

elsewhere. As they claim to possess a religion that emerged after the one preached by Muhammad, "the Seal of the prophets," traditional Islamic law cannot tolerate them, lofty as their ideas may be.

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## *Mystical Islam and Sufi Brotherhoods*

It is conceivable that the inner life of Islam might have been suffocated in the ever-narrowing net of dogmatic definitions and scholastic methods, or in the external ritual and legal prescriptions which seemed to increase almost year to year. However, a new current, mysticism, appeared in the world of Islam and gave it, in many areas, a special form. This mystical current is called Sufism, a word derived from *sūf*, "wool." From this term one can understand the originally ascetic character of the movement, for just as early Christian ascetics in the Near East used to wear woolen cloaks, thus early Muslim ascetics too donned a dark, usually dark blue, woolen garb. To understand the reason for the growth of such a movement, one has to remember that soon after Muhammad's death tension arose between the world-conquering Umayyad rulers and pious believers, who were deeply influenced by the terrible descriptions in the Koran of the Last Judgment and felt the need of

incessant repentance. Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), who is quoted by most theological schools as a witness for their opinions, always emphasized the fear of Hell:

O son of Adam! You will die alone and enter the grave alone and be resurrected alone, and it is with you alone that the reckoning will take place! O son of Adam! It is you who is intended! It is you who is addressed!

In Hasan's environment and probably under his influence, the first-known ascetics of the Iraqi and Syrian lands appeared, men and women who devoted themselves as far as possible to nightly vigils, who extended their fast far beyond the prescribed times, and who carefully avoided not only things prohibited or disapproved of but even those which were permitted but were, in the eyes of sensitive people, perhaps of doubtful merit. They constantly fought against the *nafs*, the lower soul principle that "instigates to evil" (Sura 12/53), for according to a saying of the Prophet, struggle against the *nafs* is "the greatest *jihād*," the true "Holy War" in the service of God. Unceasing control of each and every thought and action was refined to become a science of its own, so that one's whole life could be led in perfect *ikhlas*, "purity of devotion".

Ascetic movements developed not only in Mesopotamia but even more in Eastern Iran, in Khorasan, where one cannot exclude a certain influence of Buddhist monastic ideals. The first noted ascetic of the East, Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. ca. 777) hailed from Balkh, in the ancient province of Bactria. Although he was the scion of Arab settlers, a central motif of the Buddha legend was transferred to him: he becomes in legends the prince who leaves home to wander into homelessness.

For Ibrahim and his compatriots one of the most important aspects of true religious life was absolute trust in God, *tawakkul*, which, however went far beyond the Prophet's practical advice: "First tie your camel and then trust in God!" For the early Sufis it meant to refrain completely from carrying any money or food when traveling, to refrain

also from taking any medical help, or even to refuse food that was not directly given to them. Stories of this exaggerated *tawakkul*, which often verge on the grotesque, are plentiful in early hagiographies. For later Sufis, *tawakkul* remained central as an ethical attitude but was not practiced in this overstressed form. One understood that *tawakkul* was basically nothing but the practical aspect of *tauhid*: one trusts in God because there is no bestower of goods but Him, and His name *ar-razzāq*, "the One Who nourishes," is a promise that He will care for all the needs of His creatures.

Another central concept in early Sufism is *faqr*, "poverty." The Sufis relied on the Prophet's saying: *Faqrī fakhrī*, "My poverty is my pride." *Faqr* in the first place requires that one renounce any worldly possessions. Such material poverty remained the Sufi ideal for a long time (even though in later centuries many of the "poor" (*faqir*, *dervish*) turned into influential landlords and, contrary to the early ascetic ideals, even cooperated with the ruling classes). But as *tawakkul* was interiorized into an ethical ideal, so was poverty: it means to feel poor and destitute in the presence of the Eternally Rich, self sufficient God (cf. Sura 35/16). Nothing really belongs to a human being; the wealth of this world lasts only for a few days. For this reason some Sufis claimed that the spiritual rank of a grateful rich person able to part with all his wealth in a single moment without regret is comparable to that of a poor person who patiently suffers his poverty. The poor, however, who is grateful—even for not receiving anything—is superior to all others, for gratitude, like all other stations on the mystical path, has three stages: thanks for receiving something, thanks for not receiving it, and gratitude for the capacity of being grateful. *Faqr*, however, could be taken in the sense of "giving up every good," and even more "giving up hopes and wishes for the next world." It can become almost a coterminus of *fanā*, "annihilation" (*Entwerden* "de-becoming"). This is the view expressed in the frequently quoted saying that appears first in the twelfth century: "When poverty becomes perfect it is God." That is, the

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creature in his absolute poverty is lost, so to speak, in the eternally rich Creator who becomes everything for him.

In the uninterrupted struggle against the *nafs*, not only are poverty and fasting, nightly vigils and, often, silence required, but also constant introspection; worse than clinging to worldly goods is haughtiness, complacency, and striving for fame and praise. "The *nafs* has a Koran and a rosary in the one hand and a dagger in the sleeve." Thus says Rumi, pointing to the danger that one may be all too pleased with one's own piety, with one's devotional works, and with one's renown as a "saintly" person. It is better to be outwardly sinful and draw people's anger and blame than to attract praise by a show of piety. This was at least the view of the so-called Malamatiya, a group of intensely pious seekers in the tenth and eleventh centuries, whose sobriquet is derived from *malāma*, "blame." However, as other Sufis objected, even that attitude is far from perfect, for as long as the Sufi cares at all for people's reaction, be it praise or blame, he has not yet reached true insight. The goal is, first of all, *ridā*, "contentment," grateful acceptance of whatever comes. A story from the tenth century tells that a Sufi addressed God in his prayer:

"O Lord, are you satisfied with me that I am satisfied with Thee?"

He heard a voice: "You liar! if you were satisfied with Me you would not ask whether I am satisfied with you!"

The purely ascetic way of life did not remain a goal in itself. In the middle of the eighth century, the first signs of genuine love mysticism appear among the pious. Its first representative was a woman, Rabi'a of Basra (d. 801). Numerous are the legends that surround this great woman saint of Islam. The following one was famous enough to be taken over into medieval and modern European literature, though without mentioning Rabi'a's name:

She was seen one day in the streets of Basra, carrying a bucket in one hand and a torch in the other one. Asked the

meaning of her action, she replied: "I want to pour water into Hell and set fire to Paradise so that these two veils disappear and nobody worships God out of fear of Hell or hope for Paradise, but only for the sake of His eternal beauty."

This absolute love, which does not care for Hell and its punishments nor for the pleasures of the paradisaical gardens, became central themes, if not the central theme, of mystical poetry down to this day. *Spiritual union with one divine.*

Most theologians, understandably, refused to use the term "love" for the relation between man and God. Love, they claimed, is love for God's commands, hence, absolute obedience to the Law. Yet the strong element of Love could not be pushed aside. Like Rabi'a, the Sufis liked to refer to Sura 5/59: "He loves them and they love Him." These words, although taken out of context, seem to prove the possibility of mutual love, which—like every act in the world—begins in and from God.

In the century and a half after Rabi'a's death, theories of love were elaborated and enlarged. In her Iraqi homeland a number of mystics continued defining love and other mystical states and stations: One finds in Baghdad a psychologist, Muhasibi (d. 857), named after his tendency to search his soul (*muḥāsaba*) with utter sobriety; and a penetrating spirit such as Kharrāz, whose importance for the formulation of the mystical profession of faith was understood only recently. It was this mystic who stated that "Only God has the right to say 'I.'" He thus prepared the ground for the extension of the formula of *taḥīd* into its later form, e.g., "There is nothing existing but God." Muhasibi's contemporary in Egypt was Dhu'n-Nun, of Nubian descent (d. 859). He was surrounded by miracle stories but is also known as the first to define *ma'rifa*, "gnosis, non-discursive knowledge." Allegedly, he was an alchemist—but what is Sufism but the alchemy of the soul, the transmutation of base matter into pure spiritual gold? Dhu'n-Nun seems to be the first Sufi to rediscover nature as a witness to God's wondrous activities, thus giving creation a certain value, an attitude very different from that of the

world-hating ascetics, for whom this world was nothing but a dunghill, no more important than a gnat's wing. Dhu'n-Nun rightly remembered the Koranic words that everything praises God in its own silent language, and thus he translated nature's songs in his prayers:

O God, I never hearken to the voices of the beasts or the rustle of the trees, the splashing of the waters or the song of the birds, the whistling of the wind or the rumble of the thunder but I sense in them a testimony to Thy Unity and a proof of Thy incomparability, that Thou art the All-Prevailing, the All-Knowing, the All-True.

Such psalm-like prayers of the Egyptian mystic may have inspired, but are at least echoed in, later mystical poetry, mainly in the Persianate world, whose authors understood the praise of God as uttered by flower, stone, and animal.

Another contemporary of the two just-mentioned Sufis is the Persian Bayezid Bistami (d. 874), whose strange, lonely personality has become almost proverbial. His exclamation *Subhānī*, "Praise be to me! How great is my Majesty!" has often been interpreted by later Sufis as the expression of man's deification once he has been "annihilated" from the world and from himself. Bayezid's emphasis on *fanā*, "annihilation" as well as some of his paradoxical expressions have been explained by some scholars as influenced by Indian Vedanta speculations. However, he advocates not the expansion of the *atman* until it realizes its oneness with *Brahman* but rather wants to extinguish all traces of human nature. Bayezid was the first to use the symbolism of the heavenly journey when speaking of his raptures and has described his longing for *fanā* in highly poetical images, as well as his inexplicable disappointment at the end of his experiences.

*Fanā* is in the first place an ethical concept, i.e., the renunciation of human qualities and increasing spiritualization; it has nothing to do with Indian concepts of *nirvana* since it does not mean the attempt to be rescued from the painful cycle of birth and rebirth but rather the return of the creature to the state "as he was before he was."

This latter formulation was coined by one of the most renowned masters of early Sufism, Junaid of Baghdad (d. 910), "the peacock of the poor," through whom all later chains of initiation reach back to the Prophet, either via 'Ali or Abu Bakr. Junaid is regarded as the leading representative of mystical sobriety, in contrast to ecstatic intoxication, and his influence is palpable not only in the Iranian scene but also in later Sufism, especially in the Maghrib, as well. To be sure, one could also find in Iraq more poetically-minded Sufis who blended love of humanity with love of God but sometimes uttered words that horrified the dogmatic theologians. Junaid was well aware of the danger that lofty ideas of mystical union might be discussed or merely mentioned before the non-initiated, for in his earlier days (877) some lawsuits against the allegedly heretic tendencies of the Sufis had been filed in the capital. He therefore taught his disciples in coded and difficult-to-decipher words and, as legend has it, predicted a terrible end to one of the mystics who preached openly of the interiorization of Islam and its ritual duties.

This disciple, however, was to become the hero of mystical and non-mystical poets, the model of the daring lover who expressed the secret of loving union between man and God (or, as later mystics saw it, spoke of the all-embracing Unity of Being) in his word *ana'l-haqq*, "I am the absolute Truth," that is "I am God." Hallaj, hailing from Persian Iraq and famed for his almost superhuman feats of asceticism, did not actually exclaim this famed sentence at Junaid's door, as legend tells. The quintessence of his doctrine is that Adam was created in the image of the human nature, *nāsūt*, that is inherent in God, and that the uncreated Divine Spirit can overcome the created human spirit in rare moments of ecstasy, although the eternal and that which is created in time are essentially incompatible.

Hallaj wandered through the the eastern lands of the caliphate; around 905 he reached the Indus Valley and then moved on to Inner Asia, probably following the Silk Route. His disciples lived everywhere between Turkestan and Mecca; their last correspondence with him was confiscated

by the police when he was finally arrested and imprisoned. However, it was not so much his mystical teaching (which seemed suspect and dangerous even to many other Sufis in Baghdad) that made him suspect in the eyes of the Abbasid government; rather, political moves were at work. He was accused of contracts with the Qarmathians in Multan and of revolutionary conspiracy. Indeed, he called on Muslims to understand their religion not so much according to the letter, but in keeping with the spirit, although this was a dangerous stance. His numerous prayers asked for the "lifting of the veil" between God and himself, and he urged people to kill him so they would be recompensed for a pious action, while he eventually would be freed from the "I" that always stood between him and God, the God who manifests Himself everywhere to those who have eyes to see. His verse:

Kill me, O my trustworthy friends  
for in my being killed is my life,

inspired numerous mystics and was elaborated in various forms. On March 26, 922, he was cruelly executed. His short poems are the most tender expressions of mystical, non-sensual love that are known in Arabic; in his *Kitāb at-tawāsīn* he used for the first time the allegory of the moth that casts itself into the candle's flame—an image that was to become a favorite with later Sufi poets in the Persianate world. It also inspired the German poet Goethe in his moving poem *Selige Sehnsucht*, "Blessed longing."

For later Sufis, Hallaj's death was a model of death through love; his name, but even more his father's name Mansur "victorious" is well-established in the poetry of the eastern Islamic world, while his saying "I am the Truth" is usually translated as "I am God," *haqq*, ("truth, reality") being the favorite mystical term for God. The bold mystic was praised not only by classical and modern Sufis, but his name is a keyword in modern—usually progressive—poetry in the Muslim world, for he sacrificed his life for his ideals and was killed by the establishment.

Only the 'sober' brotherhoods are somewhat critical of him, regarding him as too narrow a vessel for Divine inspiration.

Hallaj's death can be taken in a certain respect as the end of the first, classical period of Sufism, which at that time could be described as "voluntarist mysticism." In subsequent centuries one observes an increasing systematization, a development that was necessary not only because the Sufis had to prove their orthodox stance, but also because of the increase in foreign influences (Neo-platonism, Christianity, and later Central Asian and Indian ascetic techniques). A great number of works in Arabic and, from the mid-eleventh century also in Persian, were composed to prove not only the compatibility of Sufism with Islamic teaching, but rather to show that there was indeed no difference between the two. All early mystics are firmly grounded in the *sharī'a*, whose rules and commands they took extremely seriously, while at the same time seeking to discover the deeper meaning of the words. For it is the broad road, *sharī'a*, from which the narrow path, *ṭarīqa*, the path trod by the chosen few, can branch out, and it is the Koran in which every wisdom can be found.

Systematization attained its high point in the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn* of Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), a Persian scholar who, after a very successful career in one of the leading theological colleges of his time, turned to mysticism. His autobiography *Al-munqidh min ad-dalāl*, ("the savior from error") shows his spiritual wrestling with the various theological currents of his time—philosophy, scholasticism, and Batiniyya. The final leap into Sufism saved him and removed his doubts. His major work, the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn*, aims as its title says at the "revivification of the sciences of religion" or, in short, "of theology" in a broad sense; in other words it introduces the believer into a life that is agreeable to God. In addition to *islām*, "absolute surrender," and *īmān*, "faith," one also needs *iḥsān* which means "to serve God as if one were seeing Him." One has to be conscious of God's presence in every moment. This feeling of God's constant presence is valid even while one

is busy with most non-religious actions, and for this reason the *Ihyā'* contains in its first three parts injunctions about correct behavior in every moment, be it marriage or prayer, commerce or travel. Only the fourth part is devoted to more clearly religious and mystical issues such as poverty, patience, trust in God, longing, love, and gnosis; these lead in the fortieth and final chapter to the seeker's attitude at the time of death. This is the aim of the entire book which, thanks to its readable style and logical argumentation, was soon accepted as standard, thus tempering mainstream Islam with a moderately mystical flavor. When reading the *Ihyā'* one should remember that forty is not only the number of patience and maturity and the number of days that the Sufi has to spend in the *chilla*, seclusion, but also the number of degrees between man and God; furthermore, it is the numerical value of the letter *M*, the abbreviation of Muhammad.

It is amazing, however, that Ghazzali in his booklet *Mishkāt al-anwār*, "the niche for lights" deals with a completely different aspect of Sufism, i.e., the mysticism of illumination, *ishrāq*, a trend that was expressed most lucidly early a century later by the brilliant young Suhrawardi, executed in 1191 and hence called *maqtūl*, "killed"). Suhrawardi's work constitutes an ingenious blending of Greek, Iranian, ancient Near Eastern, and Islamic concepts, and teaches in philosophical Arabic writings and delightful Persian allegories the soul's return from the 'western exile' of matter to the eastern, spiritual world of pure light. As for Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali's younger brother Ahmad, he showed little interest in the ethical problems facing the normal Muslim believer with which his brother had to deal, but he composed the subtlest work on mystical love known in classical Persian literature. It sparked off a series of similar attempts to approach the secret of Divine Love.

Shortly after Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali's death a new period of Sufism set in—that is, the crystallization of brotherhoods and Sufi orders, *ṭarīqa*. Earlier mystics usually gathered around a master in small groups; the master (*shaykh* in Arabic, *pīr* in Persian) or guide (*murshid*) often

had his everyday profession and might be a simple craftsman or a learned scholar. It seems that with 'Abdul Qadir al-Gilani (Jilani; d. 1166) a process was triggered that was to change the cultural scene considerably. 'Abdul Qadir himself, a Hanbalite preacher in Baghdad, probably never thought of founding a real Sufi order, but his disciples organized themselves into a brotherhood, while at about the same time other Sufi teachers also began to attract large numbers of followers who had to be organized properly. It has been speculated that the extinction of most Isma'ili centers, which seemed to offer the population a certain spiritual assistance, may have left a void which the orders were able to fill.

In these groups pious Muslims, who benefited but little from the increasing dogmatism and legalism in official Islam, could find the kind of emotional religiosity that they sorely missed. Communal prayers and often musical sessions proved attractive; the shaykh or his substitute, *khalīfa*, cared for the followers' personal problems, and thus his house attracted many searching and seeking souls. The *pīr* had virtually unlimited power over the disciple, *murīd*, who was initiated by grasping the master's hand and was thus integrated into the *silsila*, the chain of initiation and succession which led back to the Prophet. Before the master, the disciple should be, according to an old saying, "like a dead body in the hand of the undertaker." The shaykh carefully supervised the spiritual development of the *murīd*, sent him into the forty days' seclusion, and, most importantly, entrusted him with the right formula of *dhikr*. From early days onward the Sufis dwelt upon the importance of the uninterrupted remembrance of God, *dhikr*. They found support in Koranic sentences which invite humankind to remember God often, and especially in Sura 13/28: "Verily by remembering God, hearts become calm." The regular repetition of certain formulas thousands of times was practiced from early days and grew into the central spiritual technique among the brotherhoods. The *dhikr* can consist of the word "Allah," the profession of faith, formulas asking for forgiveness or praising the Lord, or, very important,

one of the Ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names of God. It can be performed aloud or silently. In the meetings of many orders the common performance of the loud *dhikr* is an important means to attain an ecstatic state. Generally, however, the silent *dhikr* is regarded as preferable. Combined with a breathing technique, refined over the centuries, *dhikr* is the central duty of the *murīd*, while the master's duty is to give the disciple the *dhikr* that is appropriate for his mental stage; for the Divine Names, when repeated thousands of times, can lead to dangerous psychological and even physiological consequences.

Due to the rapid spread of the orders, Sufism increasingly grew into a mass movement which came to embrace, beyond the true disciples, numerous loosely affiliated members and 'friends' (comparable to the Third Orders or lay members of an order in the Catholic church). Most of them would attend the *'urs*, the celebration during the anniversary of the founder's death ("wedding," "spiritual nuptials," for the saint's soul was united with God on this day). During the *'urs* they would pray together, share special food, and celebrate in various ways that were not always strictly religious. Thanks to the orders' activities, the religious contents of Islam, especially love of God, love of His Prophet, and love of His creatures, reached large parts of the population who otherwise would barely have come in touch with official theology and would probably not have understood it in any case.

The model of the Qadiriyya, based on 'Abdul Qadir Jilani, was followed by many others, but to this day the Qadiriyya's members are found in considerable numbers from West Africa to Indonesia. That the founder himself had forty-nine sons proves that celibacy was by no means required in Sufism; one would rather follow the Prophet's model in getting married. One member of the Qadiriyya was the Mughal heir apparent, Dara Shikoh (executed in 1659), who translated fifty Upanishads into Persian and dreamt and wrote about the "meeting of the two oceans" (Sura 18/65), that is, Islam and Hinduism, on the basis of mysticism. The Rifa'iyya (who trace themselves back to

Ahmad ar-Rifa'i, d. 1183) are generally known as Howling Dervishes because their loud *dhikr* causes a harsh, almost frightening sound; they are noted for strange 'miracles' such as wounding themselves, taking out their eyes, eating glass or live snakes, and other feats which, according to reliable hagiographers, was not what the founder had intended. Around 1200 the Suhrawardiyya became prominent; their roots go back to Abu Najib as-Suhrawardi (d. 1153) and his nephew, who also served as the caliph's spiritual ambassador. It is a highly cultured 'sober' order which was successful in India (Baha'uddin Zakariya of Multan, d. 1266) as far as Bengal. Contrary to other major orders, especially the Chishtiyya, the Suhrawardiyya followed their second founder's example and dealt actively with politics. In this respect they resemble the Central Asian Naqshbandiyya, who wielded enormous political power in Central Asia in the fifteenth century and later counteracted "intoxicated" Sufism and what seemed to their trends sully the purity of faith. The Naqshbandis, famed for their silent *dhikr*, extended their influence especially to India and Turkey.

In Central Asia the Kubrawiyya appeared. Their founder, Najmuddin Kubra, offered psychologically highly interesting interpretations of the color visions experienced by some Sufis on the path. In Egypt the order of Ahmad al-Badawi (d. 1278) (which has preserved several pre-Islamic elements) remained restricted to the Nile Valley; its festive days are regulated according to the solar, not the lunar, year and to the rise of the Nile. Again in Egypt and about the same time, the Shadhiliyya appeared and took over many traditions of the sober Baghdadi school. Its modern derivations in North Africa have lately attracted a number of Europeans and Americans. The Shadhiliyya literature boasts the Arabic *Hikam* by Ibn 'Ata Allah (d. 1309), brief but supremely beautiful Arabic words of wisdom:

A sign that God has placed you at some place is that He makes you stay there and you give good fruit.

The protective prayer composed by the founder of the *tariqa*, the *hizb al-bahr*, was well-known as a strong protecting talisman even in India.

In Anatolia, the Mevleviyya grew, inspired by Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273) and organized by his son; they are known in the West as the Whirling Dervishes because of their whirling dance (the only institutionalized musical *dhikr* in the Muslim world). But while the Mevleviyya in the Ottoman Empire attracted primarily members of court circles and artists, another brotherhood in Anatolia, the Bektashiyya, adopted a good number of Shiite elements and was the religious mainstay of the Janissaries, the elite troops of the Ottomans. The simple but often powerful Bektashi lyrical poetry is remarkable. But the Bektashis were frequently accused of libertinism because they allowed women to participate freely in their meetings. When the Janissaries were uprooted in 1826, the Bektashis too lost their power outwardly, yet Bektashi jokes are still alive in Turkey.

Mevleviyya and Bektashiyya never crossed the borders of the Ottoman Empire (which included the Balkans), while in India the Chishtiyya too remained restricted to the subcontinent. Their founder Mu'inuddin Chishti (d. 1236) came out of the Suhrawardi tradition, and from his seat in Ajmer, Rajasthan, the order soon spread to Delhi and to southern India. It continues to be one of the most active *wariqas* in India. Like the Mevlevis, the Chishtis too excel in music and are noted for their love of poetry. The role of these orders in the process of conversion in the fringe areas of Islam cannot be overrated.

The thirteenth century was the high time of Sufism, despite the disaster caused by the Mongol onslaught, which completely changed the political landscape of the central and eastern lands of Islam; or perhaps Sufism was an antidote to the destruction in the material world. The *magister magnus* of later Sufism, the Spanish-born Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), was inspired in Mecca to compose his enormous work, the *Futūhāt al-makkiyya*, "the Meccan revelations." His thought was to dominate the entire mystical

literature in subsequent centuries, and even those who did not accept his concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, "Unity of Being" (a term he himself never used) could not avoid his influence in both language and thought.

Ibn 'Arabi has been called a pantheist by many of his critics in East and West, but his modern interpreters are able to prove that he always maintained God's transcendence. God's essence in its Unicity remains unknowable and is beyond everything imaginable; He manifests Himself through His Names and Attributes and sees Himself in the mirror He created—that is, the world. Ibn 'Arabi, like many of his predecessors, repeatedly quoted the famous Divine extra-Koranic word, *ḥadīth qudsī*: "I was a hidden treasure and wanted to be known, thus I created the world." The world exists only insofar as it is dependent upon God, and therefore Ibn 'Arabi can say: We ourselves are the attributes by which we describe God; our existence is an objectivation of His existence; God is necessary for us in order to exist while we are necessary for Him in order to manifest Himself. Ibn 'Arabi has laid down his ideas in numerous books and treatises. The *Futūhāt al-makkiyya* with its 560 chapters is his most comprehensive work, while the quintessence of his prophetology is found in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, the "bezels of wisdom." In this comparatively small book, inspired as he claims by the Prophet himself, he deals in twenty-seven chapters with a mystical prophetology culminating in Muhammad, the Perfect Man in whom the pleroma of Divine manifestations becomes visible; he is the first thing ever created, the archetype of humanity. The roots of such ideas are found in early Sufism, such as Hallaj's prophetology. But with Ibn 'Arabi, Sufism becomes *'irfān*, a kind of special mystical knowledge, and does not necessarily maintain its personal voluntaristic character; this change has been considered by critics in both East and West as one of the reasons for the 'stagnation' of Islam after the thirteenth century.

Ibn 'Arabi's ingenious visionary systematization (which always rests upon the Koran) apparently answered all metaphysical questions and was gladly accepted by his

contemporaries and followers. In contrast, the works of Jalaluddin Rumi, junior to Ibn 'Arabi by half a century, became a treasure trove of mystically inspired poetry. Except for short, sometimes delightful verses, the Arab world had produced but little mystical poetry in the early period of Sufism. Ibn 'Arabi himself composed a collection of love poems, and during his time the small collection of Arabic odes by the Egyptian Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235) is remarkable for its beauty. The Egyptian poet has sung of the mystery of Divine Love in the highly refined style of classical Arabic love poetry; his *Tā'īyyat al-kubrā* describes man's way to God in more than 750 verses and fascinating images.

Yet the real homeland of mystical poetry was Iran. After the great mystic 'Abdullah-i Ansari (d. 1089 in Herat) wrote his short prayers, interspersed with heartfelt little verses, another poet, again in the easternmost part of Iran (today's Afghanistan), made an even more important contribution to the development of mystical poetry: this was Sana'i of Ghazna (d. 1131), the first to use the form of *mathnawī*, "rhyming couplets," to create a didactic poem about themes known among the Sufis. His *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa*, "the orchard of truth," is certainly not written in ecstatic rapture, but its form and contents—the combination of anecdotes and their application to Sufi life—have influenced all later Sufi writers. As a lyrical poet Sana'i wrote deeply felt religious poems with breathtaking rhetorical art. His tradition was continued by Fariduddin 'Attar (d. 1220 in Nishapur) who can be considered the master epico-mystical poet of Iran. His vast knowledge of Sufism is evident from his *Tadhkirat al-auliā*, a romantically embellished hagiographical work, and his talent as a story teller becomes clear from his epics, among which the *Mantiq al-tair*, "the birds' conversation" (based on Sura 27/16) is most famous. The poet describes the journey of the soul birds in quest of their king, the Simurgh. After thirty birds have wandered through the seven valleys on the long and hard path, they reach the Simurgh's place and finally realize that they themselves, being thirty birds—that is, in Persian, *sī murgh*—are identical with the *Simurgh*: the in-

dividual soul is identical with the Divine Soul. In another epic poem, *Muṣibatnāma*, "the book of affliction," 'Attar projects in poetical myths the different spiritual stages of the *murid* during the forty days' seclusion: the seeker asks wind and sun, angels and beasts the way to God, and their answers are interpreted by the master; in the end, the seeker finds God in the "ocean of his soul."

It is told that 'Attar, shortly before his death, had blessed Jalaluddin Rumi who, born in 1207 north of Balkh, Afghanistan, fled along with his father, a mystical theologian, and his family. Whether or not his father, Baha'uddin Walad, left home for political or other reasons is not known. After long peregrinations the family eventually reached Asia Minor or Rum (hence Jalaluddin's surname *Rūmī*), and Baha'uddin spent the last three years of his life (he died in 1231) in Konya, the ancient Iconium, where the court of the Rum Seljukids attracted refugees, scholars, and artists fleeing from the Mongols. After his father's death Jalaluddin was initiated into the mystical tradition by a disciple of his father and he experienced mystical love when he met, in 1244, Shamsuddin of Tabriz, a wandering dervish of about Rumi's age. Shams introduced him to the heights of Divine Love; he himself claimed to have reached the rank of "the beloved." Shams had to flee from Konya because Jalaluddin's family and disciples strongly disapproved of his close relationship with him; he was brought back after more than a year but disappeared forever in December 1248—assassinated by a jealous group in Rumi's environment. The pangs of longing—already apparent during the first period of separation—transformed Maulana ("our master," Turkish *Mevlāna*) into a poet. More than 35,000 lyrical verses were triggered off by this unique meeting of two mature mystics. After their complete identification, Rumi signed his poems not with his own but with his mystical friend's name. The so-called *Diwan-i Shams* contains probably the most ecstatic verses ever written in Persian; born out of music and whirling dance these poems are notable for their strong rhythm. Their symbols and images are taken from all walks of life, and Maulana's

poetry not only transports the reader or listener into the loftiest spheres of ecstasy and love, but also offers a picture of daily life in a medieval Anatolian town.

After Shamsuddin's disappearance Maulana found some consolation in his friendship with Salahuddin Zarkub, a simple but spiritually advanced goldsmith, and finally turned to his disciple Husamuddin Chelebi, at whose behest he composed the nearly 26,000 verses of a mystical didactic poem, *The Mathnawi*. Written in a memorable meter, *The Mathnawi* can be called an encyclopedia of all the mystical ideas and thoughts known in the thirteenth century—it is "the shop of Unity," but equally a treasure house of popular tales and stories. It is, however, not at all a systematic handbook of mystical dogmatics or a well-organized description of esoteric teachings or psychological techniques. Rumi also wrote letters and a prose work and participated in lively social activity along with teaching. After his death in 1273 his *Mathnawi*, called by later admirers "the Koran in the Persian tongue," became the standard mystical work in the Persianate world; numerous commentaries and translations into Turkish and the regional languages of Muslim India were produced through the centuries, and to this day there is barely a poet in the eastern areas of the Islamic world who has not been influenced in some way by Rumi's poetry.

The later history of Iran and Turkey is filled with the names of mystical poets; one may single out that of Fakhruddin 'Iraqi (d. 1289), a delightful Persian poet who lived during Rumi's day in Multan at Baha'uddin Zakariya's place and then stayed some time in Anatolia before turning to Damascus where he is buried not far from Ibn 'Arabi. Later, the most important name is that of Molla Jami (d. 1492 in Herat), poet, mystic, interpreter of classical works, and historian of Sufism. In fact, the role of Sufism for the development of literature in the various languages of the Islamic world cannot be overstated. The Turkish poetry of Yunus Emre (d. 1321) and his followers belongs here, as does early Urdu verse in the Deccan. Sindhi and Panjabi as well as Bengali are replete with mystical

songs, and one can safely say that the popular mystical literature of the Pakistani provinces contains some of the finest products of religious poetry in Islam—whether one thinks of the powerful, passionate language of Bullhe Shah in the Punjab (d. 1754), the musical, heart-rending verses of his contemporary Shah 'Abdul Latif in Sind (d. 1752), the ecstatic Sindhi verses by Sachal Sarmast (d. 1826), or the sonorous, strong lyrics of the Pathan mystic Rahman Baba (d. ca. 1707). Many unknown treasures can be discovered in this area, and the cross-relations between Indian Sufi poetry and Hindu *bhakti* poetry have barely been examined.

Part of this mystical poetry is devoted to the glorification of the Prophet. He whom the Koran had called only a human who had been granted revelation was elevated into higher spiritual spheres early in Islam; later, the mystics, following Ibn 'Arabi's example, embellished him with increasingly lofty attributes and invented ever new forms of praise. In Arabic, Busiri (d. 1297) and his *Burda*, a poem in honor of Muhammad and the healing power of his Yemeni cloak, is a good example of this veneration. In Persian and the other Islamic languages including Hausa and Swahili, songs in praise of "the best of mankind" were composed through the ages. To the singer of folksongs he appears mainly as the intercessor at Doomsday, as God's beloved to whom one can turn full of trust because God will not refuse His friend's intercession for his community. He is the longed-for bridegroom or, as in some Tamil songs, even a darling child—thus he is ubiquitous although sometimes appearing in strange garb. Such poems help the Islamicist understand the immense influence the Sufis exerted upon the masses, far from the world of speculative theologians and hairsplitting jurists. Likewise, Sufi influence is evident in the traditional behavior of Muslims, based on the etiquette described in the *hadith* and refined by the Sufis, an etiquette derived from the Prophet's noble example and the model set by his successors. These well-delineated rules of proper behavior were fundamental in the development of relations between people of different spheres and determined

the social network in countries from Morocco to Indonesia for centuries. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the influence of Islamic mysticism extends from the highest metaphysical speculations to the world of illiterate village women and that it colored large areas of Muslim society before the advent of modern civilization.

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## *Popular Piety and the Veneration of Saints*

Islam, a religion which in theory does not accept any mediator between man and God, underwent a considerable change in the course of the centuries as a veritable cult of saints developed. It is typical of the situation that the stern Hanbalite *madhhab* and, following its lead, the Wahhabis are dead set against Sufism and, as its excrescence, the veneration of saints, although ironically two of the most venerated saints emerged from among the Hanbalites—‘Abdul Qadir Jilani and ‘Abdullah-i Ansari.

The first systematic treatises about the hierarchy of saints, which culminates in the *quṭb*, the “pole” or “axis,” were composed as early as the late ninth century and constitute the basis for later theories. The saint is the *walī*, the “friend of God,” who enjoys His special protection. He is blessed with the capacity of performing miracles, but his miracles are called *karāmāt* “charismata,” and are of a lower rank than those performed by prophets, which are