

SUFISM

Sufism or Taṣawwuf (Arabic: تصوف) is, according to its adherents, the inner, mystical dimension of Islam. A practitioner of this tradition is generally known as a ṣūfī (صوفي), though some adherents of the tradition reserve this term only for those practitioners who have attained the goals of the Sufi tradition. Another name used for the Sufi seeker is Dervish. Classical Sufi scholars have defined Sufism as "a science whose objective is the reparation of the heart and turning it away from all else but God."^[4] Alternatively, in the words of the renowned Darqawi Sufi teacher Ahmad ibn Ajiba, "a science through which one can know how to travel into the presence of the Divine, purify one's inner self from filth, and beautify it with a variety of praiseworthy traits."^[5]

During the primary stages of Sufism, Sufis were characterized by their particular attachment to zikr (a practice of repeating the names of God) and asceticism. Sufism arose among a number of Muslims as a reaction against the worldliness of the early Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 CE^[6]). The Sufi movement has spanned several continents and cultures over a millennium, at first expressed through Arabic, then through Persian, Turkish and a dozen other languages.^[7] "Orders" (ṭuruq), which are either Sunnī or Shī'ī in doctrine, mostly trace their origins from the Islamic Prophet Muhammad through his cousin 'Alī, with the notable exception of the Naqshbandī who trace their origins through the first Caliph, Abu Bakr.^[8] Other exclusive schools of Sufism distinctly describe themselves as 'Sufi'.^[9]

According to Idriss Shah, the Sufi philosophy is universal in nature, its roots predating the arising of Islam and the other modern-day religions; likewise, some Muslims consider Sufism outside the sphere of Islam.^{[1][10]} Mainstream scholars of Islam, however, contend that it is simply the name for the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam



Mawlana Rumi's tomb, Konya, Turkey.

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Etymology

The lexical root of Sufi is variously traced to صوف *ṣūf* "wool", referring either to the simple cloaks the early Muslim ascetics wore, or possibly to صفا *ṣafā* "purity". The two were combined by al-Rudhābari who said, "The Sufi is the one who wears wool on top of purity."^[11] The wool cloaks were sometimes a designation of their initiation into the Sufi order. Sufism is known as "Islamic Mysticism," in which Muslims seek to find divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God.^[12] Mysticism is defined as the experience of mystical union or direct communion with ultimate reality, and the belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience (as intuition or insight).^[13]

Others^[who?] suggest the origin of the word *ṣūfi* is from *Aṣḥab aṣ-ṣuffā* "Companions of the Porch", who were a group of impoverished Muslims during the time of Muhammad who spent much of their time on the veranda of Al-Masjid al-Nabawi, devoted to prayer and eager to memorize each new increment of the Qur'an as it was revealed.

While all Muslims believe that they are on the pathway to God and hope to become close to God in Paradise—after death and after the "Final Judgment"—Sufis also believe that it is possible to draw closer to God and to more fully embrace the Divine Presence in this life.^[14] The chief aim of all Sufis is to seek the pleasing of God by working to restore within themselves the primordial state of *fiṭra*,^[15] described in the Qur'an. In this state nothing one does defies God, and all is undertaken by the single motivation of love of God. A secondary consequence of this is that the seeker may be led to abandon all notions of dualism or multiplicity, including a conception of an individual self, and to realize the Divine Unity.

Thus Sufism has been characterized^[by whom?] as the science of the states of the lower self (the ego), and the way of purifying this lower self of its reprehensible traits, while adorning it instead with what is praiseworthy, whether or not this process of cleansing and purifying the heart is in time rewarded by esoteric knowledge of God. This can be conceived in terms of two basic types of law (*fiqh*), an outer law concerned with actions, and an inner law concerned with the human heart.^[citation needed] The outer law consists of rules pertaining to worship, transactions, marriage, judicial rulings, and criminal law— what is often referred to, a bit too broadly, as *qanun*. The inner law of Sufism consists of rules about repentance from sin, the purging of contemptible qualities and evil traits of character, and adornment with virtues and good character.^[16]

To enter the way of Sufism, the seeker begins by finding a teacher, as the connection to the teacher is considered necessary for the growth of the pupil. The teacher, to be genuine, must have received the authorization to teach (*ijazah*) of another Master of the Way, in an unbroken succession (*silsilah*) leading back to Sufism's origin with Muhammad. It is the transmission of the divine light from the teacher's heart to the heart of the student, rather than of worldly knowledge transmitted from mouth to ear, that allows the adept to progress. In addition, the genuine teacher will be utterly strict in his adherence to the Divine Law.

Scholars and adherents of Sufism are unanimous in agreeing that Sufism cannot be learned through books. To reach the highest levels of success in Sufism typically requires that the disciple live with and serve the teacher for many, many years. For instance, Bahad-Din Naqshband Bukhari, considered founder of the Naqshbandi Order, served his first teacher, Sayyid Muhammad Baba As-Samasi, for 20 years, until as-Samasi died. He subsequently served several other teachers for lengthy periods of time. The extreme arduousness of his spiritual preparation is illustrated by his service, as directed by his teacher, to the weak and needy members of his community in a state of complete humility and tolerance for many years. When he believed this mission to be concluded, his teacher next directed him to care for animals, curing their sicknesses, cleaning their wounds, and assisting them in finding provision. After many years of this he was next instructed to spend many years in the care of dogs in a state of humility, and to ask them for support.^[18]

As a further example, the prospective adherent of the Mevlevi Order would have been ordered to serve in the kitchens of a hospice for the poor for 1,001 days prior to being accepted for spiritual instruction, and a further 1,001 days in solitary retreat as a precondition of completing that instruction.^[19]

Some teachers, especially when addressing more general audiences, or mixed groups of Muslims and non-Muslims, make extensive use of parable, allegory, and metaphor.^[20] Although approaches to teaching vary among different Sufi orders, Sufism as a whole is primarily concerned with direct personal experience, and as such has sometimes been compared to other, non-Islamic forms of mysticism (e.g., as in the books of Seyyed Hossein Nasr).

Sufism, which is a general term for Muslim mysticism, sprang up largely in reaction against the worldliness which infected Islam when its leaders became the powerful and wealthy rulers of multitudes of people and were influenced by foreign cultures. Harun al-Rashid, eating off gold and silver, toying with a harem of scented beauties, surrounded by an impenetrable retinue of officials, eunuchs and slaves, was a far cry from the stern simplicity of an Umar, who lived in the modest house, wore patched clothes and could be approached by any of his followers.^[21] The typical early Sufi lived in a cell of a mosque and taught a small band of disciples. The extent to which Sufism was influenced by Buddhist and Hindu mysticism, and by the example of Christian hermits and monks, is disputed, but self-discipline and concentration on God quickly led to the belief that by quelling the self and through loving ardour for God it was possible to maintain a union with the divine in which the human self melted away.^[21]

History of Sufism and Origins

In its early stages of development Sufism effectively referred to nothing more than the internalization of Islam.^[22] According to one perspective, it is directly from the Qur'an, constantly recited, meditated, and experienced, that Sufism proceeded, in its origin and its development.^[23] Others have held that Sufism is the strict emulation of the way of Muhammad, through which the heart's connection to the Divine is strengthened.^[24]

From the traditional Sufi point of view, the esoteric teachings of Sufism were transmitted from Muhammad to those who had the capacity to acquire the direct experiential gnosis of God, which was passed on from teacher to student through the centuries. Some of this transmission is summarized in texts, but most is not. Important contributions in writing are attributed to Uwais al-Qarni, Harrm bin Hian, Hasan Basri and Sayid ibn al-Mussib, who are regarded as the first Sufis in the earliest generations of Islam. Harith al-Muhasibi was the first one to write about moral psychology. Rabia Basri was a Sufi known for her love and passion for God, expressed through her poetry. Bayazid Bastami was among the first theorists of Sufism; he concerned himself with *fana* and *baqa*, the state of annihilating the self in the presence of the divine, accompanied by clarity concerning worldly phenomena derived from that perspective.^[25]

Sufism had a long history already before the subsequent Sufi teachings institutionalized into devotional orders (*tariqât*) in the early middle Ages.^[26] Almost all extant Sufi orders trace their chains of transmission (*silsila*) back to Muhammad via his cousin and son-in-law Ali. The Naqshbandi order is a notable exception to this rule, as it traces the origin of its teachings from Muhammad to the first Islamic Caliph Abu Bakr.^[8]

Different devotional styles and traditions developed over time, reflecting the perspectives of different masters and the accumulated cultural wisdom of the orders. Typically all of these concerned themselves with the understanding of subtle knowledge (gnosis), education of the heart to purify it of baser instincts, the love of God, and approaching God through a well-described hierarchy of enduring spiritual stations (*maqâmât*) and more transient spiritual states (*ahwâl*).

Formalization of doctrine

Towards the end of the first millennium CE, a number of manuals began to be written summarizing the doctrines of Sufism and describing some typical Sufi practices. Two of the most famous of these are now available in English translation: the *Kashf al-Mahjûb* of Hujwiri, and the *Risâla* of Qushayri. Two of Imam Al Ghazali's greatest treatises, the "Revival of Religious Sciences" and the "Alchemy of Happiness," argued that Sufism originated from the Qur'an and was thus compatible with mainstream Islamic thought, and did not in any way contradict Islamic Law—being instead necessary to its complete fulfillment. This became the mainstream position among Islamic scholars for centuries, challenged only recently on the basis of selective use of a limited body of texts. Ongoing efforts by both traditionally trained Muslim scholars and Western academics are making Imam Al-Ghazali's works available in English translation for the first time,^[28] allowing readers to judge for themselves the compatibility between Islamic Law and Sufi doctrine.



The tomb of Khoja Afaq, near Kashgar, China.

Growth of Sufi influence in Islamic cultures

The spread of Sufism has been considered a definitive factor in the spread of Islam, and in the creation of integrally Islamic cultures, especially in Africa^[29] and Asia. Recent academic work on these topics has focused on the role of Sufism in creating and propagating the culture of the Ottoman world,^[30] and in resisting European imperialism in North Africa and South Asia.^[31]

*Between the 13th and 16th centuries CE, Sufism produced a flourishing intellectual culture throughout the Islamic world, a "Golden Age" whose physical artifacts are still present. In many places, a lodge (known variously as a *zaouia*, *khanqah*, or *tekke*) would be endowed through a pious foundation in perpetuity (*waqf*) to provide a gathering place for Sufi adepts, as well as lodging for itinerant seekers of knowledge. The same system of endowments could also be used to pay for a complex of buildings, such as that surrounding the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul, including a lodge for Sufi seekers, a hospice with kitchens where these seekers could serve the poor and/or complete a period of initiation, a library, and other structures. No important domain in the civilization of Islam remained unaffected by Sufism in this period.^[32]*

Contemporary Sufism

Currently active traditional Sufi teaching orders include the The Naqshbandiyya Order led by Grandshiekh Nazim al-Qubrusi, which has worldwide affiliates.

Currently active Sufi academics and publishers include Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, Shawni, Nuh Ha Mim Keller, Hamza Yusuf, and Abdal Hakim Murad

In South Asia, Sufi orders include the Qadiriyyah, the Sarwari Qadiri, the Chishti Order, the Suhrawardiyya, the Barelwis and the Deobandi.^[33]

Sufism is popular in such African countries as Senegal, where it is seen as a mystical expression of Islam.^[34] Mbacke suggests that one reason Sufism has taken hold in Senegal is because it can accommodate local beliefs and customs, which tend toward the mystical.^[35]

Sufism suffered many setbacks in the modern era, particularly (though not exclusively) at the hands of European imperialists in the colonized nations of Asia and Africa. The life of the Algerian Sufi master Emir Abd al-Qadir is instructive in this regard.^[36] Notable as well are the lives of Amadou Bamba and Hajj Umar Tall in sub-Saharan Africa, and Sheikh Mansur Ushurma and Imam Shamilin in the Caucasus region. In the twentieth century some more modernist Muslims have called Sufism a superstitious religion that holds back Islamic achievement in the fields of science and technology.^[37]

For a more complete summary of currently active groups and teachers, readers are referred to links in the site of Dr. Alan Godlas of the University of Georgia.^{[38][39]}

A number of Westerners have embarked with varying degrees of success on the path of Sufism. One of the first to return to Europe as an official representative of a Sufi order, and with the specific purpose to spread Sufism in Western Europe, was the Swedish-born wandering Sufi Abd al-Hadi Aqhili (also known as Ivan Aguéli). The ideas propagated by such spiritualists may or may not conform to the tenets of Sufism as understood by orthodox Muslims, as for instance with G. I. Gurdjieff.

Other noteworthy Sufi teachers who were active in the West in recent years include Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, Nader Angha, Sheikh Abdullah Sirr-Dan Al-Jamal, Inayat Khan, Javad Nurbakhsh, Bulent Rauf, Irina Tweedie, Idries Shah and Muzaffer Ozak.

Theoretical perspectives in Sufism

Traditional Islamic scholars have recognized two major branches within the practice of Sufism, and use this as one key to differentiating among the approaches of different masters and devotional lineages.^[40]

On the one hand there is the order from the signs to the Signifier (or from the arts to the Artisan). In this branch, the seeker begins by purifying the lower self of every corrupting influence that stands in the way of recognizing all of creation as the work of God, as God's active Self-disclosure or theophany.^[41] This is the way of Imam Al-Ghazali and of the majority of the Sufi orders.

*On the other hand there is the order from the Signifier to His signs, from the Artisan to His works. In this branch the seeker experiences divine attraction (*jadhba*), and is able to enter the order with a glimpse of its endpoint, of direct apprehension of the Divine Presence towards which all spiritual striving is directed. This does not replace the striving to purify the heart, as in the other branch; it simply stems from a different point of entry into the path. This is the way primarily of the masters of the Naqshbandi and Shadhili orders.^[42]*

*Contemporary scholars may also recognize a third branch, attributed to the late Ottoman scholar Said Nursi and explicated in his vast Qur'an commentary called the Risale-i Nur. This approach entails strict adherence to the way of Muhammad, in the understanding that this wont, or *sunnah*, proposes a complete devotional spirituality adequate to those without access to a master of the Sufi way.^[43]*

Contributions to other domains of scholarship

Sufism has contributed significantly to the elaboration of theoretical perspectives in many domains of intellectual endeavor. For instance, the doctrine of "subtle centers" or centers of subtle cognition (known as *Lataif-e-sitta*) addresses the matter of the awakening of spiritual intuition^[44] in ways that some consider similar to certain models of *chakra* in Hinduism. In general, these subtle centers or *latâ'if* are thought of as faculties that are to be purified sequentially in order to bring the seeker's wayfaring to completion. A concise and useful summary of this system from a living exponent of this tradition has been published by Muhammad Emin Er.^[40]

Sufi psychology has influenced many areas of thinking both within and outside of Islam, drawing primarily upon three concepts. Ja'far al-Sadiq (both an imam in the Shia tradition and a respected scholar and link in chains of Sufi transmission in all Islamic sects) held that human beings are dominated by a lower self called the *nafs*, a faculty of spiritual intuition called the *qalb* or spiritual heart, and a spirit or soul called *ruh*. These interact in various ways, producing the spiritual types of the tyrant (dominated by *nafs*), the person of faith and moderation (dominated by the spiritual heart), and the person lost in love for God (dominated by the *ruh*).^[45] Of note with regard to the spread of Sufi psychology in the West is Robert Frager, a Sufi teacher authorized in the Halveti Jerrahi order. Frager was a trained psychologist, born in the United States, who converted to Islam in the course of his practice of Sufism and wrote extensively on Sufism and psychology.^[46]

Sufi cosmology and Sufi metaphysics are also noteworthy areas of intellectual accomplishment.

Sufi practices



Sufi gathering engaged in Zikr

The devotional practices of Sufis vary widely. This is because an acknowledged and authorized master of the Sufi path is in effect a physician of the heart, able to diagnose the seeker's impediments to knowledge and pure intention in serving God, and to prescribe to the seeker a course of treatment appropriate to his or her maladies. The consensus among Sufi scholars is that the seeker cannot self-diagnose, and that it can be extremely harmful to undertake any of these practices alone and without formal authorization.^[47]

Prerequisites to practice include rigorous adherence to Islamic norms (ritual prayer in its five prescribed times each day, the fast of Ramadan, and so forth). Additionally, the seeker ought to be firmly grounded in supererogatory practices known from the life of

Muhammad (such as the "sunna prayers"). This is in accordance with the words, attributed to God, of the following, a famous Hadiss Qudsi:

My servant draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks. It is also necessary for the seeker to have a correct creed (Aqidah),^[48] and to embrace with certainty its tenets.^[49] The seeker must also, of necessity, turn away from sins, love of this world, the love of company and renown, obedience to satanic impulse, and the promptings of the lower self. (The way in which this purification of the heart is achieved is outlined in certain books, but must be prescribed in detail by a Sufi master.) The seeker must also be trained to prevent the corruption of those good deeds which have accrued to his or her credit by overcoming the traps of ostentation, pride, arrogance, envy, and long hopes (meaning the hope for a long life allowing us to mend our ways later, rather than immediately, here and now). Sufi practices, while attractive to some, are not a means for gaining knowledge. The traditional scholars of Sufism hold it as absolutely axiomatic that knowledge of God is not a psychological state generated through breath control. Thus, practice of "techniques" is not the cause, but instead the occasion for such knowledge to be obtained (if at all), given proper prerequisites and proper guidance by a master of the way. Furthermore, the emphasis on practices may obscure a far more important fact: The seeker is, in a sense, to become a broken person, stripped of all habits through the practice of (in the words of Imam Al-Ghazali words) solitude, silence, sleeplessness, and hunger.^[50]

Zikr

Allah as having been written on the disciple's heart according to Qadiri Al-Muntahi order Zikr is the remembrance of God commanded in the Qur'an for all Muslims through a specific devotional act, such as the repetition of divine names, supplications and aphorisms from hadiss literature and the Qur'an. More generally, zikr takes a wide range and various layers of meaning.^[51] This includes zikr as any activity in which the Muslim maintains awareness of God. To engage in zikr is to practice consciousness of the Divine Presence and love, or "to seek a state of god wariness". The Qur'an refers to Muhammad as the very embodiment of zikr of God (65:10-11). Some types of Zikr are prescribed for all Muslims, and do not require Sufi initiation or the prescription of a Sufi master because they are deemed to be good for every seeker under every circumstance.

Some Sufi orders engage in ritualized Zikr ceremonies, or sema. Sema includes various forms of worship such as: recitation, singing (the most well known being the Qawwali music of the Indian sub-continent), instrumental music, dance (most famously the Sufi whirling of the Mevlevi order), incense, meditation, ecstasy, and trance.^[53]

Some Sufi orders stress and place extensive reliance upon Zikr, and likewise in Qadri Al-Muntahi Sufi tariqa, which was originated by Riaz Ahmed Gohar Shahi. This practice of Zikr is called Zikr-e-Qulb (remembrance of Allah by Heartbeats). The basic idea in this practice is to visualize the Arabic name of God, Allah, as having been written on the disciple's heart.^[54]

Muraqaba

The practice of *muraqaba* can be likened to the practices of meditation attested in many faith communities. The word *muraqaba* is derived from the same root (*r-q-ḥ*) occurring as one of the 99 Names of God in the Qur'an, *al-Raqīb*, meaning "the Vigilant" and attested in verse 4: 1 of the Qur'an. Through *muraqaba*, a person watches over or takes care of the spiritual heart, acquires knowledge about it, and becomes attuned to the Divine Presence, which is ever vigilant. While variation exists, one description of the practice within a Naqshbandī lineage reads as follows:

He is to collect all of his bodily senses in concentration, and to cut himself off from all preoccupation and notions that inflict themselves upon the heart. And thus he is to turn his full consciousness towards God Most High while saying three times: "*Ilāhī anta maqsūdī wa-riḍāka matlūbī*—my God, you are my Goal and Your good pleasure is what I seek." Then he brings to his heart the Name of the Essence—*Allāh*—and as it courses through his heart he remains attentive to its meaning, which is "Essence without likeness." The seeker remains aware that He is Present, Watchful, Encompassing of all, thereby exemplifying the meaning of his saying (may God bless him and grant him peace): "Worship God as though you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He sees you." And likewise the prophetic tradition: "The most favored level of faith is to know that God is witness over you, wherever you may be."

Visitation

In popular Sufism (i.e., devotional practices that have achieved currency in world cultures through Sufi influence), one common practice is to visit the tombs of saints, great scholars, and righteous people. This is a particularly common practice in South Asia, where famous tombs include those of *Khoja Afaq*, near Kashgar, in China; *Lal Shahbaz Qalander*, in Sindh, Pakistan; *Moinuddin Chishti* in Ajmer, India. Likewise, in Fez, Morocco, a popular destination for such pious visitation is the *Zaouia Moulay Idriss II* and the yearly visitation to see the current Sheikh of the *Qadiri Boutchichi Tariqah*, *Sheikh Sidi Hamza al Qadiri al Boutchichi* to celebrate the *Mawlid* (which is usually televised on Moroccan National television).

Islam and Sufism and Sufism and Islamic law



Tomb of Shaikh Salim Chisti, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Scholars and adherents of Sufism sometimes describe Sufism in terms of a threefold approach to God as explained by a tradition (*hadīṣ*) attributed to Muhammad, "The Canon is my word, the order is my deed, and the truth is my interior state". Sufis believe the canon, order and truth are mutually interdependent.^[56] The order, the 'path' on which the mystics walk, has been defined as 'the path which comes out of the Canon, for the main road is called branch, the path, *tariq*.' No mystical experience can be realized if the binding injunctions of the Canon are not followed faithfully first. The path, order, however, is narrower and more difficult to walk. It leads the adept, called *sālik* (wayfarer), in his *sulūk* (wayfaring), through different stations (*maqāmāt*) until he reaches his goal, the perfect *tawhīd*, the existential confession that God is One.^[57] Jalaluddin Ar Rumi, the initiator of the Mawlevi Tariqah, spoke of the Canon and Sufism in such terms, "To be a real Sufi, is to be to Muhammad, *salallahu alaihy wasallam*, just as Abu Bakr was to him, peace be upon him." Shaykh al-Akbar Muhiuddeen Ibn Arabi mentions, "When we see someone in this Community who claims to be able to guide others to God, but is remiss in but one rule of the Sacred Law - even if he manifests miracles that stagger the mind - asserting that his shortcoming is a special dispensation for him, we do not even turn to look at him, for such a person is not a sheikh, nor is he speaking the truth, for no one is entrusted with the secrets of God Most High save one in whom the ordinances of the Sacred Law are preserved. (Jami' karamat al-awliya)" The Amman Message, a detailed statement issued by 200 leading Islamic scholars in 2005 in Amman, and adopted by the Islamic world's political and temporal leaderships at the Organization of the Islamic Conference summit at Mecca in December 2005, and by six other international Islamic scholarly assemblies including the International Islamic Fiqh Academy of Jeddah, in July 2006, specifically recognized the validity of Sufism as a part of Islam.^[59]

Traditional Islamic thought and Sufism

The literature of Sufism emphasizes highly subjective matters that resist outside observation, such as the subtle states of the heart. Often these resist direct reference or description, with the consequence that the authors of various Sufi treatises took recourse to allegorical language. For instance, much Sufi poetry refers to intoxication, which Islam expressly forbids. This usage of indirect language and the existence of interpretations by people who had no training in Islam or Sufism led to doubts being cast over the validity of Sufism as a part of Islam. Also, some groups emerged that considered themselves above the Sharia and discussed Sufism as a method of bypassing the rules of Islam in order to attain salvation directly. This was disapproved of by traditional scholars. For these and other reasons, the relationship between traditional Islamic scholars and Sufism is complex and a range of scholarly opinion on Sufism in Islam has been the norm. Some scholars, such as Al-Ghazali, helped its propagation while other scholars opposed it. W. Chittick explains the position of Sufism and Sufis this way:

In short, Muslim scholars who focused their energies on understanding the normative guidelines for the body came to be known as jurists, and those who held that the most important task was to train the mind in achieving correct understanding came to be divided into three main schools of thought: theology, philosophy, and Sufism. This leaves us with the third domain of human existence, the spirit. Most Muslims who devoted their major efforts to developing the spiritual dimensions of the human person came to be known as Sufis.

Traditional and non-traditional Sufi groups



The mausoleum (gongbei) of Ma Laichi in Linxia City, China.

The traditional Sufi orders, which are in majority, emphasize the role of Sufism as a spiritual discipline within Islam. Therefore, the Sharia (traditional Islamic law) and the Sunnah are seen as crucial for any Sufi aspirant. One proof traditional orders assert is that almost all the famous Sufi masters of the past Caliphates were experts in Sharia and were renowned as people with great Iman (faith) and excellent practice. Many were also Qadis (Sharia law judges) in courts. They held that Sufism was never distinct from Islam and to fully comprehend and practice Sufism one must be an observant Muslim.

In recent decades there has been a growth of non-traditional Sufi movements in the West. Examples include the Universal Sufism movement, the Golden Sufi Center, the Sufi Foundation of America, the neo-sufism of Idriss Shah, Sufism Reoriented and the International Association of Sufism. Rumi has become one of the most widely read poets in the United States, thanks largely to the translations published by Coleman Barks.

The use of the title Sufi by non-traditional groups to refer to themselves, and their appropriation of traditional Sufi masters (most notably Jalaluddin Rumi) as sources of authority or inspiration, is not accepted by some Muslims who are Sufi adherents.

Many of the great Sufi masters of the present and the past instruct that: one needs the form of the religious practices and the outer dimension of the religion to fulfill the goals of the inner dimension of Sufism (Proximity to God). The exoteric practices prescribed by God contain inner meanings and provide the means for transformation with the proper spiritual guidance of a master. It is thought that through the forms of the ritual and prescribed Islamic practices (prayer, pilgrimage, fasting, charity and affirmation of Divine Unity) the soul may be purified and one may then begin to embark on the mystical quest. In fact it is considered psychologically dangerous by some Sufi masters to participate in Sufi practices, such as "zikr", without adhering to the outer aspects of the religion which add spiritual balance and grounding to the practice.

Some traditional Sufis also object to interpretations of classical Sufis texts by writers who have no grounding in the traditional Islamic sciences and therefore no prerequisites for understanding such texts. These are considered by certain conventional Islamic scholars as beyond the pale of the religion. This being said, there are Islamic Sufi groups that are open to non-Muslim participation,^[60] Sufi-Buddhism being one such group.

Preeminent Sufis

Abul Hasan al-Shadhili

Abul Hasan al-Shadhili, the founder of the Shadhiliyya Sufi order, introduced *zīkr jahri* (The method of remembering Allah through loud means). Unlike other Sufis who preached self-denial, Shadhili taught his followers to enjoy all permitted (*halal*) and thank Allah for that which attracted Muslims towards his Sufi order. For this, Shadhiliyya is also called *tariqush shu'kr*. Shadhili gave eighteen valuable *hizbs* not only to the followers of his order, but to all Muslims out of which *Hizbul Bahr* is recited worldwide even today.

Bayazid Bastami

Bayazid Bastami is considered to be "of the six bright stars in the firmament of the Prophet", and a link in the Golden Chain of the Naqshbandi Tariqah. He was the first one to spread the reality of Annihilation (*Fana'*), whereby the Mystic becomes fully absorbed to the point of becoming unaware of himself or the objects around him. Every existing thing seems to vanish, and he feels free of every barrier that could stand in the way of his viewing the Remembered One. In one of these states, Bastami cried out: "Praise to Me, for My greatest Glory!" His belief in the unity of all religions became apparent when asked the question: "How does Islam view other religions?" His reply was "All are vehicles and a path to God's Divine Presence." From a young age, he left his mother stating to her that he could not serve Allah and his mother at the same time.^[62]

Ibn Arabi

Muhyiddin Muhammad b. 'Ali Ibn 'Arabi (or Ibn al-'Arabi) is considered to be one of the most important Sufi masters, although he never founded any order (*tariqa*). His writings, especially *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* and *Fusus al-hikam*, have been studied within all the Sufi orders as the clearest expression of *tawhid* (Divine Unity), though because of their recondite nature they were often only given to initiates. Later those who followed his teaching became known as the school of *wahdat al-wujud* (the Oneness of being). He himself considered his writings to have been divinely inspired. As he expressed the Way to one of his close disciples, his legacy is that 'you should never ever abandon your servanthood (*'ubudiyya*), and that there may never be in your soul a longing for any existing thing'.^[63]

The following quotations give a flavor of his teaching: 'Whoever witnesses without ceasing what he was created for, in both this world and the next, is the Perfect Servant, the intended goal of the cosmos, the deputy of the whole cosmos'.^[64] 'The self is an ocean without a shore. There is no end to the contemplation of it in this world or the next'.^[65] 'God seeks from you your heart and gives to you all that you are. So purify and cleanse it [the heart] through presence, wakefulness and reverential fear'.^[66]

Junayd Baghdadi

Junayd Baghdadi (830-910 AD) was one of the great early Sufis, and is a central figure in the golden chain of many Sufi orders. He laid the groundwork for sober mysticism in contrast to that of God-intoxicated Sufis like al-Hallaj, Bayazid Bastami and Abusaeid Abolkheir. During the trial of al-Hallaj, his former disciple, the Caliph of the time demanded his fatwa. In response, he issued this fatwa: "From the outward appearance he is to die and we judge according to the outward appearance and God knows better". He is referred to by Sufis as Sayyid-ut Taifa, i.e. the leader of the group. He lived and died in the city of Baghdad.

Mansur al-Hallaj

Mansur al-Hallaj is renowned for his claim "Ana-l-Haq" (I am The Truth). His refusal to recant this utterance, which was regarded as apostasy, led to a long trial. He was imprisoned for 11 years in a Baghdad prison, before being tortured and publicly crucified on March 26, 922. He is still revered by Sufis for his willingness to embrace torture and death rather than recant. It is said that during his prayers, he would say "O Lord! You are the guide of those who are passing through the Valley of Bewilderment. If I am a heretic, enlarge my heresy."

Reception

Perception outside Islam



Zikr in Omdurman, Sudan. A choreographed Sufi performance on Friday, at Qadiriyya event.

Sufi mysticism has long exercised a fascination upon the Western world, and especially its orientalist scholars.^[68] Figures like Rumi have become household names in the United States, where Sufism is perceived as quietist and less political.^[68]

The Islamic Institute in Mannheim, Germany, which works towards the integration of Europe and Muslims, sees Sufism as particularly suited for interreligious dialogue and intercultural harmonization in democratic and pluralist societies; it has described Sufism as a symbol of tolerance and humanism - undogmatic, flexible and non-violent.^[69]

Influence of Sufism on Judaism

A great influence was exercised by Sufism upon the ethical writings of Jews in the Middle Ages. In the first writing of this kind, we see "Kitab al-Hidayah ila Fara'id al-Kouloub", Duties of the Heart, of Bahya ibn Paquda. This book was translated by Judah ibn Tibbon into Hebrew under the title "Hovot ha-Levavot".^[70]

The precepts prescribed by the Torah number 613 only; those dictated by the intellect are innumerable.

This was precisely the argument used by the Sufis against their adversaries, the Ulama. The arrangement of the book seems to have been inspired by Sufism. Its ten sections correspond to the ten stages through which the Sufi had to pass in order to attain that true and passionate love of God which is the aim and goal of all ethical self-discipline. A considerable amount of Sufi ideas entered the Jewish mainstream through Bahya ibn Paquda's work, which remains one of the most popular ethical treatises in Judaism.

*It is noteworthy that in the ethical writings of the Sufis Al-Kusajri and Al-Harawi there are sections which treat of the same subjects as those treated in the "Hobot ha-Lebabot" and which bear the same titles: e.g., "Bab al-Tawakkul"; "Bab al-Taubah"; "Bab al-Muhasabah"; "Bab al-Tawaḍu"; "Bab al-Zuhd". In the ninth gate, Bahya directly quotes sayings of the Sufis, whom he calls *Perushim*. However, the author of the *Hovot ha-Levavot* did not go so far as to approve of the asceticism of the Sufis, although he showed a marked predilection for their ethical principles.*

The Jewish writer Abraham bar Hiyya teaches the asceticism of the Sufis. His distinction with regard to the observance of Jewish law by various classes of men is essentially a Sufic theory. According to it there are four principal degrees of human perfection or sanctity; namely:

- (1) of "Shari'ah," i.e., of strict obedience to all ritual laws of Islam, such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, almsgiving, ablution, etc., which is the lowest degree of worship, and is attainable by all*
- (2) of *Tariqah*, which is accessible only to a higher class of men who, while strictly adhering to the outward or ceremonial injunctions of religion, rise to an inward perception of mental power and virtue necessary for the nearer approach to the Divinity*
- (3) of "Hakikah," the degree attained by those who, through continuous contemplation and inward devotion, have risen to the true perception of the nature of the visible and invisible; who, in fact, have recognized the Godhead, and through this knowledge have succeeded in establishing an ecstatic relation to it; and*
- (4) of the "Ma'arifah," in which state man communicates directly with the Deity.*

*Abraham ben Moses ben Maimon, the son of the great Jewish philosopher Maimonides, believed that Sufi practices and doctrines continue the tradition of the Biblical prophets. He introduced into the Jewish prayer such practices as reciting God's names (*ziker*), prostration*

, stretching out hands, kneeling, ablution of the feet. Some of these Sufi-Jewish practices are still observed in a few Oriental synagogues.

Abraham Maimuni's principal work is originally composed in Judeo-Arabic and entitled "כתאב כפיא אלעאבדין" *Kitāb Kifāyah al-`Ābidīn* ("A Comprehensive Guide for the Servants of God"). From the extant surviving portion it is conjectured that Maimuni's treatise was three times as long as his father's *Guide for the Perplexed*. In the book, Maimuni evidences a great appreciation and affinity to Sufism (Islamic mysticism). Followers of his path continued to foster a Jewish-Sufi form of pietism for at least a century, and he is rightly considered the founder of this pietistic school, which was centered in Egypt.

The followers of this path, which they called, interchangingly, Hasidism (not to confuse with the latter Jewish Hasidic movement) or Sufism (*Tasawwuf*), practiced spiritual retreats, solitude, fasting and sleep deprivation. The Jewish Sufis maintained their own brotherhood, guided by a religious leader - like a Sufi sheikh.^[71]

Abraham Maimuni's two sons, Obadyah and David, continued to lead this Jewish-Sufi brotherhood. Obadyah Maimonides wrote *Al-Mawālā Al Hawādiyya* ("The Treatise of the Pool") - an ethico-mystical manual based on the typically Sufi comparison of the heart to a pool that must be cleansed before it can experience the Divine.

The Maimonidean legacy extended right through to the 15th century with the 5th generation of Maimonidean Sufis, David ben Joshua Maimonides, who wrote *Al-Mursīd ilā al-Tafarrud* (The Guide to Detachment), which includes numerous extracts of Suhrawardī's *Kalimat at-Tasawwuf*.^[72]

Popular culture

Films

The movie *Bab'Aziz* (2005), directed by Nacer Khemir, tells the story of an old and blind dervish who must cross the desert with his little granddaughter during many days and nights to get to his last dervish reunion celebrated every 30 years. The movie is full of Sufi mysticism, containing quotes of Sufi poets like Rumi and showing an ecstatic Sufi dance.

In *Monsieur Ibrahim* (2003), Omar Sharif's character professes to be a Muslim in the Sufi tradition. Newer production companies and directors are beginning to populate the media landscape with films that emphasize a Sufi sensibility. Most notably Sufi Films with Director James McConnell also Director Simon Broughton for *Sufi Soul - The Mystic Music of Islam*, to name a few in a growing field. The University of North Carolina provides a partial list of some other Films on Sufism and Saints.

Music

Madonna, on her 1994 record *Bedtime Stories*, sings a song called "Bedtime Story" that discusses achieving a high unconsciousness level. The video for the song shows an ecstatic Sufi ritual with many dervishes dancing, Arabic calligraphy and some other Sufi elements. In her 1998 song "Bittersweet", she recites Rumi's poem by the same name. In her 2001

Drowned World Tour, Madonna sang the song "Secret" showing rituals from many religions, including a Sufi dance.

*Singer/songwriter Loreena McKennitt's record *The Mask and Mirror* (1994) has a song called "The Mystic's Dream" that is influenced by Sufi music and poetry. The band MewithoutYou has made references to Sufi parables, including the name of their upcoming album *It's All Crazy! It's All False! It's All a Dream! It's Alright* (2009). Lead singer Aaron Weiss claims this influence comes from his parents, who are both Sufi converts.*

*Lalan Fakir and Kaji Nazrul Islam scored several Sufi songs. Other famous Sufi musicians from the Indian subcontinent include the legendary Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Abida Parveen, and Kailash Kher. A. R. Rahman, the Oscar-winning Indian musician has several compositions which draw inspiration from the Sufi genre; one example is the Sufi filmi qawwali, "Khwaja Mere Khwaja" in the 2008 Bollywood film *Jodhaa Akbar*.*

Junoon, a band from Pakistan, is famous for creating the genre of Sufi rock by combining elements of modern hard rock and traditional folk music with Sufi poetry.

Richard Thompson is a practicing Sufi and once lived in a Sufi commune in East Anglia with his first wife and young family.

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