

## Exploring the Wisdom of Acceptance and Love Through Mahabbah According to Rabiah Al-Adawiyah

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### Abstract

This article reviews the concept of mahabbah as taught by Rabiah al-Adawiyah, a prominent Sufi figure. Rabiah al-Adawiyah's concept of mahabbah emphasizes deep and pure love for Allah as a means to achieve a profound understanding of acceptance and to develop sincere love. This research employs a qualitative approach using descriptive-analytical methods. The primary data sources include books related to Rabiah al-Adawiyah, as well as journal articles and other relevant secondary sources on this topic. The study concludes that Rabiah al-Adawiyah's teachings on the acceptance of destiny and pure love for Allah offer a powerful spiritual solution to overcoming stress and anxiety in modern times, emphasizing the sincerity of love that brings inner peace and spiritual strength.

**Keyword:** Divine Love; Mahabbah; Rabiah al-Adawiyah

### Introduction

Acceptance and love are essential elements in human spiritual development, forming the basis for achieving balance and harmony in life. In the context of spiritual teachings, especially as reflected in the thought of Rabiah al-Adawiyah, a Sufi figure renowned for her wisdom and compassion for Allah, acceptance and love are translated in the unique and profound concept of *mahabbah*. *Mahabbah* is not just love, but it is also the path to discovering the deep understanding of acceptance and to developing genuine love.

In this modern era, where many individuals face stress and anxiety, the concepts taught by Rabiah al-Adawiyah of acceptance and *mahabbah* are becoming increasingly relevant. The challenges of living in a complex digital world often bring out the need for inner peace and a deeper meaning to life. By understanding Rabiah al-Adawiyah's teachings, we can find inspiration to deal with uncertainty and achieve inner peace by accepting fate and loving the Divine. Therefore, this article will explore how the

teachings of Rabiah al-Adawiyah can provide valuable guidance for us in finding the wisdom of acceptance and developing deep love in the context of modern.

Rabiah al-Adawiyah taught the concept of *mahabbah* as a deep and pure love for Allah. In her Sufism, *mahabbah* means completely surrendering oneself to Allah as a “lover” without expecting anything in return (Wasalmi, 2021). This concept is a development of the concept of *zuhud* pioneered by Hasan al-Basri, where fear and hope were elevated by Rabiah al-Adawiyah to love-driven *zuhud*. This pure and holy love is considered higher in value than fear and hope (Taufikurrahman et al., 2023).

The results of previous research related to the concept of *mahabbah* Rabiah Al-Adawiyah greatly helped the author prepare a framework to complete the discussion that does not yet exist. Among them Yanti, M., & Bahagia, M. (2023). *Cinta Ilahi (Mahabbah) Sufi Wanita: Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah. Jurnal Ekonomi, Syariah Dan Studi Islam*, 1(2). The current and previous research data collection techniques have in common, namely using library research, where the object of study is data from books and related literature. The collected data is analyzed using descriptive methods, namely by describing and describing the data obtained and using documents as supporting research instruments (Yanti & Bahagia, 2023). However, the difference between current research and previous research lies in how this is from the teachings of Rabiah Al-Adawiyah's *mahabbah*. So that the current research complements the shortcomings of the discussion of previous research.

The research formula in this paper consists of three parts, namely the problem formulation, research objectives, and research benefits. The problem formulation includes three questions: First, who is Rabiah al-Adawiyah. Second, how is the concept of *mahabbah* according to Rabiah al-Adawiyah. Third, what are the core teachings of *mahabbah* taught by Rabiah al-Adawiyah. The purpose of this study is to understand the concept of *mahabbah* from the perspective of Rabiah al-Adawiyah. This research is expected to benefit academics by presenting a new perspective in the analysis of life phenomena.

### **Research Methodology**

This research adopts a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. The research data sources include both primary and secondary sources. The research process involves finding and analyzing primary and secondary sources, studying literature, categorizing data based on the research framework, processing data, citing references, and drawing conclusions. The main primary data sources are books related to Rabiah al-Adawiyah, while the secondary data sources include literature

from journal articles, books, and other sources relevant to the topic of this research. The data collection technique used is library research.

## **Research Result and Discussion**

### **1. Biography of Rabiah Al-Adawiyah**

Rabiah Al-Adawiyah, a leading female Sufi figure in the teaching of love (*al-mahabbah*), was born in Basrah in 95 H (717 M) (Nasution, 2015). Basrah was a city famous for the presence of scholars of jurisprudence, Sufis and scholars of kalam, and was inhabited by aristocrats and many poor people. Rabiah was born into a very humble family in Basrah. Her full name was Ummu al-Khair bint Isma'il al-Adawiyah al-Qisysiyah, and she was from the Atiq tribe whose lineage is said to go back to Nabi Nuh (Bakri, 2020).

Rabiah Al-Adawiyah, whose name means the fourth of four children, was born into a family living in poverty. Her father Ismail struggled financially, even when the future great Sufi saint was about to be born to his beloved wife. Ismail could not afford oil for lighting during her birth, nor did he have enough cloths to swaddle the newborn. Despite having asked the neighbors for help, Ismail did not get any. Despite his difficulties, he remained steadfast and relied on Allah, comforting his wife by saying, "We should be grateful to Allah, because throughout our lives, even though we are poor, we have never begged anyone." (Abi, 2020).

Since childhood, Rabiah had demonstrated her strength in memorization and her brilliant mind. By adolescence, she had completed reading the Qur'an silently by the age of 10. Poverty in Baghdad caused hardship for the poor family, which forced Rabiah to work after separating from her three sisters. She was eventually captured by robbers and sold as a slave to a master (Abi, 2020).

Despite being trapped in slavery, Rabiah showed fortitude. Rabiah's talent for singing was utilized by her masters to entertain nobles and merchants. Despite her status as a slave, she had no option to resist her master's orders. One night, her master awoke from sleep and saw through the window that Rabiah was prostrate and praying, "O Allah, my only desire is to obey Your commands; if I could change this fate of mine, I would not cease in the least from devotion to You." Seeing this, her master was frightened and remained silent all night until dawn (Wasalmi, 2021).

Early in the morning, her master called Rabiah gently and decided to set her free. The man who once owned Rabiah recounted that he saw a bright light shining above Rabiah's head while she was in worship, and the light illuminated all the rooms of his house. After that, Rabiah chose to pursue the Sufi path. The initial education she received came from her

family and her Sufi wanderings, where she discovered the doctrine of *mahabbah* (loving-kindness) as its central tenet.

Rabiah Al-Adawiyah was a Sufi pioneer in the teaching of love, where love became the main motivation and foundation in devotion to God. She fundamentally changed the purpose of life for Muslims, especially *zahids* (people who abstain from the world), from worship driven by fear of punishment or hope of reward, to solely out of love for God. For Rabiah, the concepts of heaven and hell had lost relevance because true happiness is seeing His face in unbounded love (Hasbi, 2020).

The desire of love (*mahabbah*), the deep desire (*syauq*), and the desire for union (*'ashiq-ma'syuuq*) have created a spiritual restlessness that leads to the state of being lost in love and the ultimate experience of intimacy with the Beloved (*al-uns*). Rabiah taught a deep understanding of *mahabbah*. For Rabiah, God was not just a Being to be feared for His punishment or hoped for His paradise, but a Being to be loved. It is this love (*mahabbah*) that can create inexpressible and limitless happiness (Bakri, 2020).

It was this passion for God that led Rabiah to reject several scholars who proposed to her, including Hasan al-Bashri, believing that doing so would interfere with her spiritual relationship with God. Nonetheless, some argue that Rabiah later married Ribah al-Qaisi. Rabiah died in 185 H and was buried in Basrah, Iraq (Taufikurrahman et al., 2023). Rabiah had reached the pinnacle in the level of *mahabbah*, as if nothing could match her love for the Most Beautiful Essence. Her teaching of the doctrine of love (*mahabbah*) greatly influenced the lives of Sufis in the following period (Yanti & Bahagia, 2023).

## **2. The Concept of Mahabbah According to Rabiah Al-Adawiyah**

According to Hasbi (2020), Rabiah Al-Adawiyah is known for her Sufism teachings that focus on love (*al-Hubb*) or *mahabbah*. This tasawwuf teaching introduced by Rabiah al-Adawiyah is known as *al-Mahabbah*. This concept is a development of the level of *zuhud* life previously developed by Hasan al-Basri, where fear and hope were transformed by Rabiah al-Adawiyah into love-driven *zuhud*. According to her, pure and holy love is of higher value than fear and hope (Taufikurrahman et al., 2023). This can be seen from her answer to a question: When Rabiah al-Adawiyah was asked, "Do you love God Almighty?" she answered, "Yes." Then she was asked again, "Do you hate Satan?" Rabiah replied, "No, because my love for God leaves no room in me to hate Satan." (Nicholson, 1976).

Furthermore, Rabiah Al-Adawiyah said, "I saw the Prophet in a dream, He asked, 'Oh Rabiah, do you love me?' I replied, 'Oh Messenger of Allah, who would dare say no love to you?' However, my love for the Creator makes me turn away from feeling love or hatred towards other creatures." (Nicholson, 1976).

Perfect love is love that gives everything without expecting anything in return. True love, according to Rabiah al-Adawiyah, is not affected by strings attached or the desire for praise, unity, or even love itself. According to her, strings can reduce the purity of love (Abbas & Nisa, 2023). True love desires only happiness and good for the beloved, unconditionally. Rabiah al-Adawiyah believed that the nature of love is difficult to explain in words, as true love can be fully understood only by those who feel it themselves (Ismail et al., 2005).

Ismail et al., (2005) explained that Rabiah al-Adawiyah's love for God was the essence of her Sufism. That pure and holy love does not ask for anything in return. Her deep feelings of love are in line with the concept of love expressed by Allah in His verses, as found in surah al-Maidah verse 54.

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ ۖ أَذِلَّةٌ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٌ عَلَى الْكُفْرِينَ يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ ۚ ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ۝٤٤ ﴾ (المائدة/5: 54)

“O you who believe, whoever among you apostatizes from his religion, then Allah will bring a people whom He loves and they love Him, who are gentle with the believers and firm with the disbelievers. They strive in the cause of Allah and do not fear the reproach of the reproachful. That is the bounty of Allah which He gives to whom He wills. Allah is All-Wise, and All-Knowing.” (QS Al-Ma'idah: 54)

For Rabiah, love of God was the sole impetus behind every behavior of Rabiah al-Adawiyah and was also the main purpose of her devotion to God (Siregar, 1999). Ibnu Qayyim al-Jauziyah (691-751 H) classifies love into four types. First, love for Allah Himself. However, loving Allah alone does not guarantee salvation from His punishment or obtaining His reward, for even the polytheists and Jews love Allah. Second, loving everything that Allah loves. This love is the mark of a Muslim and distinguishes him from a disbeliever. Those most loved by Allah are those who are strongest in this love. Third, loving for the sake of Allah and to Allah. This is a progression from loving everything that Allah loves. Fourth, loving with Allah. This type of love is considered shirk. If a person loves something other than Allah not for Allah, then he has made the object of love a counterpart to Allah. This is the type of love that the polytheists have (Aminudin & Syuhada, 2021).

According to Rabiah al-Adawiyah, love is divided into two types: love that brings happiness and love that is the absolute right of Allah to accept. This is reflected in an expression as follows:

“I love You with two loves, love for myself and love for You. The love for myself is my constant remembrance of You. As for love for Yourself, it is the state of Your revealing the veil until I see You. Neither for this, nor for that, is praise due me, for You is praise both for this and for that.” (Rofi’ie, 2019).

Rabiah al-Adawiyah’s love for herself is love because she was created by God to enjoy His bounty. Whereas love for God is love that is driven by the desire to meet Him. That is what is considered the pinnacle of love in Rabiah’s Sufism (Santalia & Haq, 2024).

Al-Ghazali commented on Rabiah’s poem by stating that it is possible that the first love referred to by Rabiah is love for Allah, because He has given her His favor and grace by giving her life so that she can mention His name. While the second love is love because of the beauty (*Jamal*) and greatness (*Jalal*) of Allah, which is increasingly revealed to her. According to Al-Ghazali, it was at this time that Rabiah reached the highest degree of love (Rofi’ie, 2019).

Throughout history, the concept of divine love (*mahabbatullah*) introduced by Rabiah has been widely discussed by various circles because it has a much deeper meaning and essence than just ordinary love. According to Sufis, *mahabbatullah* is a level or stage that seekers of the divine path must pass through to achieve Allah's pleasure in worship. In fact, it is considered the culmination of all spiritual stages. Hujjatul Islam Imam al-Ghazali said, “After *mahabbatullah*, there is no more *maqam*, except for the fruits or effects that follow, such as longing (*shuq*), intimacy (*uns*), and contentment (*ridha*).” (Bakri, 2020).

Rabiah had reached the pinnacle of the *maqam*, which is *mahabbatullah*. Rabiah’s love for Allah is difficult to express in words. This means that divine love cannot be described with certainty, either through language or symbols. Sufis have various opinions in defining this divine love because its definition depends on the different spiritual experiences of each Sufi in his spiritual journey towards the Creator. Rabiah love is love that is spiritual and holy, not love based on lust or any other form of love (Aminudin & Syuhada, 2021).

### **3. The Core Teachings of Mahabbah Rabiah al-Adawiyah**

Rabiah’s love for Allah is the core of her Sufism. This love is pure and holy, with no expectation of anything in return. For Rabiah al-Adawiyah, *al-Hubb* is complete longing and surrender to Allah, with all her thoughts

and feelings directed only to Him. Love of Allah was the sole impetus for his every action and was also the ultimate goal of his life's devotion to Allah (Siregar, 1999).

The teachings introduced by Rabiah were a new evolution in spirituality, where the concept of *zuhud* practiced by Hasan Basri, Rabiah al-Adawiyah elevated the orientation of *khauf* (fear of Allah) and *raja'* (hope in reward) to a level of *zuhud* based on *hubb* (love). For him, pure and holy love was considered higher than *khauf* and *raja'*, because pure love does not consider rewards. Pure love directed towards Allah is the pinnacle of Rabiah's Sufism (Wasalmi, 2021).

Rabiah lived entirely in a state of *zuhud* and only desired closeness to God. She completely devoted herself to worship, repented, shunned the life of the world, and rejected all forms of material assistance given to her. Rabiah even prayed not to be asked for material things from God.

The word *al-Mahabbah* comes from *al-Habb*. There is another opinion that states that *al-Mahabbah* is believed to be derived from *ash-Shafa*, which means clear, because in Arabic, the clarity of the white color of teeth and their freshness are referred to as *hababul asnaan*. In addition, there is another view that states that *al-mahabbah* comes from *al-Habaab*, which is the foam that appears on the surface of water during heavy rain, which describes the turmoil of the heart that longs for an encounter with a lover. Another opinion states that *mahabbah* comes from *habbatul qolbi*, which means the deepest part of the heart, or from the term fruit of the heart, because love is considered a fruit of the heart whose influence is felt to the deepest part of the heart (Al-Munajjid, 2021). According to Harun Nasution, *mahabbah* is: Living in obedience to God and hating all forms of defiance against Him; Devoting oneself completely to the beloved; and Cleansing the heart of everything other than the beloved.

Love (*mahabbah*) for Allah is an extraordinary thing that should be instilled in every individual, because without *mahabbah*, a person is only at the earliest level, namely the level of converts. The love that has been embedded in a person's heart will have a big impact on his life. According to the book "Divine Love" by al-Ghazali and Rabiah al-Adawiyah, the love of a servant to his Lord has an important influence in human life. According to Rofi'ie (2019), some of which are: First, the onset of devotion to Allah occurs when one loves Him. In this state, one will naturally obey Allah and His Messenger. As a result, Allah will also love and forgive his sins. Secondly, love (*mahabbah*) has the ability to cleanse the heart from all defilement and dependence on the world. *Mahabbah* is the factor that has the greatest influence in the inner life of man. It is a source of strength and light that can cleanse and illuminate the heart, thus providing the necessary sturdiness. Thirdly, the lovers of Allah always yearn to remember Him, because a heart filled with love is always attached to the object of its love.

In contrast, a negligent heart has not felt the presence of love and is not attached to the beloved. Fourthly, the effects of this *mahabbah* include sincere love for Allah and rejection of things that are contrary to Him. This is the natural expression of love for Allah; when one loves Him, there will inevitably be a deep sense of love and rejection of everything that is contrary to Him. Fifthly, to prioritize obedience to Allah's commands over simply surrendering to Him, because sometimes one can surrender to something without really surrendering to it. A wholehearted willingness to obey Allah's commands is the highest level attained by those servants of Allah who love Him sincerely.

### Conclusion

Rabiah al-Adawiyah's teachings on acceptance of destiny and mahabbah (love of God) help overcome anxiety in modern times. Acceptance of destiny reduces fear and builds inner calm, while mahabbah strengthens spiritual connections and provides peace and strength to face life. Unlike ordinary, reward-oriented love, mahabbah is pure selfless love, focused on devotion to Allah and brings lasting inner peace. This research has practical benefits for a deeper understanding of Sufism, all of which contribute to an individual's emotional, spiritual and mental balance. This research still has limitations of empirical data on individuals who apply the teachings of Rabiah Al-Adawiyah in their daily lives, so it is expected to be an opportunity for further research.

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