

of good and evil, a hidden coming prophet, and an apocalyptic reversal to which the faithful looked forward. Christian and Manichaean influences on Shi'a cannot be excluded either, for Husain emotionally becomes virtually a suffering savior.

Islamic Mysticism

A discussion of Islam would be superficial if it dealt only with its outward, official history and practices, and left out the mystical wing which has frequently given the faith of Muhammad another face. This tradition is known to the West as Sufism, and its practitioners as Sufis. Their God is the same God as that of the Koran and the tradition. But they seek not only to follow his external commandments, but to know him intimately and even to lose themselves in love and loss of self into the depths of his being. Around the Sufis' mystic quest have clustered a number of auxiliary practices, many of great beauty: spiritual masters, parables and wisdom tales, spiritual fraternities, schools of meditation, techniques of attaining ecstasy through music, chanting, and dance.

Sufis believe their approach is grounded in the inner experience of the prophet himself. Muhammad clearly prayed deeply and knew God intimately, even experiencing trance and rapture. Certain verses of the Koran support the quest for mystical awareness of God everywhere: "To Allah belongs the east and the west. Whichever way you turn there is the face of Allah."³⁹

Another suggests the esoteric side of things: we are told that Allah took his servant from a holy shrine to a further shrine to reveal certain divine signs.⁴⁰ According to some traditions, this last passage refers to God's mysteriously transporting Muhammad in a single night from Mecca to Jerusalem, and then taking him up into heaven to show him sighs not seen by other mortals; accounts of this journey at second hand probably helped inspire Dante's *Divine Comedy*.⁴¹

Thus Sufis believe not only that their way is that of Muhammad himself, but many of them also that—just as in a sense Muhammad's declaration was but a restoration of the true primordial faith of Abraham and of Eden—Sufism is really a timeless path known to the wise in all generations.

Doubtless there is truth to this, represented historically by the parallels and possible influence between Sufism and Asiatic shamanism, Greek Neoplatonism, Christian monasticism, and the lore of Hinduism and Buddhism. But within Islamic history, Sufism became visible as a movement about a century after Muhammad. Like Shi'a but in a different way, Sufism was a reaction against the luxury and corruption, the loss of original desert simplicity and pure faith, which many serious Muslims saw overtaking the now triumphant Islamic world of the caliphates.

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³⁹ Dawood, *The Koran*, p. 336; verse cited above, note 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁴¹ See J. R. Porter, "Muhammad's Journey to Heaven," *Numeri*, XXI, fasc. I (April 1974), 64-80.

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more inward way wore as a mark distinguishing them from those content with outward conformity to Islam.

Sufi inwardness made of greatest importance one's personal relation of faith and love to God, a love which was its own reward. Never has this attitude been more eloquently expressed than by the mystic Rabi'a al-'Adawiya of Basra (d. 801), a former slave who had been trained as a flute player. At night she would pray thus:

Oh my Lord, the stars are shining and the eyes of men are closed, and kings have shut their doors, and every lover is alone with his beloved, and here am I alone with Thee.

She said also:

I saw the Prophet in a dream, and he said to me, 'O Rabi'a, dost thou love me?' I said, 'O Prophet of God, who is there who does not love thee? But my love to God so possessed me that no place remains for loving or hating any save Him.'

And again:

It is a bad servant who serves God from fear and terror or from the desire of a reward.... Even if Heaven and Hell were not, does it not behoove us to obey Him?⁴²

This is a pure Sufi spirit echoing down through the ages. As time went on, this sheer love of God came to be more and more organized, with particular practices and doctrines and societies shaping the lives of those who followed its path.

Thus, Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d. 874) described the stages of the spiritual life leading up to *fana*, complete passing away of the separate individual self into God. The *fana* state was often manifested in ecstatic spiritual intoxication; in that state al-Bistami, hardly knowing whether it was he or God in him whose words they were, did not shrink from expressions like 'I am your Lord,' 'Praise be to me, how great is my majesty,' or 'My banner is greater than that of Muhammad.' The conventional were duly shocked.

Finally, in 922, one of these God-possessed persons of uninhibited rapture, al-Hallaj, was executed at Baghdad for saying 'I am the Truth'—'Truth' being an attribute of Allah. The tragic al-Hallaj had taken Jesus, in Islam the exemplar of the inward mystic, as his model of the God-incarnate man, and appropriately he was crucified.

At the same time, a reaction in favor of a more orthodox Sufism set in. Junayd of Baghdad (d. 911) emphasized that the claims of mystical experience cannot be given priority over normative moral and customary demands of religion, and that the nature of love itself demands that, even in the mystic's 'identity' with God, there be also a difference between him and God.⁴³

The great al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who had been a conventional Muslim scholar until he experienced, and then sought to interpret, the mystic path, made Sufism a respectable part

⁴² From Margaret Smith, *Rabi'a the Mystic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. 22, 99, 100. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

⁴³ See the discussion of Junayd in R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

of Islam. He interpreted Sufi inwardness as an attitude to accompany the outward acts and bring them to life, as we have seen in his treatment of the hajj.

The philosopher and Sufi master Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240), a spiritual follower of al-Ghazali, moved in the direction of a pantheist philosophy as the intellectual expression of what the Sufi "knows" and enacts. For him, as we have seen, God was not only the source of all, but the sole reality. Within the divine, however, are gradations; between the human and the divine is a realm of images that reflect in the human imagination—angels, the Day of Judgment, and so forth—and on these images religious visions and events are grounded.

The Sufi way has made much of *shaykhs*, spiritual teachers and masters, and *wali*, saints. Drawing initially from Shi'a sources, Sufis also have talked of hidden holy ones, and of a coming Mahdi or apocalyptic teacher-savior. According to Sufism, the saints are different from the prophet Muhammad, but in their own way nearly as great. For a Sufi to attain *waliya*, sainthood or being a "friend of God," was as good a goal as outward Islam, submission.

Indeed, by the tenth and eleventh centuries the twin goals of sainthood and submission came together, as the notion gained force in Sufi circles that one should submit to one's *shaykh* or spiritual guide. The *shaykh*, called farther east around India a *pir* or *murshid*, was more or less an Islamic parallel to the Hindu guru. The very self-abnegation of submitting to his commands "as a dead body in the hands of its washers" was an experience of egolessness and bore its own spiritual reward, whether the guide was wise or not.

Many were wise, but their wisdom was often expressed in peculiar tales and gnomic wisdom. We are told, for example, that a certain man fell down in a seizure on a street of perfume sellers. People tried to revive him with various of the sweet odors of the tradesmen, but to no avail. Finally someone thrust sharp, pungent, ammonious ordure before his nose, and he arose. The implication is that only by the different, even the disconcerting, can the walking dead can be brought to life.⁴⁴ The methods of differentness have *shaykhs* employed, with their paradoxes and their chanting, dancing, and trances.

Since the labors of al-Ghazali, Sufi masters generally have emphasized doing the normative devotions of Islam, but with a special mind to the inward as well as the outward aspects. But beyond that, there are special ecstatic techniques for knowing God which the *shaykhs* taught: practices like *dhikr* (or *wird*), reciting the beautiful names of God on beads, or even whirling dances like those of the dervishes, or feats of shamanistic fervor like rending garments, eating glass, or cutting oneself without pain to show one's divine absorption.

Practices like these were developed by the great Sufi orders which spread across Islam after the tenth century. They still exist, although since around 1900 their power has diminished. For the most part they were not celibate monastic orders, although in some instances an inner core of devotees or leaders might—whether officially married or not—exemplify a level of commitment comparable to that of monks or abbots in other faiths. But for the bulk of lay adherents, the orders were more like lodges: one would receive a formal initiation by a *shaykh* or *pir* of the order, and then would practice its devotion

⁴⁴ Idries Shah, *Tales of the Dervishes* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970), p. 143.

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corporately and privately. Some Sufi orders, especially in the Turkish Empire, had political and revolutionary overtones. Some have been suppressed by modern Islamic governments because the whole Sufi attitude was considered by modernizers to inculcate a medieval, superstitious, nonproductive mentality. Ironically, at the same time Sufism has been discovered and much appreciated by many outside of Islam.

Sufi orders with their saintly masters were and are a great proselytizing force for Islam. It was primarily in their gentler, more mystical form that Islam entered India and Indonesia; it is easy to speculate that, apart from its empathetic presentation by such mystic saints, Islam might have had but little success in these cultures, so differently oriented from Arabia. Today Sufi orders are having great success in spreading Islam in Africa.

The prestige of the shaykh made much of Islam into a cult of personalities. Shaykhs became saints, wali, who had cosmic as well as temporal meanings. It was said to be the saints who kept the world together generation after generation. In an invisible hierarchy were varying degrees of saints: "successors," "pegs," "pillars," and finally *qutbs*, "poles" or "axes" of the universe. These last, according to a popular tradition, are of a certain definite number in every generation, and when one dies he is replaced by another. They are the true pivots upon which the world in its inner life turns. They may not be known to the general public—indeed, a saint in his humility may not even know himself that he is a saint, much less an axis of the world—but should he fail in the mysterious work his inward sanctity enables him to do, the social order and the earth itself would fall apart. Finally, Sufis spoke of the enigmatic leader and guide of the saints themselves, al-Khidir, "the Green One," a generally invisible but immortal and ever-youthful guide who appears at time of need to the dreams or waking sight of the sincere questor on the mystic path.⁴⁵

The Muslim public knew well the reputations of the more visible saints. They flocked to their presences and, after their deaths, to their tombs. In the heyday of popular Sufism, the twelfth through nineteenth centuries, legends of saints were rife, and pilgrimages to their holy places rivaled Mecca in popularity. Many of them are still much frequented. In Shi'a areas, the shrines of Imams, like that of Husain himself at Karbala in Iraq, are thronged. Countless village mosques contain the tomb of a local saint, unmarked by image or picture but well known and visible because of its coffin shape, inscription, and the many colored flags on the building.

In the valley of Bamian in Afghanistan, famous for its ancient Buddhist monastic caves, but whose population is now strongly Muslim, I came across a shrine of an "ice-burning saint." According to the local legend, this mystic had once come with his disciples into the valley and begged for fuel with which to cook food for himself and his band. But the villagers, not recognizing him for what he was, hardened their hearts against his request. The saint then sent a disciple into the nearby mountains to get some ice, and by a miracle he caused the ice to burn and used it for firewood. Thereupon the awestruck villagers believed in him and besought the holy man to stay, which he did. When he died, the shrine was built over his tomb, a modest domed edifice of mud with a wall around it,

⁴⁵ See the discussion of Muslim saints in Farzlar Rahman, *Islam* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1968), pp. 162-65 and in von Grunebaum, *Muhammadian Festivals*, pp. 67-84.

all festooned with red banners. I saw bearded men of the village circumambulate the tomb inside the walls muttering dhikr as they went; in setting out, each stooped to pass under a table holding the Koran.

One sensed here both the devotional power of popular Islam, and the basic similarities of the central Asiatic myths and cults of men or power, whether in shamanistic, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian forms—for the wizard saint has been a constant in all the many faiths which have swept across the wild mountains, deserts, and forests of that vast area of the earth.

Islam generally believes that the saints have power to perform miracles. Muhammad did none, except the miracle of the Koran itself. But the saints, like Jesus who is their esoteric model, have a different calling from that of the public envoy of God, one at once more arcane and more popularly appealing. They must work wonders to show the transcendence of spiritual attainment over the material, and do works of mercy which help hold the universe together. They are masters of the realm of archetype and dream that lies above this world and below God, as written in the philosophy of al-Ghazali and Ibn al-Arabi. The *baraka*, or numinous power of the saints, rests eternally over their tombs and relics, and for this reason pilgrims to these sites are often healed and blessed.

Islam in the World Today

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, Islam finds itself second only to Christianity in number of active members among the religions of the world. The devastation of Buddhism and the traditional religions of China by Communist revolutions leaves no doubt about that status. Moreover, as we have seen, Christianity today appears to be shorn of the overconfidence with which it began the century, though still possessing much strength. But Muslims have little hesitancy in viewing the position of their faith and of Islamic culture at century's end as far stronger than at its beginning.

In 1900 the Muslim world was notoriously in decline compared to Europe and America. It was sunk in poverty and technologically backward. Most of it was subject to humiliating European colonial rule: the Dutch controlled Indonesia, millions of Indian Muslims as well as Hindus lived under the British flag, France ruled vast reaches of Muslim North Africa. The only sovereign Muslim states were the Ottoman (Turkish) and Persian empires which sprawled over much the Middle East; however, they were anachronistic and corrupt regimes, if anything more oppressive than colonial rule to their long-suffering subjects and moreover, despite nominal independence, subservient to Europe in countless ways. Finally, Islamic faith itself in 1900 was not at its best. Intellectually it was seldom in touch with the modern world, and on the popular level was pervaded by the sort of mysticism that many observers considered neither authentic Islam nor able to meet modern needs.

But in the last quarter of this century, this situation has changed dramatically. Rarely, since the stunning spread of Islam in its first century, have the fortunes of a religion changed so remarkably in so short a time. Virtually all Muslim lands—except those in the Soviet Union—have attained independence. The old Ottoman and Persian Empires are

now Turkey (much diminished in size) and Iran. With the regimes and far-reaching changes. Some Muslim countries mostly from petroleum; lands like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia: capita income that are among the highest in the world. Islam through a high birth rate in many places and through missionary the establishment of Islamic Centers have given the religion world. Islam is also experiencing vigorous intellectual ferment for simplification and purification of the faith and its practice.

Change is uneven, of course. The House of Islam in the richest nations in the world, but also some of the poorest, like of its resurgence have seemed, at least to outsiders, as more accompanied by religious zealotry than real spiritual awakening. always well judged by outsiders, and require considerable personal ultimate meaning can be discerned. However one assesses it, religious ferment and renewal associated with nation-building comparable to what the Protestant Reformation meant to the Christian also produced much war and bigotry, yet nonetheless helped stages of historical development.

Not infrequently, the resurgence of traditional Islam has self-assertion of underprivileged classes in Muslim countries urban masses, against the westernized elite who typically dominated economies of these countries in their early period of modern first three decades after World War II. While those elites promote nation-building and the development of modern (the transportation, education, and political institutions, their behavior readily apparent to those not of the elite class, while their disavowal, family, and Islamic moral and spiritual values have over, the elites are commonly perceived as inwardly content and unduly eager to cultivate the ways and friendships of Americans.

The political and social upsurge of traditional Islam which late 1970s, most conspicuously in the Iranian revolution, outburst of long-pent-up hostility by nonelites against the defiant Muslim fundamentalist preachers and mystics, the seizure upon pure Islam as the symbol for what they stood for their faith and culture, the true though semi-alienated life-sources theirs though from which they also were semi-alienated. The Shari'a become the law of the state as well as the mosque, that wealth be fairly distributed according to Islamic ideals of dress, family life, and education be publicly honored rather than

We shall now survey the situation of Islam in the late twentieth world. Saudi Arabia incorporates the land where the faith cities of Mecca and Medina. Islam there is firmly established which rejects mysticism of the Sufi sort and demands a state based of the Koran and Shari'a, dominates it. Under its influence