

9

Windows on the House of Islam

*Muslim Sources on Spirituality
and Religious Life*

Edited by

JOHN RENARD

1998

University of California Press

BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON

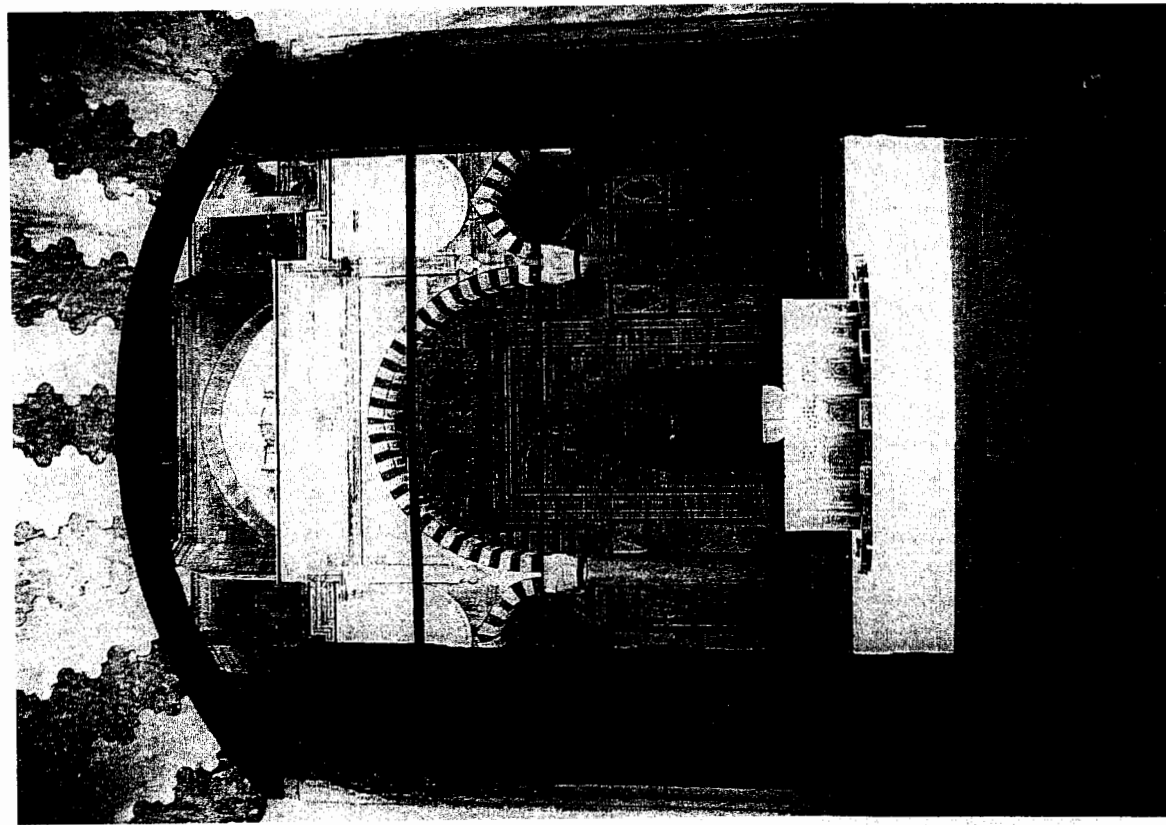


Figure 11. A view through the courtyard of the Mosque of Ottoman Sultan Selim II in Edirne, Turkey (1568–1575), built by Sinan, showing the ablution fountain and prayer hall entrance. (On Ottoman architecture, see also figs. 34, 35, 40, 41, 44, 50; and SD fig. 19.)

2 Devotion

Ritual and Personal Prayer

Muslim writers and artists have invested enormous energy in celebrating, teaching, and interpreting the devotional aspects of their tradition. From the complex of rituals expected of all, to the practices of smaller populations that vary from one region to another, to the aspirations of the individual who prays in silence, recent scholarship has made the riches of that tradition increasingly accessible. In this section Muslims past and present from all over the world offer their views on the core of the believer's response to God's initiatives. Visual themes will feature the ritual settings of daily liturgical prayer, pilgrimage, and funerary rites.

ON THE FIVE PILLARS

We begin with a fourteenth-century letter from India on the prerequisite of all devotion, right intention, and a contemporary Indonesian theologian's analysis of the relationship between ritual and faith. A hadith describes how Muslims came to pray five ritual prayers daily (see figs. 11–15); a recently discovered Swahili religious epic recounts a conversation between God and Moses on the requirements of the life of devotion; and a selection from a modern Indonesian *tafsir* explores various aspects of pilgrimage (see Figs. 16, 17).

* Sharaf ad-Din Maneri
On the Necessity of Proper Intention

PAUL JACKSON

Ahmad son of Yahya Bibi Razia was born in 1290 in Maner, not far west of Patna, the capital of the state of Bihar, India. He left home at age fourteen to study in Bangladesh; after nineteen years there he headed for home, but soon journeyed to Delhi in search of a spiritual guide. After nearly ten years with a shaykh of the Firdawsi order, Najib ad-Din, Ahmad again returned to Maner; but on the way he decided to spend some time in solitude in a cave near Rajgir. His reputation

for sanctity and sage advice spread abroad. So many people sought his counsel that he ended up remaining there nearly fifty years, until his death in 1381. Given the name Sharaf ad-Din (Eminence of the Religion), the shaykh developed a large correspondence with disciples unable to visit in person. The Shaykh 'Umar to whom this letter is addressed probably lived in the Gaya district. Maneri's hundreds of letters are sprinkled with citations of Persian poetry. His topic here is no less than the bedrock of devotional response to God's revelation: purity of intention.¹

Brother, Shaykh 'Umar, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Ahmad Yahya Maneri!

You must know that the position of the Law is: "On the Day of Resurrection, people will be raised according to the purity of their intention." If the desire and quest of God predominates within you, you will be raised up among the lovers and seekers of God. Their reward is: "Our Lord will shine forth radiantly." What room is there for heaven and hell here?

There is no room for heaven or hell:

Whatever you know serves but to veil Me.

If your desire and quest is mainly for heaven, you will be counted among the virtuous, for whom the reward is: "Gardens of paradise descend." 'Ayn al-Qudat* says: "Here we have eating and drinking, and there we have eating and drinking. God forbid that simply by eating and drinking we are the same as brute beasts!" Behold the boldness of the intrepid!

A spiritless dog searches for bones:

A lion cub pursues living marrow.

If your predominant passion is a desire and quest for the world, you will be counted among the worldly. Their reward is: "And a gulf is set between them and what they desire" (34:54). Here, dust has to be thrown

* 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani: a Persian Sufi executed in Baghdad in 1132 because of statements some judged heretical.

on the head, and one should grieve for oneself, and the same thing should be said as was mentioned by a luckless one:

Where shall I seek medicine for this pain?

My life is done: how can I grieve?

I am a plaything of the age, no matter what I do:

Nothing comes to completion, no matter what I do.

Look within yourself to see what is there. Do love and affection for God predominate? Or love and affection for paradise? Or love and affection for the world? Realize that whatever predominates now has its significance explained in the following couplet:

Whatever captures your attention in this world
Will be your path to union for eternity.

This is the meaning of the one who said: "God does not look at your faces or your works: He looks at your hearts and your intentions." The impact of this news on the souls of the righteous is similar to that of hell on the souls of the unbelievers and foolish people.

Until one experiences this work of seeking God,

What does he know about love and pain?

You know not this work, nor are you a lover:

You are dead! How are you fit to love?

O brother, asking questions about the state of the work takes its birth from you and me. If you are serious, correct your intention and desire, for the work of a believer cannot but be one. If he goes on pilgrimage to Mecca, he cannot keep trying to please his mother. If he does not go because he wants to please his mother, he simply cannot go on pilgrimage. The same applies to other works. By his intention he reaches out to all sorts of good deeds and acts of submission. The recompense for any good work performed by the believer has to be limited because the work is limited, while the recompense for a believer's good intention is unlimited, for there can be no limit to the intention of performing acts of submission and good deeds. "The good intention of a believer is better than his work." This would mean that if someone has a good intention and desire but for some reason is unable to perform the work—as, for ex-

mple, a sick person is unable to perform the pilgrimage; a weak man cannot go out to fight on the way of God; and a poor person cannot bestow alms—the reward and recompense would certainly be the same as that of the person who performs all these works.

It is related that the Messenger set out on the jihad of Tabuk during which the Muslims had to undergo many labors and trials. He said: "It is perfectly true that there are some people in Medina who have not seen his desert, nor have they defrayed any of the expenses involved, nor have they suffered any trial or sorrow on the way of God. Nevertheless, they are participating in all things along with us."

People said: "O Apostle of God, how could this be? They are still in Medina." He replied: "There was an excuse for their remaining. They are accounted as present with us because of the perfection of their intention." From this it is proved that the work is of the heart, not of clay, and there is an enormous distance between clay [gi] and heart [di]. The abode of intention is the heart, not clay. Here one needs to be careful so that eagerness finds no entrance. That is the meaning of the words

From the door of the body to the Ka'ba of the heart,

There are, for lovers, a thousand and one stages.

Along this way, befriend your heart:

Make provision for a hundred thousand stages.

O brother, the science of intention is exceedingly refined and subtle. Not everyone is capable of traveling along that road. Whatever a master of the heart does is in accordance with his intention, for the intention of each person is a measure of his faith. The faith of someone who follows others is rooted in imitation; that of the rationalist, in proof; while that of mystic flows from personal experience. Look at the astonishing work of the renowned Righteous One [Abu Bakr]! He left his wife and children behind in Mecca and migrated from Mecca together with the Chosen One [Muhammad]. Khwaja Uways Qarani* did not leave his mother behind. When you examine their intention, both are correct.

* Uways Qarani: a legendary figure of Yemen during Muhammad's time, after whom a group of religious seekers, guided solely by God's grace without aid of a spiritual guide, is named (Uwaysis).

There were a number of people from earlier generations who abandoned submission to God because they did not have a correct intention therein. Ibn Sirin* did not recite the funeral prayer for Khwaja Hasan Basri.[†] He said: "This is not my intention." Thus it is that renowned men say that it is possible that his not saying the prayers was better than their recital by others, as far as merit was concerned. What do you know about why people pray, or why they do not pray? What do you know about their motive for going on pilgrimage to Mecca, or for not going? Do you know why people fast or not? The heads of those addicted to habit and custom spin at this stage. Inevitably, habit and custom are one thing, while the way of the prophets and saints is something else.

When can you travel along this way, O friend?

Can a spider hope to travel like an elephant?

Nowadays everybody finds contentment in foolish ideas and feels satisfied with false opinions. If religion were as easy as people think it is, then prophets and saints would not have grown anxious, nor would the brave have become faint hearted. . . .

You should know that the behavior of the world is one thing, while lovers form a different category. They do not have the strength to wait. They seek the Promised One here and now. Intoxicated with love they all say:

Either give me what I want, or free me of my desire:

Don't talk about tomorrow's promise! Do this or that.

Rabi'a of Basra* was asked why she did not wish for paradise. She said: "First the neighbor, then the house." Look at the firm resolve of this wearer of a skirt and grieve over your fine dress and turban-sash and know that, in reality, you are neither a man nor a woman. Simply ask, "What am I?"

On one occasion Imam Shibli[‡] disappeared. His disciples went looking

* Ibn Sirin (d. 728): a Hadith scholar and renowned interpreter of dreams.

† Hasan al-Basri (d. 728): an early ascetic and a father figure of Sufism.

‡ Rabi'a (d. 801): a poetess and the most famous woman Sufi; see Rabi'a's hagiography in part 3, and her dream account in part 7.

§ Abu Bakr ash-Shibli (d. 945): an early Sufi of Baghdad and friend of Hallaj.

or him. They saw him in the garb of hermaphrodites and seated in their midst, looking just like one of them. They threw dust upon their heads and cried out: "O Leader of the Age, what is this all about?" He replied: "I saw that I could not be called a man, nor did I have the features of a woman. Thus I could not be anything else than a hermaphrodite. And what could be better for a hermaphrodite than to be among kindred folk?" Khwaja 'Attar* says:

When a madman seeks with such artful boasting,

Don't blindly rush to do battle with him.

Keep your tongue far from his enticing words:

Hold excused a lover in his madness.

Wise people experience the difficulty of the Law,

While those without hearts love being honored.

Without doubt a madman, even if at fault,

Speaks arrogantly, no matter what he says.

In short, O brother, each action that a person performs cannot be bereft of intention and purpose. If he is interiorly filled with love of this world, his intention and purpose will be of this world and, in his actions, the same will apply. No matter how much he prays, fasts, goes on pilgrimage, or gives alms, it will all be tinged with worldliness. On the other hand, if his inner disposition is that of a love for what lies in store for him, and that is the purpose and intention of his actions, then, whether it be eating or drinking, it will be related to the world to come. "From each vessel the contents will appear" is a well-known adage.

There is another group of people known for being royally audacious. Whatever they do is done purely for His sake. "My prayer, my worship, my life, and my death are for God, the Lord of the worlds" would be attributed to them. Their splendor is: "They seek His face," with their feet in this world and their heads in the next. They do not lower them until they hear from the Friend: "You are, in truth, My favorites."

* Farid ad-Din 'Attar (d. 1220): a Persian poet, author of the didactic religious epic *The Conference of the Birds*.