk). Therefore, if people say that asking Allah through dead persons is regarded as shirk, I would say that asking living persons can be considered as shirk too if we believe that these persons have the power to help. For example, when we ask a doctor to cure our sickness and we believe that the doctor, not God, can heal the sickness,

this conduct can be considered as shirk too. Therefore, in tawassul we never regard people we use as a means in tawassul or as agents who can give help or assistance.

Asked why people still need a means to approach God if He is closer to people than their jugular vein, Zainuddin told me that although God is the Most powerful, He still relies on Angels and the Prophet to deliver His teachings.\footnote{In this context, Zainuddin said that God relies on Angels and the Prophet to deliver His teachings.} However, Zainuddin was reluctant to give this answer to support his notion of the permissibility of wasilat through the Prophet because this argument opens endless debate (I., debat kusir). Therefore, Zainuddin believed that if Islamic law (shari‘at) acknowledges such tawassul practice, Muslims should accept and practise it, even though there are some different opinions on this matter.

Similarly, Gus Latif, one of the leaders of Majlis Dhikr in Kediri, also supported the practice of tawassul through the person of the Prophet and other pious Muslims after their death. He cited previous hadith that support the permissibility of such tawassul. He also pointed out that tawassul is needed in the supplication to God since this means that one’s prayer to God will be more easily granted than if no intermediaries are used. For him, this practice is important because those persons whose names are mentioned in tawassul possess high status, dignity, and respect in Allah’s eyes. By mentioning their names in the supplication, God will therefore give much more attention to one’s prayer. Gus Latif also said that since the Prophet, his Companions, Muslim saints (A., auliyā‘) and other pious Muslims are the most beloved persons of God, if people love these persons by mentioning their names in their prayer, in return God will love those supplicants. In this sense, tawassul is closely related to the concept of barakah (blessing), since Gus Latif believed that these pious persons are able to spread barakah because they are the most beloved persons of God. This is similar to the notion put forward by Kyai Hasyim Asy’ari who interpreted the Prophetic tradition as follows, ‘People who love someone will be gathered [in the hereafter] with someone they love.’ For Kyai Hasyim Asy’ari, this hadith can also mean that people whose pious acts are relatively few who love someone whose pious acts are perfect will be gathered [in the hereafter] with that person (Asy’ari 2005:27).

Although most leaders of Majlis dhikr groups are familiar with the concept of tawassul as described by Muslim theologians, some of their practices of tawassul are different from those of the theologians. During my attendance at the dhikr rituals held by these groups, I never heard the tawassul phrase such as Alla>humma inni> atawassalu biji>hi nabiyyika an taqd{i> ha>ja>ti> (God, verily I seek a means by the dignity of your messenger, fulfill my needs) used when those
Majlis Dhikr groups performed *tawassul*. I only found one passage in the last part of a prayer in the *Salāwat*Wāhidiyat group that could be categorized as a *tawassul*. This passage was:

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

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

To the presence (*ilā ḥadrati*) of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him, next to the presence of my lord Syaikh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jailāni and Syaikh Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, and my lord al-Habīb ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Alwi al-Haddād, may God be pleased with them: *al-Fātiḥat*.

After this, the gathering recited the first chapter of the Qur’an in unison. The leader of *Majlis Dhikr* then continued to mention other names followed by reciting *al-Fātiḥat*. However, Marzuki, a Muslim scholar in the State Islamic University in Malang, argued that reciting *al-Fātiḥat* for the benefit of deceased persons obviously could not be regarded as the practice of *wasīlat*. Instead, this practice can be categorized as paying respect to fellow Muslims and the most respected people, including the Prophets of God, Muslim saints, parents, teachers, and others. For him, according to Islam, respect for those people is not confined to their life but also continues after their death by sending them...
al-Fātiḥat for the benefit of the people named. Muslim theologians have widely discussed this practice within the context of giving presents to deceased persons by sending them al-Fātiḥat.24

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

### 3.4. Sending the Merit of Pious Deeds to Deceased Persons

This topic is related to matters discussed within Islamic jurisprudence (I., fiqih) especially regarding the question of whether deceased persons can obtain benefit from the deeds of others. This question generates other questions. For example, can the living give the merit of their good deeds, such as reciting the Qur’an, charity (A., shadaqat), sacrifice (I., kurban), performing pilgrimage to Mecca (haji) and fasting, to deceased persons, and are deceased persons able to receive the merit of such pious acts. Within Islamic jurisprudence, this topic is categorized as a disputed matter (A., khilāfiyyat), and has been the subject of debates among religious scholars. Therefore, not all Muslims jurists (A., fuqahā) agree on the permissibility of such practice.

This topic is important to discuss further in order to understand the ritual practice of Majlis Dhikr groups in Indonesia because most of their rituals are concerned with giving the merit of pious acts (I., amal saleh) to deceased persons. Therefore, this section will focus on how these groups elaborate and approach this topic with reference to previous debates involving Muslim jurists.

The majority of religious scholars have argued that dead persons cannot benefit from the merit of others’ good deeds. They base their argument on the following verses from the Qur’an.

> That no burdened person (with sins) shall bear the burden (sins) of another (53:38). And the man can have nothing but what he does (53:39).

Chapter III

On this Day (Day of resurrection), none will be wronged in anything, nor
will you bte requited anything except that which you used to do (36:54).

...He or she gets reward for that (good) which he or she has earned, and he
or she is punished for that (evil) which he has earned (2:286).

The meaning of these verses is that people cannot bear the burden of another
and people can only be rewarded because of the good deeds they have carried
out themselves. For the supporters of this argument, these verses indicate that
God is just toward His servants because He never punishes people for something
that they have not done, and He will only reward people for their own good
deeds. In the light of those verses, Imam Shâfi‘î, as cited by Ibn Kathîr (d.774
CE), pointed out that the merit of reciting the Qur’an for the deceased cannot
be received by them because it is not recited by those deceased themselves, but
by others. Therefore, Imam Shâfi‘î argued, even though reciting the Qur’an is
considered to be a religious virtue, sending its merit to deceased persons was
never sanctioned by the Prophet and his Companions.25

How about the hadith of the Prophet that ‘When a person dies all his deeds are
cut off except three; an ongoing charity (I., amal jariyah), beneficial knowledge,
and a righteous child who prays for him or her’ (the deceased). Does this hadith
acknowledge that deceased persons can benefit from prayers supplicated by
others? In response to this, Ibn Kathîr argued that all of the three kinds of
deeds mentioned in the hadith are actually a result of the deceased persons’
own deeds when they were still alive, not a result of others’ deeds. For example,
the decision to establish an ongoing charity (I., amal jariyah) such as a mosque
or a school was actually made by the deceased persons before they died, so
they are still able to receive the merit of their own deeds even though they
have passed away.26 Likewise, persons who write a book from which others can
obtain benefit are able to keep receiving the merit of their own deeds although
they have died. Similarly, parents who educate their children to be righteous are
able to benefit from the prayers of their children. In short, these kinds of deeds
are a result of the deceased persons’ deeds when they are still alive. The hadith
cited indicates that other than these kinds of deeds, deceased persons cannot
benefit from the actions of others.

Another argument against the ability of a deceased person to benefit from the
merit of others is based on a logical argument rather than the text of hadith or

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hNo=62&Display=yes&UserProfile=0.
26 Ibid.
the Qur’an. It is argued that God’s commands to His servants are part of an obligation that should be fulfilled by each person. This obligation cannot be transferred and fulfilled by others. For instance, God will not accept someone’s prayer if it is performed by others. Similarly, God will not accept someone’s repentance if it is performed by others. Those who support this argument draw the analogy of sick persons who cannot benefit from someone else taking a tablet on their behalf, or a thirsty person, whose thirst cannot be quenched if others drink on his behalf (al-Jauziyah 1999:211)

Moreover, it is argued that not all pious acts necessarily generate merit, and only God can determine their worth. In other words, merit depends on God’s gift. If God wishes, He will give the merit to anyone whom He wishes, but if He does not wish, He will not give the merit to anyone. If this is the case, how can people force God to give the merit of their pious acts to someone else. In other words, people cannot deliver the merit of their pious acts to deceased persons because that merit is fully in the power of God (al-Jauziyah 1999).

Other Islamic scholars have divided pious acts into two categories: the first, whose merit cannot be received by deceased persons, and the second which can. Examples of the first type include prayer, reciting the Qur’an and fasting. The merit of such deeds can only be obtained by their practitioners and such merit cannot be delivered to others. The second category includes returning deposited goods to the owner, paying a debt, charity, and making a pilgrimage to Mecca. The merit of such good deeds can be delivered to deceased persons because such deeds can be performed by others on behalf of people who are not able to perform them in person.

In contrast, other Muslim scholars such as al-Maliki, have responded that deceased persons can obtain benefit from the merit of others’ pious acts such as reciting the Qur’an, charity, fasting, and the hajj. He pointed out that the hadith cited above could not be used as an argument to decide which kinds of pious acts can deliver merit to deceased persons, and which cannot. Instead, al-Maliki agreed that it is true that deceased persons are cut off from performing certain actions that living persons do. He argued, however, that the text of hadith does not indicate that a deceased person is cut off from obtaining the merit of others’ deeds. For him, a pious deed is owned by the person who carries it out. If he or she gives the merit of this deed to another, the recipient will obtain benefit from it. Thus within Islamic jurisprudence, for example, if people die and they are in debt to others, their heirs can settle the debt on behalf of the deceased persons (Al-Maliki n.d:15).
Similar to al-Maliki, al-Jauziyah, a student of Ibn Taymiyyah, strongly criticized those who rejected the possibility of deceased persons benefiting from others’ deeds. He specifically countered the argument of those who said that since an obligation imposed by God is part of an individual’s responsibility, people cannot fulfil others’ obligation. For al-Jauziyah, this notion does not prevent God from allowing Muslims to give the merit of pious acts to other people because this is part of God’s grace for His servants. This is why, although the pilgrimage to Mecca and fasting are categorized as obligations for individual Muslims, the Prophet allowed Muslims to fulfil these obligations on behalf of others who could not do so including deceased persons. In al-Jauziyah’s opinion, transmitting the merit of deeds and giving benefit to those who are in need are religious virtues sanctioned by God. Therefore, he argued, transmitting the merit of pious deeds to deceased persons, who are cut off from doing such deeds and are thus most in need of others’ help, is even more beloved by God (al-Jauziyah 1999:225-6). To prove his point, al-Jauziyah cited two hadith which report that the Prophet allowed a man to fast on behalf of a deceased person who had fasting to make up. Another hadith cited by al-Jauziyah is a reliable hadith in which some one is reported to have asked the Prophet about a month’s fasting his mother had missed before she passed away. The man asked the Prophet whether he should make up the fasting that his mother missed. The Prophet asked the man, ‘If your mother had a debt would you settle it for her?’ The man said that he would. The Prophet then said to the man that the debt to Allah has a greater right to be fulfilled (al-Jauziyah 1999:205).

Moreover, to convince his readers that deceased persons can obtain benefit from living persons, al-Jauziyah quoted another hadith which reported that the Prophet assumed that the dead could hear the greetings of the living because when they were addressed the spirits of the dead were returned to their body (al-Jauziyah 1999:15-6). He pointed out that if the deceased cannot hear the living, why did the Prophet ask Muslims to greet them when they visited Muslim tombs. al-Jauziyah argued that if people want to visit tombs, they should come bearing a gift dedicated to the dead, such as a supplication for the dead, alms offered on their behalf, or a righteous act bringing one closer to God. All of these acts can increase the dead’s happiness just as the living are pleased when a visitor arrives bearing a gift (Taylor 1998:189).

With regard to the division of pious deeds into those which can bestow merit on deceased persons and those which cannot, al-Jauziyah argued that this division finds no sanction in the Prophetic tradition. To prove this, he cited several hadith containing examples of pious acts which can be performed by people on behalf of others. In addition, he also quoted AbuHanifah’s opinion that Islamic law (A., shari’at) allows pious acts conducted by their doers to be
delivered to others. Ḥanīf argued that discouraging Muslims from giving the benefit and merit of their virtues to their parents and Muslim fellows in a time when they are in need could not be regarded as compatible with Islamic law (al-Jauziyah 1999:228).

It is interesting to note here that al-Jauziyah’s view on the legitimacy of deceased persons benefiting from the merit of pious deeds performed by living persons is not popular among Indonesian Muslims reformists such as Muḥammadīyah, PERSIS (Persatuan Islam) and the Salafi groups. However on issues other than the issue of sending the merit of pious deeds to the dead, these groups invariably rely heavily on the opinion of both Ibn Taymiyyah and his student, al-Jauziyah. Both scholars are often referred by these groups when they criticize religious practices conducted by the members of Nahdatul Ulama and PERTI (Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah, The Association for Muslim Education), and al-Washliyah and accuse them of practising illegitimate innovation within Islam (A., bid’ah) and idolatry (A., shirk). In contrast, al-Jauziyah’s view on this matter has been widely accepted by Indonesian Muslims groups such as Nahdatul Ulama, al-Washliyah and PERTI.

3.4.1. The Majlis Dhikr Groups’ Understanding of Sending the Merit of Pious Deeds to Deceased Persons

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

27 This Minangkabau-based traditionalist association was established in 1930. After Independence PERTI transformed itself into a political party. But today this organization is no longer a political party.
obtain any benefit from their children’s prayers. However, if others who do not have any familial relationship with the deceased are righteous and pray for the deceased, the latter can benefit from their prayers. Likewise, only charity accompanied with sincerity (I., *ikhlas*) can benefit its doer after they have died.

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

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

One day the chairman of Muhammadiyah Youth Association in Kediri (*Ikatan Pemuda Muhammadiyah*) asked me whether our prayer can be received by deceased persons. The chairman asked me again, ‘If the prayer can be received by the deceased persons, can you show me the hadith which justifies that practice?’ I knew this young man wanted to ask me about the legitimacy of *tahlilan* [special ritual by reciting the phrase *lailaha illa Allah* person in unison for a deceased] that I practise. I said to him, if we have found evidence (I., *dalil*) justifying this view in the Qur’an, I think we do not need to find another *dalil* from an hadith, even though we can find another *dalil* from an hadith. As mentioned in the Qur’an, God teaches the Prophet to pray for his Muslim brothers who have preceded him. The prayer is as follows, *rabbanâ ighfir lanâ wa liikhwâîîna al-lazdinâ sabaqûna bî al-imân* [Our Lord! Forgive us and our brethren who came before us into the Faith] (59:10). If the prayers of living person could not be received by deceased persons, God would not have taught this prayer to his Prophet. Meanwhile, argument from the hadith can also be found in the hadith narrated by *Imam*

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Muslim and Bukhari relating to the occasion when the Prophet visited Uhud and Baqi’s grave site. Firstly, the Prophet greeted the personages in those graves, saying assalāmū’alaikum, and the Prophet prayed for them. The word assalāmū’alaikum indicates that the Prophet chatted with the deceased persons and the prayer supplicated by the Prophet could be heard and its merit could be received by the deceased persons.

The members of the Wāḥidiyat group even believe that the merit of charity performed by living persons can benefit deceased persons. This can be seen from the courtesy (adab) of giving donations imposed by the group on its members. One of the adab is that before putting money into a donation box, members of this group should intend to give the merit of the donation to their families who are still alive or dead. This is due to the belief that donating to the Wāḥidiyat group can cause happiness and perfection of gnosis for living families and deceased families (Anonymous 1423:31-2). One of the members of this group, Dedey Firmansyah, a member of the group from Lampung, told the following story about the importance of delivering the merit of putting a money in a donation box (I., kotak amal) for his deceased father.

This story took place when I ignored the significance of putting money into a donation box for the Wāḥidiyat group. One day, I dreamed my father, who had passed away, came to me. His face looked sad. He was silent but tears dropped from his eyes. In that dream, I was extremely sad too. The more I approached my father, the louder he cried. Then I asked him, ‘Why are you crying?’ He did not reply to my question and kept crying. While he was crying, he answered my question, ‘Currently, I no longer receive your charity; pointing his finger to a donation box. Now, I feel tired. Do you leave me with this tiredness?’ (Rohani 2004:143).

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

### 3.5. Seeking Blessing (barakah, tabarruk)

The word barakah is an Arabic word meaning ‘divine blessing’ (Colin 1978:1032). According to the Qur’an, God can bestow blessings on particular people, places or times. For example, God blessed the persons of his prophets and his saints. In the Qur’an, God regards the night when the Qur’an was firstly revealed as a blessed night (A., lailat al-mubārakat). Moreover, places such as the Ka’ba
and Jerusalem are considered blessed places. In other words, \textit{barakah} can be in persons, places, and time. Meanwhile, from the same root as \textit{barakah} derives the word \textit{tabarruk} which means seeking divine blessing by means of someone or something which has been blessed by God. Seeking \textit{barakah} (J., \textit{ngalap berkah}, A., \textit{tabarruk}) is a popular practice among Majlis Dhikr in Indonesia and among Nahdlilyyin, a term referring to members of Nahdatul Ulama. In this section, I will discuss this practice by referring to Muslims’ interpretation of two sources of Islamic teachings, the Qur’an and hadith, and how this concept is interpreted and practised by the Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups.

For the Salafi group, according to hadith and the Qur’an, \textit{barakah} can be divided into two kinds: firstly, the \textit{barakah} of physical essence (A., \textit{dhat}) and secondly the \textit{barakah} of righteous action and following the Prophet. For this group, the first kind of \textit{barakah} is exclusively bestowed by the Prophet, including anything that is left from the body of the Prophet. It is argued that this type of \textit{barakah} did not continue after the death of the Prophet. Therefore, none of his followers, including his Companions, had such \textit{barakah}. However, according to this group, Muslims can still obtain his \textit{barakah} by adhering to the Prophet’s commands and avoiding his prohibitions. In addition, after his death, everything that remains of the Prophet’s physical essence such as his hair can generate \textit{barakah}.

Every Muslim can obtain the second type of \textit{barakah}, if they act as commanded and avoid prohibited things following the example of the Prophet acted. In this sense, Salih (2007) argues that this second type of \textit{barakah} comes not from the Prophet’s physical body but from following the Prophet’s guidance.\footnote{Salih bin Abdul-Aziz bin Muhammad Aal ash-Shaikh 1995, The Understanding of Tabarruk with Ahl al-Sunnah: Salafi Publications, viewed 2 January 2007, 11:04 am, http://www.spubs.com/sps/sp.cfm?subsecID=TAW04&articleID=TAW040001&articlePages=1.} In other words, as Ibn Taymiyyah argued, people can obtain this second type of \textit{barakah} if they strictly follow the guidance of the hadith and the Qur’an as the Prophet has taught and ordered them. Therefore, the extent to which people can obtain this type of \textit{barakah} is determined by the extent to which they abide by hadith and the Qur’an (Al-Maliki 1993:179-80). In other words, Muslim can obtain growth and increase in the reward of their actions because of following the guidance of the Prophet. For this group, the source of both types of \textit{barakah} is God. No one can be blessed unless God gives a blessing. Therefore, people cannot decide if something or someone is blessed. In order to regard something as having \textit{barakah}, as an Indonesian Salafi preacher, Abdul Qadir Djaelani noted, people should refer to God and his Prophet (Djaelani 1996:218).

In line with these types of \textit{barakah}, Imran, a proponent of the Salafi movement in Indonesia, has argued that since only the Prophet has \textit{barakah} of physical
essence (dhat), and this barakah was cut off after his death, no one after his death can obtain this barakah. Seeking blessing (A., tabarruk) through the physical essence of the Prophet only happened when the Prophet was alive. After his death, Imran noted, none of his Companions practised such tabarruk. For example, after his death, none of his Companions sought blessing from his family, tomb, hair, or the water collected after washing his corpse. Therefore, Imran pointed out that if Muslims today seek barakah from Muslim saints such as Syeikh Abd al-Qadir al-Jailani, his tomb and the tombs of other Muslims, this can be considered bid'ah because it has no sanction in the hadith and the Qur'an (Imran 1990:61-2). Abdul Qadir Djelani, another proponent of the Salafi movement in Indonesia, even regards this practice as extremely reprehensible form of innovation (A., bid'at da'lat) which can lead its doer to infidelity. As a result, Muslims should repent if they practice such tabarruk (Djaelani 1996:220).

Further, since the barakah of physical essence is exclusive to the Prophet, Muslims cannot obtain barakah from the physical essence from people other than the Prophet including righteous persons. However, Muslims can only obtain barakah from the virtuous actions of righteous persons (I., orang saleh), not from their physical essence. In other words, the barakah of the righteous persons arises from their righteous actions, and it is because of these actions that other people can feel their blessing. An example of such righteous actions is calling people to goodness, and invoking God for them. Therefore, Salih regards the practice of kissing the hands of righteous persons in the belief that they contain physical blessing as a practice forbidden in Islam.

In contrast, al-Maliki recognized tabarruk as a practice in Islam which has long been a subject of debate among Muslim theologians. In his opinion, some Muslim theologians regard incorrectly those who practise tabarruk with the Prophet, his remains, his family, Muslim saints and Muslim scholars as practising polytheism (shirk). Al-Maliki defined tabarruk as the same as performing tawassul toward God by means of places, persons and their remains. Therefore, for al-Maliki, when performing tabarruk, Muslims should believe that because of their closeness and their high status before God, Muslims can obtain blessings from others. At the same time, Muslims should not believe that anyone can bring goodness and reject evil without the will of God (Al-Maliki 1993:158).

In contrast to those who regard tabarruk as polytheism, al-Maliki, based on his understanding of the Prophetic traditions, considered tabarruk as a permissible practice, even as a legitimate practice (A., mashru’). For him, the greatest tabarruk is the one possessed by the Prophet Muhammad. To support his notion, al-Maliki quoted many hadith reporting that everything pertaining to the
Prophet, such as his hair, blood, sweat, saliva, and the water from his ablution was able to generate barakah. It is reported in the hadith that the Prophet’s Companions used to seek blessing through those things. For al-Maliki, seeking barakah through the Prophet was not confined to his lifetime. In contrast to the Salafi groups’ notions, al-Maliki cited several traditions of the Prophet’s Companions proving that after his death, they still sought barakah by means of the Prophet’s grave, podium, his house, his robe and places the Prophet touched (Al-Maliki 1993:167-77).

In support of this view, Imam Muslim (821-875), a prominent early hadith collector, narrated examples of tabarruk performed by ‘Umar Ibn Khaṭṭāb. One of these was that he kissed the Black Stone (A., Ḥajr Aswad) located in one of the corners of the wall around the Ka’ba30 because he saw the Prophet do it. When kissing the stone, ‘Umar said, ‘you are just a stone, if the Prophet had not done it, I would not have done it.’ On another occasion, Imam Bukhārī (810-870), a prominent hadith scholar, reported that when ‘Umar Ibn Khaṭṭāb was about to die, he told his son, Abdullah, to ask permission from ‘Aishat (the widow of the Prophet) to let him be buried beside the tombs of the Prophet and Abū Bakr (Al-Maliki 1993:158-81). Other Muslim scholars such as al-Ghazaʿī, al-Subkī, ‘Alā al-Dīn also supported the permissibility of seeking barakah through the Prophet after his death. They based this on the belief that God bestowed blessing on the Prophet so that his body could not physically perish in the grave (Taylor 1998:213).

For al-Maliki seeking blessing through the relics of the righteous and the Prophets is lawful because the Prophet practised it. To support his claim, al-Maliki cited the hadith narrated by a reliable hadith scholar, Imam Muslim, in which the Prophet was reported to have travelled with his Companions and stopped to take a rest at a place known as al-hijr, which used to belong to the community of Thamūd, a community who lived during the time of Prophet Sālih (Shelah). The Prophet’s Companions prepared a meal and took water from that place. Then, the Prophet asked his Companions to throw away the water taken from the well at al-hijr and to give the meal to their camels. Instead, he asked his Companions to take water from the well from which the Prophet Sālih’s camel used to drink (Al-Maliki 1993:178). In this hadith, the Prophet was reported to be seeking barakah through the well of the Prophet Sālih rather than through Thamūd’s well because the Thamūd were known as a group of people who opposed Prophet Sālih. This hadith, as argued al-Maliki, can be used to support the permissibility of seeking barakah through the relics of righteous persons (I., orang saleh) (Al-Maliki 1993:178).

30 Ka’ba is situated almost in the centre of the great mosque in Mecca (masji al-haram). All Muslims in the world should direct themselves to the Ka’ba when they perform prayers.
3.5.1. The Concept of Tabarruk As Understood by Majlis Dhikr Groups

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

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

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

According to Kyai Misbah, there are two kinds of barakah. The first is a barakah which is dependent (I., disandarkan) on humankind. This type of barakah is similar to wasilat; hence a person who becomes the object of tabarruk serves as a means to ask God. In this sense, when people seek barakah from righteous dead persons, they should not ask the persons in the grave because the source of barakah is God. Like the Salafi groups, Kyai Misbah pointed out that since it is only God who has the authority to give barakah to someone, people should ask for barakah to God rather than through righteous persons who do not have the authority to spread blessing. To further explain this, Kyai Misbah gave the analogy of people who ask for money from a particular person who does not have money. Even though that person is asked to give money, he or she will not be able to, because he or she does not have any. The same is true of righteous persons who cannot give barakah because they do not possess barakah since the source of barakah is in the hands of God. Kyai Mughni, another senior Kyai in Jampes, gave the following example of this kind of tabarruk:

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

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

Asked why people should seek barakah through righteous persons before and after their death, the Indonesian Majlis Dzikr leader referred to similar practices performed by the Prophet and his Companions. Another reason for such a practice is that righteous persons, such as ‘ulama’, wali, and kyai have a high status before God. With their high status and their closeness, they deserve to be approached. For Kyai Misbah, seeking barakah through these righteous persons is conducted with the hope that God will bless supplicants so they may be able perform the same righteous acts as those pious persons. However, Tholhah Hasan, a Muslim scholar from Nahdlatul Ulama has warned that people should not incorrectly seek barakah through anyone whose righteousness is in dispute. Consequently, Muslims are not allowed to seek barakah through sacred sites where guardian spirits (I., pundhen-pundhen keramat), dukun-dukun or sacred things (I., benda-benda keramat) are worshipped (Hasan 2006:287).

31 The high status of ‘ulama’, for example is shown in the hadith where they are described not only as heirs of the Prophet but also as trustworthy persons of God for His people.
Like Kyai Misbah, Gus Fahri defined *barakah* as increasing qualities (*J.*, *tambahe keapian*) and gave the following example:

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

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

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

It is clear that in some aspects of practical Sufism, Majlis Dhikr groups in Indonesia follow similar notions to those articulated by prominent Muslim scholars, Sufi and theologians. Leaders of Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups attribute their notions to similar practices conducted by the Prophet himself, his Companions (A., ṣaḥabāt), the Successors of his Companions (A., tābi’īn), and the Successors of the Successors (A., tābi’īt al-tābi’īn). Therefore, the Indonesian Majlis Dhikr groups cannot be regarded as practising polytheism (shirk) or making innovation (bid’ah) because what they practise can be related to their interpretation of the main sources of Islamic law (A., shari’at), the hadith and the Qur’an, and the practice of the Prophet’s Companions. If this interpretation differs from that of other groups of Muslims, one interpretation cannot be judged by another. Moreover, I argue that interpretations can be regarded as under the field of ijtihad, which means the use of all the capabilities of reason by particular Muslims in deducing interpretations from evidence from the Qur’an and hadith. If this is the case, one can expect different results of ijtihad among Muslims scholars. Muslims should not therefore claim that their own results of ijtihad are deemed to be true, while others’ ijtihad are false, because all of these will be justified later in the hereafter. If the result is true according to the meaning and purpose of God and the Prophet, then it will have two rewards. In contrast, if the result is wrong because it does not agree with God’s and the Prophet’s purpose, it will have only one reward.

Those who practise Sufism without tarekat only attain the experience of ‘ilm al-yaqi>n. They never reach ‘ain al-yaqīn and ḥaqq al-yaqīn. This is because they only believe (I., yakin) based on their theoretical philosophy. They do not believe practically (I., secara amaliah), even though they claim that they believe secara amaliah. In fact, this belief happens only in their imagination, as if they believe secara amaliah.