

## ISLAMIC THEOLOGY IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ACEH A Study on ‘Abd Al-Ra’ūf Al-Sinkīlī’s Concept on *Tawḥīd*

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### Abstract

*This paper examines ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkīlī’s concept of tawḥīd. Using a historical approach and content analysis, this paper argues that tawḥīd is an important aspect in Islam and becomes an interesting discourse in the Islamic intellectual tradition, especially Sufism. ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkīlī stated that the first commitment for a human being is to accept the Oneness of Allah, and purify it from all things inappropriate to Him with the statement of *lā ilāha illā Allāh*. This affirms that Allah is believed to be the only Being. There is no existence without the existence of Allah (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*). This statement of creed implies two meanings: to negate any existence (*al-nafyu*), and to confirm only one existence (*al-ithbāt*), which is the existence of *al-Ḥaqq* (the true Being). Al-Sinkīlī also states that Allah is One, without our attempt to make Him One. Allah is true without a need to truth legitimation from humans.*

*[Artikel ini menjelaskan lebih lanjut tentang konsep tawḥīd ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkīlī. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis dan analisis konten, artikel ini berkesimpulan bahwa tawḥīd adalah aspek yang cukup penting dalam Islam dan menjadi diskursus yang menarik dalam tradisi intelektual Islam, khususnya dalam tradisi tasawuf. Menurut ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkīlī kewajiban pertama bagi manusia adalah menerima Keesaan dari Allah SWT, dan memurnikannya dari segala hal yang sepantasnya dengan pernyataan *lā ilāha illā Allāh*. Melalui konfirmasi ini, Allah diyakini sebagai satu*

*keberadaan, tidak ada keberadaan tanpa keberadaan Allah (lā ilāha illā Allāh). Dalam pernyataan itu, ada dua makna, untuk meniadakan keberadaan (al-naḥy), dan untuk mengkonfirmasi hanya satu keberadaan (al-ithbāt), yaitu al-Ḥaqq. Al-Sinkīlī juga menyatakan bahwa Allah itu Esa tanpa kita berusaha menjadikannya Esa, Allah itu benar tanpa memerlukan legitimasi kebenaran dari manusia.]*

**Keyword:** *Tawḥīd, 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī, Sufism*

## Introduction

Islam considers that religion is the basic principle and the regulator of life, and *tawḥīd* is the basis of all aspects of life. *Tawḥīd* which is manifested everywhere in the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) and becomes *qaidah fikriyah* (rationale) or a principle upon which the whole foundation of thought and human science is built. In Islam, everything revolves around the axis of the unity of God (*tawḥīd*) and the feasibility of science and technology is also based on that creed. *Tawḥīd* is a tool that lead humans to the knowledge about God, and can be effective in establishing an independent *tawḥīd* society.

This Islamic paradigm instructs humans to build all their thoughts based on Islamic *aqīda* (creed). We can understand this from the first Qur'anic verse to be revealed (meaning): "Read by (mentioning) the name of your God who created. (QS. al-'Alaq [96]: 1). This verse means that humans have been ordered to read in order to obtain various thoughts and understanding. But all of his thoughts must not be separated from the Islamic *aqīda*, because the command of reading (*iqra*) must be linked to God (*rabbika*). In other words, reading must be based on faith in Allah, which is the basic principle of Islamic *aqīda*. The explanation above shows that *tawḥīd* is the most important aspect in Islam. It becomes an interesting discourse in the Islamic intellectual tradition, especially in the tradition of *Sufism*. This article examines the concept of *tawḥīd* in *Sufism*,

especially according to ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkīlī (1616-1693), a seventeenth century very influential scholar in the Malay world.

A study on ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkīlī is initiated by a Dutch scholar, D. A. Rinkes. He is investigates the influence of al-Sinkīlī and the spreading of his mystical ideas and teachings in Sumatera and Java in particular, and in the Indonesian archipelago in general.<sup>1</sup> Research on al-Sinkīlī also attract the attention of Indonesian scholars Syamsul Bahri. He examines the mystical thought of al-Sinkīlī. Bahri highlights al-Sinkīlī’s thought on *wahdah al-wujūd* (the unity of existence) based on one of al-Sinkīlī’s works, namely *Tanbih al-Māshī*. Bahri discovers that ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkīlī emphasized the importance of *tawhīd* as the basis of religious life in general and *Sufism* in particular. Regarding the ontological status between Allah and the universe, al-Sinkīlī, according to Bahri, asserts the transcendence of Allah upon His creation (the universe). Meanwhile, in the case of the doctrine of *wahdah al-wujūd*, Bahri arrives at a different conclusion from other researchers on al-Sinkīlī. According to Bahri, al-Sinkīlī rejected *wahdah al-wujūd*, but embraced *wahdah al-shubūd*. Bahri concludes that al-Sinkīlī’s *Sufism* is a Sunni one, not a philosophical (*falsafi*) one. Al-Sinkīlī’s tendency to the Sunni *Sufism*, according to Bahri, is demonstrated by his thought which emphasizes on the importance of the Qur’an and *sunnah* as the foundation and guidance for muslim especially those who follow the sufis path, the significance of *tawhīd*, and his attention to rites (*‘amal*) and ethics (*akhlāq*).<sup>2</sup>

Oman Fathurrahman also observes the mystical thought of al-Sinkīlī in his book. The book is developed from his Master thesis defended at University of Indonesia. Fathurrahman uses a philological approach to the manuscript of *Tanbih al-Māshī* by editing the text, employing content

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Rinkes, “Abdoerraoef van Singkel: bijdrage tot de kennis van de mystiek op Sumatra en Java,” *thesis* (Leiden: Leiden University, 1909).

<sup>2</sup> Syamsul Bahri, “Tasawuf Syaikh Abd al-Rauf Singkel dan Paham *Wujūdīyyah* dalam Karyanya Kitab *Tanbih al-Māshī*,” *thesis* (Jakarta: UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2004).

analysis and translating the text from Arabic to Indonesian.<sup>3</sup> Another important academic research on this topic has been conducted by Baihaqi. In his bachelor's thesis, Baihaqi conducts a comparative study between the thought of Shams al-Dīn al-Samāṭra'ī and 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī.<sup>4</sup>

Another study has been conducted by Rasyad, Hermansyah and Zulkhairi who analyze the Arabic literary aspects in the works of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Ridwan Arif discusses the role of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī in reconciling *Sufism* and the *shari'ah* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Malay world.<sup>6</sup> And a study by Abid Syahni focuses more on al-Sinkīlī as a Qur'an interpreter with his commentary *Turjuman al-Mustafid*.<sup>7</sup>

Azyumardi Azra partially discussed 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī in his Ph.D. thesis which was later published as *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII*. In his book, Azra investigates the relation and network between Muslim scholars in the Malay world and their counterparts in the Middle East. In his analysis, Azra places al-Sinkīlī as one of the most important reformers (*mujaddids*) beside Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, Yusūf al-Makassārī (from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century), 'Abd al-Samād al-Palimbānī, and Daud ibn 'Abdullah al-Pattānī (from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century). This research contributes greatly to describing the network of Muslim scholars in the Middle Eastern countries. Contrary to al-Rānīrī who employed the radical approach, al-Sinkīlī, according to Azra, presented himself as an evolutionist reformer. It means that al-Sinkīlī emphasized

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<sup>3</sup> Oman Fathurrahman, *Tanbih al-Māshī: Menyoal Wahdah al-Wujūd Kasus Abdurrauf Singkel di Aceh Abad 17* (Bandung: Mizan, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Baihaqi, "Konsep Wahdah al-Wujūd dalam Perfektif Shams al-Dīn al-Samāṭra'ī dan 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī," *bachelor's thesis* (Jakarta: UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Rasyad, Hermansyah and Zulkhairi, "TanbīH Al-MāSyī Al-MansūB Ilā TarīQ Al-Qusyasyī: Analisis Uslub Bahasa Arab dalam Karya 'Abd Ar-Rauf As- Singkili", *Adabiyya*, Vol. 18, No. 35, 2016, pp. 62-82.

<sup>6</sup> Ridwan Arif, "The Role of *Shaikh* Abd Al-Ra'uf Al-Fansuri in The Reconciliation of *Sufism* And Shari'ah of 17th Century the Malay World," *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2018, pp. 207-45.

<sup>7</sup> Abis Syahni, "Mufasssir dan Kitab Tafsir Nusantara: Tafsir Turjumun al-Mustafid Karya Abd. Rauf as-Sinkili," *Journal Nun*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2019, pp. 33-51.

more on a reconciling approach when facing two contradictory views. Azra briefly touches upon al-Sinkīlī's mystical thought.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the richness of studies on 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī, there has not been any single study which attempts to investigate the concept of *tawḥīd* according to 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī. Most of the existing studies discuss al-Sinkīlī's mystical thought, commentary of the Qur'an, explanation of some prophetic tradition, and concepts of *sharī'ah*. This study is a library research, using a historical approach to obtain data and conducting content analysis. This study aims to explain further the concept of *tawḥīd* according to 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī.

### A Biographical Sketch of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī

The full name of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī is 'Abd al-Ra'ūf bin 'Alī al-Fanṣūrī al-Jāwī al-Sinkīlī. He was a Malay scholar coming from Fanṣūr, Singkil (modern: Singkel) in the Northwest Coast of Aceh. His father was an Arab, named *Shaikh* 'Alī. It is not known for sure when he was born, but according to Rinkes, as quoted by Azyumardi Azra, al-Sinkīlī was born around the year 1024/1615 and possibly had a relation with Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī, because in part of his works his name is always followed by the statement "the nation of Fanṣūrī"<sup>9</sup>

Concerning the birth of al-Sinkīlī, Rinkes tracks the time when al-Sinkīlī returned from the Middle East to Aceh in 1661 AD. According to him, the reasonable age for people starting to wander is the ages between 25 and 30 years old. Some evidences show that al-Sinkīlī certainly lived in Arabia for 19 years. Therefore, Rinkes suggests that 1615 is a perfect estimation as the year when al-Sinkīlī was born. Rinkes's conclusion has been later adopted by many scholars researching al-Sinkīlī.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII, Melacak Akar-Akar Pembaruan Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>10</sup> T. Iskandar, *Abdurrauf Singkel Tokoh Syatariyah (Abad ke 17)*; M. D. Mohamad, *Tokoh Sastra Melayu Klasik* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987), p. 72-73; P. Riddel, *Transferring a Tradition: Abdurrauf of Singkili's Rendering into Malay of the Jalalayn*

According to Hasjmi, al-Sinkīlī's ancestors came from Persia. They came to the Samudera Pasai Empire in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. They then settled in Faṇṣūr (Barus), an important old port city in the coast of West Sumatera. Al-Sinkīlī's father was a brother of Ḥamzah Faṇṣūrī, a prominent Sufi who spread the teachings of *wujūdīyyah* in Aceh at the time.<sup>11</sup> However, Azra doubts the statement of Hasjmi that al-Sinkīlī was really a nephew of Ḥamzah Faṇṣūrī, because there were no other sources that support this relation. Nevertheless, Azra acknowledges that al-Sinkīlī did have a sort of family relationship with Ḥamzah Faṇṣūrī, because al-Sinkīlī's name was followed by an attribution "the nation of Ḥamzah Faṇṣūrī" in some of his works, as mentioned above.<sup>12</sup> Yet, Azra's opinion is questioned by Oman Fathurahman who refers to Voorhoeve's analysis on the text. Voorhoeve views that the statement "the nation of Ḥamzah Faṇṣūrī" in Javanese manuscripts is written as "*kang abangsa Shaikh Ḥamzah Faṇṣūrī*", and is not intended to refer that al-Sinkīlī had any direct connection with Ḥamzah Faṇṣūrī, not even a teacher-student relationships, or family relationships. It is further intended to refer to places all over the West Coast of Sumatera, including Sinkil and Faṇṣūr. However, because at a later stage there was a famous *sufi* of Faṇṣūr, the statement "the nation of Faṇṣūrī" was eventually associated with "a nation of Ḥamzah Faṇṣūrī".<sup>13</sup>

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*commentary* (Berkeley: Monograph No. 31, Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California at Berkeley, 1990), p. 4-5; Oman Fathurahman, *Tanbih al-Māsyī al-Mansūb ilā Tharīq al-Qusyāsyī*, *Tanggapan al-Sinkīlī terhadap Doktrin Wujūdīyyah di Aceh Abad XVII* (Depok: Universitas Indonesia, 1998), p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> The mystical thought based on Ibn 'Arabī's teaching is called *wujūdīyyah* because it dictates that the only, real existence is God, while the existence of the universe comes from and is dependent to Him. Another name for *wujūdīyyah* is *waḥdah al-wujūd* (the unity of existence). A. Hasjmi, Syekh Abdurrauf Syiah Kuala, "Ulama Negarawan yang Bijaksana," *Universitas Syiah Kuala Menjelang 20 Tahun* (Medan: Waspada, 1980), p. 370; Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur...*, p. 190.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>13</sup> Oman Fathurahman, *Tanbih al-Māsyī*..., p. 26.

Quoting from Peunoh Daly, Azra views that al-Sinkīlī's father, *Shaikh* 'Alī (al-Fanṣūrī) was an Arab who married a local woman from Fansūr. They lived in Singkil, where their son, 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, was born.<sup>14</sup> This means that al-Sinkīlī's father was not a Malay, but a settler who came from Arabia. However, no other sources confirm this.

Al-Sinkīlī is often called 'Abd al-Ra'ūf 'Alī al-Fanṣūrī or 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Singkel or 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī. He is also called "*Tengku Shiah Kuala*", a more popular title among local people. At first, the title reads "*Tengku Shaikh* in Kuala" because of his knowledge in the field of religion. For the purpose of simplification, people started to call him *Shaikh* Kuala, and later it changes to "*Shiah Kuala*". Therefore, the title of *Shiah* Kuala given to 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī has nothing to do with *Shi'ia*, a school of theology that has a strong basis in Iran and Iraq.

Little is known about the early life of al-Sinkīlī. He received his early education from his family. About 1642, al-Sinkīlī went to Mecca to continue his pursuit of knowledge and learn from the scholars in the Ḥaramayn. When he returned to Aceh (around 1661 AD), his religious views soon attracted the attention of Sulṭāna Ṣafīyyah al-Dīn Shah, who ruled the Sultanate of Aceh from 1662 to 1675. The Sulṭāna assigned him as Qaḍī Mālik al-'Adil, or muftī who had a responsibility over the administration of religious matters. Al-Sinkīlī was appointed as a royal judge (*Qaḍī*) during the periods of Naqīyyah al-Dīn al-'Alam (1675-1678 AD) and Sulṭānah Zakīyyah al-Dīn (1678-1688 AD). Al-Sinkīlī died in 1693 AD and was buried beside the tomb of Teungku Anjong who is deemed as the most sacred person in Aceh, near to Aceh Kuala river, a village of Kuala Dayah Raya district, about 15 km from Banda Aceh. Hence, in Aceh, he was known as the Teungku in Kuala. Until now, his tomb has become a place of pilgrimage for many Muslims, either from Aceh itself or from other regions. Because of his fame, the name of

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<sup>14</sup> Peunoh Daly, "Naskah Mir'at al-Thullab Karya 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī," *Agama, Budaya, dan Masyarakat* (Jakarta: Balitbang Depag RI, 1980), p. 133; Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur...*, p. 190.



al-Sinkīlī is taken as the name of a university in Aceh, the University of Shiah Kuala.

Like other *sufi*, al-Sinkīlī is often connected with various mythical narratives. He is considered as the first scholar who Islamized Aceh, even though Islam might have been there since earlier times. Another narrative says that al-Sinkīlī was a man who managed to convert prostitutes who were allegedly offered to Ḥamzah Faṣṣūnī in the capital. All of the various narratives did not always correspond with historical facts, but at least they demonstrate the fame and the role of al-Sinkīlī as a great scholar in Aceh.

### **The Works of ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkīlī**

As a scholar and expert in various fields of religious sciences, al-Sinkīlī had produced a variety of essays that covered the field of jurisprudence, *ḥadīth*, *Sufism*, Qur’anic commentary, and other religious sciences. Al-Sinkīlī’s productivity is inseparable from his important positions in the kingdom of Aceh. He enjoyed the patronage and the protection of the rulers of the kingdom. His works were written in Arabic and some in Malay. According to Azyumardi Azra, most of his works are written in Arabic, for he realized that his Malay language was not as good as his Arabic because he had lived for a long time in Arabia. However, Azra’s opinion is questioned. Oman Fathurrahman argues that most of al-Sinkīlī’s works are indeed written in Malay, using the Jawi script, the Arabic alphabets adopted for the Malay language. So far, there have been approximately 22 works written by al-Sinkīlī, which cover the issues of *fiqh*, *tafsīr*, *kalām*, and *Sufism*.

His works in *fiqh* include *Mir’ah al-Ṭullāb fī Taysīr al-Aḥkām al-Sharīyyah li al-Mālik al-Wabbāh*, *Bayān al-Arkān*, *Bidāyah al-Bālighah*, *Majmūc al-Masā’il*, *Fāṭihah Shaikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf*, *Tanbīh al-’Amil fī Tahqīq al-Kalām al-Nawāfil*, *Waṣīyyah*, *Doa yang Dianjurkan oleh Shaikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf Kuala Aceh*, and, *Sakarāt al-Mawt*. His works in *sufism* include *Tanbīh al-Māshī al-Mansūb ilā Ṭarīq al-Qushāshī*, *Umdah al-Muḥtājīn ilā Suluk Maslak al-Mufridīn*,



*Sullām al-Mustafidīn*, *Piagam tentang Dhikr*, *Kifāyah al-Muḥtājīn ila Mashrab al-Muvahhidīn al-Qā'ilīn bi Waḥdāh al-Wujūd*, *Bayān Aghmad al-Mas'īl wa al-Ṣifāt al-Wājibah li Rabb al-Arḍ wa al-Samawāt*, *Bayān Tajallī*, *Daqā'iq al-Ḥurūf*, *Risalah Adāb Murīd akan Shaikh*, *Munyah al-Itiqād*, *Bayān al-Itlāq*, *Risalah A'yān al-Thābitah*, *Risalah Jalan Ma'rifah Allāh*, *Risalah Mukhtasarah fi Bayān Shurūṭ al-Shaikh wa al-Murīd*, *Sya'ir Ma'rifah*, *Otak Ilmu Tasawuf*, *Umdah al-Ansāb*, *Idāh al-Bayān fi Tahqīq Masā'il al-Adyān*, *Ta'yīd al-Bayān Hashiyah Idāh al-Bayān*, *Lubb al-Kashf wa al-Bayān li Mā Yarāhu al-Muḥtadar bi al-Tyān*, *Risalah Simpan*, and *Shaṭṭariyyah*.<sup>15</sup> In the field of *tafsīr*, his works include *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*, which is the first complete Malay commentary of the Qur'ān. In the *hadīth* field his works include *al-Arba'in Hadīthan li al-Imām al-Nawawī*, and *al-Mawāciz al-Badī'ah*.

*Mir'ah al-Ṭullāb fi Ma'rifah al-Aḥkām al-Shar'iyyah li al-Mālik al-Wahhāb* was written upon the request of Sultāna Ṣafīyyah al-Dīn. In this work, al-Sinkīlī presents a comprehensive discussion of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), not merely limited to the issue of worship, but also the problems of human interaction (*mu'āmalah*) that are rooted in Muslims' political, social, and economic life. This work can be considered as al-Sinkīlī's most famous work in this field, especially when compared to the work of al-Rānīrī, *Sirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, which focuses only on the issues of worship. The main source of this work is *Fath al-Wahhāb* by Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī. Al-Sinkīlī also refers to *Fath al-Jawāb* and *Tuhfab al-Muḥtāj*, both of which are the works of Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 973 H/1565 M), *Nihāyat al-Muḥtāj* of Shams al-Dīn al-Ramī, *Tafsīr al-Bayḍawī* of Ibn 'Umar Al-Bayḍawī (d. 685H/1286 M), and *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* of al-Nawāwī (d. 676 H/1277 M). Although *Mir'ah al-Ṭullāb* is not used any longer in the Malay world today, in the past the work was spread widely. Hooker says that Lumaran, a collection of Muslim laws, was widely used by Muslims in Maquidanao, the Philippines, since the middle of the 19th century AD.

<sup>15</sup> Oman Fathurahman, *Tanbīh al-Māshī*..., p. 29.

*Mir'ah al-Ṭullāb* is one of its primary resources.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, *Tanbīh al-Māshī al-Manṣūb ilā Ṭarīq al-Qushāshī* contains an explanation of the ontological relationship between *al-Haqq* (God) and *al-khalq* (creature). The explanations given were intended, among other things, to answer questions such as the ontological status of *al-khalq*, whether nature is identical with God or whether the universe has no form at all. It is the only book written by al-Sinkīlī in Arabic. Another book by al-Sinkīlī, *Umdāh al-Muḥtājīn ilā Suluk Maslak al-Mufridīn*, contains some practices to be implemented by a mystic. Al-Sinkīlī divides this book into several chapters. After the introduction (*muqaddimah*), the first chapter is about some obligations on a *mukallāf* (religiously an accountable person) to know the nature of human duties. The second chapter discusses the manners and procedures of recitation. The third chapter talks about the prophetic tradition, which talks about the virtue of *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, one of the major pillars of Muslim faith. The fourth chapter discusses the benefits of remembering *lā ilāha illā Allāh* in depth. The fifth chapter contains an explanation of *talqīn* between teachers and students with *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, ritual ordinances and *talqīn bai'a*. The sixth chapter discusses recommendable (*sunna*) prayers and *ẓikr* recitation by a *ṣālik*. And the seventh chapter discusses the properties of the congregation and the explanation of the Apostle's companions about the attitudes of the believers. In the closing of the book, al-Sinkīlī introduces himself through his scientific autobiography just to confirm his genealogy of noble origin and high value of teaching.<sup>17</sup>

It is worth noting that most of al-Sinkīlī's works are written in the form of prose. *Ma'rifaḥ* is the only work by al-Sinkīlī, which is written in a poetic style. Its manuscript was copied in Bukit Tinggi in 1859 AD. This poetic work discusses four components of Islam: faith, *Islām*, *tawḥīd*

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<sup>16</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur...*, p. 202.

<sup>17</sup> C. Snouck. Hurgronje, *Aceh: Rakyat dan Adat Istiadatnya*, trans. Sutan Maimoen from *De Atjehers*, Vol. II (Jakarta: Indonesian-Netherland Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS), 1997), p. 13-14.

and *ma'rifa*. This poem work also asserts that these four components determine if a person is considered as the perfect man (*Insān al-Kāmil*).

According to Braginsky, the discussion above shows that al-Sinkīlī can be considered as the true successor of writing tradition on 'religious-mystical poetry', which previously had been initiated by Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī. Braginsky's conclusion is quite interesting because he does not choose ar-Rānīrī as a successor of that tradition, although al-Rānīrī writes many poetic verses in his *Buṣṭān al-Salāṭīn*.

### Definition of *Tawḥīd*

'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī contributed to the development of the *waḥdah al-wujūd* doctrine, because he lived after the conflict over mystical thought, especially between the followers of Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī and Shams al-Dīn al-Samaṭra'ī who were the strong defenders of the *wujūdīyyah* teaching against the followers of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, who emphasized the heterodoxy of *wujūdīyyah* at the cost of *sharī'ah*. That fight was a big tragedy in Aceh, resulting in the burning of *wujūdīyyah*-related works and the killing of the followers of Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī and Shams al-Dīn al-Samaṭra'ī by al-Rānīrī and his followers. Following that tragedy, al-Sinkīlī wandered to Hijaz to learn religious knowledge, which later he greatly contributed to his career in the Malay world, especially in Aceh. Al-Sinkīlī lived in Hijaz for a long time and maintained intellectual dialogues with various streams of Muslim intellectuals. The fight against mysticism and *tarīqah* in Islam, especially in the Ḥaramayn, gave him the experience necessary for him to find a solution to the conflict in Aceh. Later, he developed the *tarīqah* of *Shaṭṭārīyyah* from his beloved teacher, which is often seen to work under the shades of *wujūdīyyah*. Al-Sinkīlī brought much influence to the social religions situation and condition of the Acehnese people at that time. His mastery of religious knowledge, his close relation to the leaders of Aceh, and his intellectual network with the Ḥaramayn enabled him to play a bigger role in religious fields and

to give a solution to religious problems at that time. Moreover, al-Sinkīlī was not a radical scholar like al-Rānīrī, who openly fought the teachings and practices of Islam, which were regarded as outside the framework of Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup>

Al-Sinkīlī seems to be very much concerned with the theme of *tawḥīd*, because in some of his work like *Tanbīh al-Māshī*, *Kifāyah al-Muḥtājīn* and *Sullām al-Mustafidīn*, he emphasizes the importance of *tawḥīd*. For instance, after he explains the writing background of *Sullām al-Mustafidīn*, al-Sinkīlī explains the first obligation of a matured Muslim which is to believe in the Oneness of Allah (obligation of *tawḥīd*). These works of al-Sinkīlī explain the attributes of Allah and His prophets: the good attributes, the impossible attributes, and the possible attributes (*jā'iz*).<sup>19</sup> In *Tanbīh al-Māshī*, al-Sinkīlī states that “actually the first obligation for you is to accept the Oneness of *al-Ḥaqq*, and purify Him from all things in appropriate to Him with the statement of *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, which covers the four stages of *tawḥīd*”.<sup>20</sup> After emphasizing the importance of *tawḥīd*, he explains what he means with that *tawḥīd*. It is an associated action, like association of something to the truth or association of something to the lies, instead of making Allah is One, without we try to make Him One. Allah is true without having a truth legitimating from us and also the association of Allah to the nature or the action which is suitable to Him.<sup>21</sup>

In our discussion on *Tanbīh al-Māshī* and *Kifāyah al-Muḥtājīn* above, al-Sinkīlī explains that the *tawḥīd* testimony (*shahādah*) stated by a student needs to be followed by a confirmation to release any attributes not

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<sup>18</sup> Quoting some hadiths, al-Sinkīlī warned Muslims not to accuse other Muslims from different Sufi orders as infidels. ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkīlī, *Tanbīh al-Māshī al-Mansūb ilā Ṭarīq al-Qushāshī*, based on four copies in National Library in Jakarta (A 655 and A 101) and Leiden University Library (Cod. Or. 7030 and Cod. Or. 7031), p. 45-56.

<sup>19</sup> Oman Fathurahman & Munawar Holil, *Katalog Naskah Ali Hasjmy Aceh*, Jakarta: Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat (PPIM) UIN Jakarta & Centre for Documentation and Area-Transcultural Studies (C-DATS): Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUS), 2007), p. 152.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Sinkīlī, *Tanbīh al-Māshī*..., p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Sinkīlī, *Kifāyah al-Muḥtājīn*..., p. 8.

suitable to *al-Ḥaqq*. That confirmation appears in one statement of *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, which covers four stages of *tanbīh*. Through this confirmation, Allah is believed as the one existence. There is no existence without the existence of Allah (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*). In that statement, there are two meanings, to negate any existence (*al-nafy*), and to confirm only one existence (*al-ithbāt*), which is the existence of *al-Ḥaqq*.

## The Oneness of God

According to the Qur'an, the unique and regular system which controls the entire universe is a clear evidence about the unique and the Oneness of the Creator and the Controller of the universe. We have been asked to think of the systematic and comprehensive system how to know the Oneness in the creation and command.<sup>22</sup>

Al-Sinkīlī states that one of the evidences concerning the Oneness of Allah is not from the imbalance of the universe. His statement is strengthened by a Qur'anic quotation: "*Had there been within the heavens and earth gods besides Allah, they both would have been ruined. So exalted is Allah, Lord of the Throne, above what they describe*" (al-Anbiya' [21]: 22). So, unbroken sky and earth are the evidence of the Oneness of Allah, and because sky and earth cannot be separated from the universe.<sup>23</sup>

When we state that "Allah is One" it means that God is the unique essence and nothing can equale Him. It is impossible to accept other existences equal to Him. Therefore, to understand the Oneness of God it is important to know God Himself truly; we ought to have a true conception regarding the term of "God" in our mind. If we understand this theme as to what it means, then we can reach a conclusion by our

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<sup>22</sup> Many verses in al-Qur'an attract human attention to the real signs in the system of the universe that show the oneness of Allah as the Creator. Some of that verses are: al-Baqarah (2): 163-164; al-Ancām (6): 94-99; al-A'rāf (7): 58; Yūnus (10): 3-6, 67-68; al-Naḥl (16): 10-20, 65-74, 80-81; al-Isrā' (17): 12; Yāsin (36): 33-41; al-Jāthiyah (45): 1-5, al-Ikhlāṣ; Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Baheshti, *Tuban Menurut Al-Qur'an: Sebuah Kajian Metafisika*, trans. Arif Mulyadi (Jakarta: Penerbit al-Huda, 2003), p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Sinkīlī, *Tanbīh al-Māshī*..., p. 2.

self that, if God is One, He cannot be two or many, and His essence cannot walk with the duality and multicity of concepts.<sup>24</sup>

There are two perspectives about the Oneness of God in Islamic thought: *tanẓīh* and *tashbīh*. Both of them have different perspectives in the foundation of *tawḥīd* or the Oneness of God. *Tanẓīh* designates the meanings of incomparability, transcendence, or unreached being. With *tanẓīh* Allah is beyond the qualities and attributes of His creatures. Armstrong explains that the word of *tanẓīh* comes from the word *naẓẓaha*, which means to “protect something in order not to be mixed with something else”. The rational faculty (*al-’aql*), Armstrong continues, is confirmed by the unreachability of Allah. Allah says “*there is no one like Him*” (QS. 42:11). It shows the incomparability of Allah. Meanwhile, in the same chapter Allah says “*and He is the most Hearing also the most Seeing*.” It shows His immanence. *Sufis* claim to know Allah through Allah (*al-’arīfīna bihi*), feeling the unity of His transcendence (*tanẓīh*) and His immanence (*tashbīh*). His transcendence associates Allah with the essence, while His immanence associates Him with God.<sup>25</sup> Kautsar Azhari Noer who defends Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of *wahdah al-wujūd* states that the doctrine does not only emphasizes on the immanency of God, but also on His transcendence. Ibn ‘Arabī, according to him, does not merely teach *tashbīh*, but also *tanẓīh*. The unity of *tashbīh* and *tanẓīh* are the principle of *coincidencia oppositerum* or *al-jam’ bayn al-’adād* in the system of Ibn ‘Arabī. It also exists at both spiritual (*al-bāṭin*) and the empirical (*al-ẓāhir*) levels, and between the oneness (*al-māhid*) and the multiplicity (*al-kathīr*).<sup>26</sup>

From those both perspectives, al-Sinkīlī emphasizes more on the *tanẓīh* than on the *tashbīh*. It is because of his prudence in reinterpreting

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<sup>24</sup> Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Baheshti, *Tuhan Menurut Al-Qur’an...*, p. 116.

<sup>25</sup> Amatullah Armstrong, *Khaṣanah Istilah Sufi: Kunci Memasuki Dunia Tasawwuf*, trans. M.S. Nasrullah & Ahmad Baiquni (Bandung: Mizan, 2001), p. 286.

<sup>26</sup> Kautsar Azhari Noer, *Tasawwuf Perennial: Kearifan Kritis Kaum Sufi* (Jakarta: PT Serambi Semesta, 2002), p. 27-28.

the concept of *waḥdah al-wujūd* that people in general did not understand precisely (unknowledgeable). Many times in his writing, he says about the inability of man to know the essence of God, and to know the essence of himself is the only way to the knowledge of God. In the understanding of self, al-Sinkīlī still confuses the ability of human to fully know himself. Therefore, when trying to give an interpretation of a prophetic saying (*ḥadīth*), “*man ‘arafa nafsahu faqad ‘arafa rabbahu*” (one who knows himself knows his God), he gives more emphasis on a meaning that he quoted from Abū Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, “*for a man who knows himself as a faqīr (dependent), it confirms that he knows his God.*”<sup>27</sup> For him, human can never fully know himself. He says “*...human’s soul cannot reach the essence of himself (iḥāṭah)*. This argument is strongly stated by the Qur’an, “*Tell it (o Muhammad)! The spirit (rūḥ) is in my God knowledge*”. With that verse Allah reminds human that he will never fully know himself, even though he attempts to be close to God. If human knowing God is fully impossible, human will accordingly never know exactly the essence of His word (*kalām*), His attributes and His action.<sup>28</sup> One who knows that God is too great to be known really knows Him.<sup>29</sup>

Although emphasizing on *tanzīh*, al-Sinkīlī denies the existence of *tashbīh* as implied in this statement, “and if connected to *al-Ḥaqq*, the universe looks like His shadow. There is no other essence beside the essence of Allah that has been known from the beginning.”<sup>30</sup> So, this universe is different from Allah, but not really separated from Him, because separation needs two existences, each of which stands by itself, while in reality it is only Allah the Almighty who can stand by Himself.

From the explanation above, in relation to the causality, we can analyze that the law of causality for al-Sinkīlī is a big power in the system of the universe. Although this law is created by God, human also has

<sup>27</sup> Al-Sinkīlī, *Tanbīh al-Māshī*..., p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10-11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.



power, but the relative one, because it is derived from God. With this power, human can do anything he wants under certain circumstances in this world. Therefore, in order to accomplish his actions, human needs to know the law of causality in his life. It is only through this law that man can act. Without knowing this law his actions become useless. Concerning human actions, it is God who enables human to act freely, to act whatever he wants as long as it is still under the rules of God.

It means that the causality system itself is under the domination of God's will. Human and other creatures can act only within the limits allowed by this system. But, God is beyond this system; it is not applied to Him because He is the Absolute and the Creator of this system. He creates causes with specific effects. When God has a will, He will create particular causes and surely make His will real. He can dismiss the power of fire that could have burned the Prophet Abraham, for example.<sup>31</sup> This shows how absolute God is.

## The Signs of God

The Qur'an contains an explanation that not only does Allah have the *bāṭin* attributes but also the *ẓāhir*.<sup>32</sup> Allah is *al-bāṭin* in the sense that He is hiding from any human knowledge. He is the transcendent God, the incomparable. Allah is also *al-ẓāhir* in the sense that He is the real God, whose manifestation can be found in any places. The reality of Allah is connected with the existence of divine signs inside the universe. These signs are intentionally spread by Him as a way for humans to know Him. He is like what is mentioned in a *ḥadīth* "the hidden Wisdom".

Al-Sinkīlī differentiates between God's empirical attributes and His spiritual attributes, between *al-ẓāhir* and *al-bāṭin* by giving an explanation to the incorrect concept of unity between God and His creation. He contends that the reality is the Truth except from the side of fusion, and

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<sup>31</sup> Al-Anbiyā' (21): 68-70.

<sup>32</sup> "*huwa al-ʾammalu wa al-ʾakhiru wa al-ẓāhiru wa al-bāṭinu wa huwa bikulli shay'in qadīr*" (QS. 57:3).

there is no difference in the One. Now if everything has been seen in the reality, then the unity of everything is not needed anymore, because the seen realm has its own law, and so does the unseen. The unseen law is an indistinct law, while the seen law is the real law.<sup>33</sup>

So, the empirical reality (*ẓāhir*) of God is the evidence of His existence to us, and His *bāṭin* remains because human reason cannot catch His Essence, and His Substance cannot be seen either in this world. Al-Sinkīlī continues his explanation, “He is real from the side of knowledge, but unreal in the side of form”.<sup>34</sup> Nothing is similar to the al-Haqq, but He covers the entire thing in this universe.

The reality of Allah cannot be illustrated by any appearance in this world. Because the physical eyes cannot catch Him, Allah shows His existence through physical evidences. His essence is manifested in multilevel empirical realities, a concept which in Islamic philosophy is known as emanation (*ḥayḍ*). Those evidences are His signs, which in the Qur’an are called as *āyāt* (signs).<sup>35</sup> Those multilevel evidences, on one hand, show the wisdom of Allah, and on the other hand, are directed to human in order for him to know God in an feasible way. In this regard, al-Sinkīlī states that it is only Allah Himself who can know Allah because human reason is incapable to know the substance of Allah. It is confusing for human to know the higher position of Allah<sup>36</sup> because human can only grasp His *tajalliyāt* (disclosures).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Al-Sinkīlī, *Tanbīh al-Māshī*..., p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Qur’an mentions this word around 400 times. In general the word *āya* means a sign that gives an information about a reality. More specifically, that word is used to show everything in the sky and in the earth that informs the existence of God. Sachiko Murata and William Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (USA: Paragon House, 1994), p. 52-53.

<sup>36</sup> The confused feeling is knowledge itself because from confusion human can attain knowledge. It is what has been illustrated by the Prophet when he prayed to God to give him knowledge about something. The Prophet did not pray in order for God to fix everything. The final step of knowledge is confusion. This knowledge will never be achieved except with sincere *ẓhikr* and pure *akhlāq*. Al-Sinkīlī, *Tanbīh al-Māshī*..., p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

The signs of God, according to Sachiko Murata and William Chittick, can be categorized into two categories: (1) the prophetic signs that consist of (a) the writing signs, i.e. the scripture, and (b) the physical miraculous signs shown by a prophet (*mu'jizah*); and (2) the natural signs, which consist of (a) the external signs of Allah in the universe (nature or society), and (b) the internal signs of Allah, that exist beneath human consciousness.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, al-Sinkīlī suggests that we should go back to the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* because the revealed knowledge with great spiritual importance has been delivered by the Prophet Muhammad in particular, and inside every human in general.<sup>39</sup> Through this knowledge, human can reach to and know Allah. Concerning natural signs, al-Sinkīlī contends that the world is created by Allah as a sign or as a facility in order for human to know His existence. Even he gives an analogy that the world is like *khātām* (stamp), whose function is a tool to know the stamped thing.<sup>40</sup>

From this point of view, al-Sinkīlī emphasizes that there are two signs of God that lead human to the knowledge about His existence: metaphysical sign and physical signs. The metaphysical signs work in the reality, while the physical ones work in the phenomena. Although both signs have different laws and work in different worlds, they are inseparable. The metaphysical signs become the foundation of the physical signs because Allah is the ultimate cause for the universe that even human senses cannot know. The existence of Allah can be known through His signs in the universe.

### **The Names and the Attributes of God**

As we have known, two statements of faith (*shahādātayn*, *ashḥadu an lā ilāha illā allāh wa ashḥadu anna muḥammadan rasūl allāh*) are the most fundamental pillar of Islam. These *shahādātayn* become a formula that

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<sup>38</sup> Murata dan Chittick, *The Vision*..., p. 54.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Sinkīlī, *Tanbīh al-Māsyū*..., p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

differentiate Muslims from non-Muslims. People who have sincerely uttered the *shahādatayn* are considered as Muslims. On the contrary, people who deny the pledge of *shahādatayn* are called infidels or *kuffār*. Therefore, the *shahādatayn* have an important value in Islam.

Al-Sinkīlī states that it is compulsory for every *mukallāf* to pledge the *shahādatayn* as the recognition of the Oneness of Allah and the truth of His book that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. The *shahādatayn* consist of the introduction to the attributes of God and His messenger: compulsory, impossible and also possible attributes. Al-Sinkīlī like other Ash'arī' followers states that Allah has 20 compulsory attributes, which are: *wujūd*, *qidam*, *baqā'*, *mukhālafah li al-ḥawādith*, *qiyāmuhu binafsih*, *waḥdaniyyah*, *qudrāh*, *irādah*, *cilmu*, *ḥayyah*, *sama'*, *baṣar*, *kalām*, *qādir*, *mūrid*, *ālīm*, *ḥayy*, *sāmi'*, *bāṣir*, *mutakallim*.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to those compulsory attributes, Allah also has impossible attributes, which are completely contrary to the compulsory. They also consist of twenty attributes. The prophet is also known to have compulsory, impossible and possible attributes. The compulsory attributes of the Prophet are: *Ṣiddiq*, *amānah*, *tablīgh*, *faṭānah*. Meanwhile, the impossible attributes are: *kidhb*, *khiyānah*, *kitman*, and *balāda*, while the possible attribute of the Prophet is his human nature.<sup>42</sup>

### The Stages of *Tawḥīd*

In his *Shaṭṭariyya* manuscript, al-Sinkīlī divides *tawḥīd* into four stages.<sup>43</sup> The first is *tawḥīd ulūhiyyah*, which is *tawḥīd* in worship. This kind of *tawḥīd* requires that Muslims always make Allah the only destination in all forms of worship; They should not worship except Allah. This *tawḥīd* has two sides: Allah's side and human's side. Allah's side implies that there is no being that deserves to be worship except Allah. Meanwhile, human's side

<sup>41</sup> 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī, *Umdah al-Muḥtājīn ilā Sulūk Maslak al-Mufridin* (Jakarta: Perpustakaan Nasional, tt.), p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3-4.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Sinkīlī, *Shaṭṭariyyah* (Jakarta: Perpustakaan Nasional, tt.), p. 8-9.

implies that human cannot worship other than Allah. The second is *tanḥīd af'āl*, which requires Muslims to believe that Allah is the Only Creator, the Ruler and the Controller of the universe. This *tanḥīd* is an attribute to the Oneness of Allah by confessing that Allah is God for the entire creatures, the Ruler, the Creator, and the Substance who makes living and death, and gives human safety or danger.

The third is *tanḥīd ṣifat*, which requires Muslims to believe in the singleness of God's attribute and His Substance. Both can never be separated from each other. Muslims should believe that Allah has *asmā'* (names) and attributes, without any *taḥrīf*, *ta'ṭīl*, *takyīf*, and *tamthīl*. And the forth is *tanḥīd dhāt*, which requires Muslims to believe that Allah is *wājib al-wujūd* (Absolute Being). There is no duality or even plurality concerning the Substance of Allah. His Substance is pure, and not arrayed from several parts like the creatures.

According to al-Sinkīlī, *tanḥīd dhāt* is the highest level of *tanḥīd* for people who follow the paths to Allah. The form of *tanḥīd dhāt* is like what has been explained by the author of al-Jawāhir, "You are not seeing in this substance except the substance itself, which is called as *tajallī dhāt*. This stage is the end of human journey in seeking Allah. There is no place closer from that worship."<sup>44</sup>

Like al-Junayd al-Baghdādī and al-Ghazālī, al-Sinkīlī divides *tanḥīd* into many categories. Quoting *Shaiḥ* Muḥammad al-Ghawth, he explains three types of *tanḥīd*. The first is *tanḥīd* for lay people to testify that there is no God other than Allah. The second is *tanḥīd* for specific persons who testify that there is no anything other than Allah. The third is *tanḥīd* for the most specific people who testify the Oneness of God's Substance, His undivided Substance"<sup>45</sup>.

This is like what Ibn al-'Arabī has said that *tanḥīd* is knowledge, thing, then knowledge. First, knowledge is a kind of *tanḥīd* in terms

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<sup>44</sup> Al-Sinkīlī, *Tanḥīh al-Māshī*..., p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

of explanation. This is the general *tawhīd* for general people. The deep meaning of *tawhīd* is the esoteric one, *ma'rifah Allāh* (knowing God). He also places *tawhīd* in the *maqām* (station) position. It means that *tawhīd* can be reached by people who have passed a number of *maqāms* (stations).<sup>46</sup>

Finally, al-Sinkīlī advise Muslims to return to the Qur'an and *hadīth*, for both are the great legacy that Prophet Muhammad SAW left to his people. In the face of these problems, both are the right formula. Look at the Prophet's saying, "I leave two things for you, the Book of Allah and my *sunnah*, then explain the Qur'an with my *sunnah*, for your eyes will never be blind, your feet will not slip, and your hands will not be cut off as long as you held them tight. "With this *hadīth* al-Sinkīlī emphasizes," Understand and hold fast the Qur'an and the Prophetic *Sunnah*, you will surely be guided and remain on the straight path."<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

Al-Sinkīlī is consistent to the theme of *tawhīd*, because in some of his works like *Tanbīh al-Māshī*, *Kifāyah al-Muhtājīn* and *Sullām al-Mustafidīn*, he emphasizes the importance of *tawhīd*. It is the first obligation for Muslims to accept the Oneness of *al-Haqq*, and purify it from all other things inappropriate to Him with the statement of faith *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, which covers the four stages of *tawhīd*. Al-Sinkīlī also states that *tawhīd* is an associated action, like associating something to the truth. Allah is One, without we try to make Him one. Allah is the Truth without a need to having a truth legitimation from humans. Humans should not associate Allah with nature or actions which are not suitable to Him.

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<sup>46</sup> Jauhar Hatta, *Penafsiran Ibn 'Arabī Atas Ayat-Ayat Tauhid* (Jakarta: UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2007), p. 167-168.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Sinkili, *Tanbīh al-Māsyūf*..., p. 7.

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