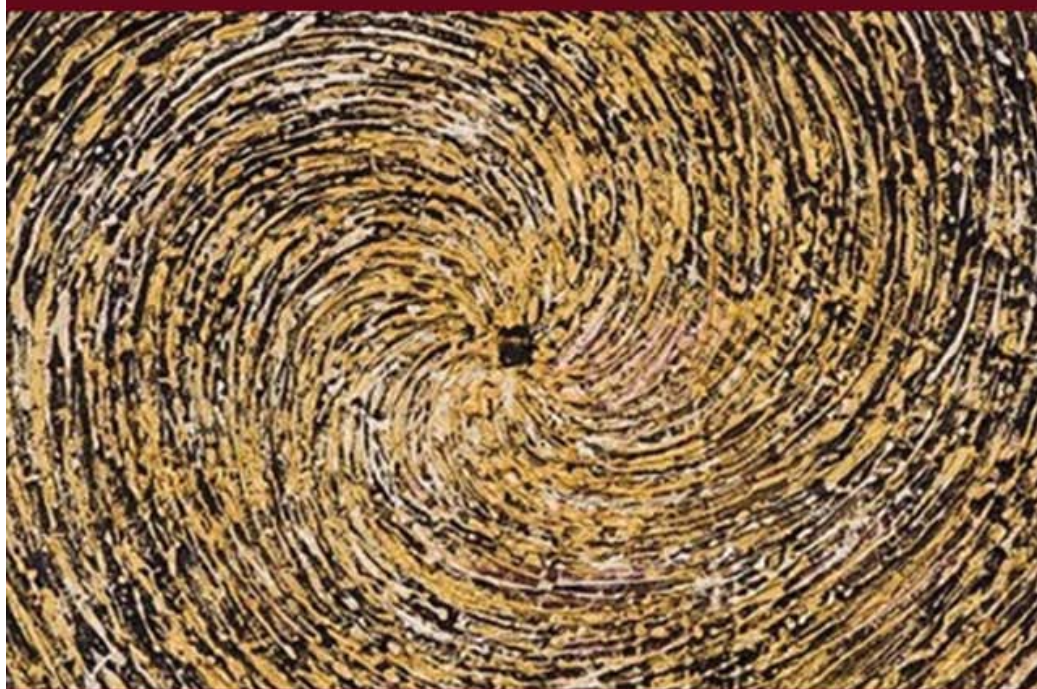


ELEMENTS OF SUFISM



SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI



Publisher: Zahra Publications

ISBN-10 (Printed Version): 1-919897-06-2

ISBN-13 (Printed Version): 978-1-919897-06-6

ISBN (E-Book Version): 978-1-919826-47-9

<http://www.zahrapublications.pub>

First Published in 1990

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Book Description

NOTE: This book has also been published under the title, “*The Thoughtful Guide to Sufism*”.

Sufism is the heart of Islam. This introduction to Sufism describes its origins and practices, its historical background and its spread throughout the world.

The Elements of Sufism explains:

- Where Sufism originated
- The relationship between Islam and Sufism
- What it means to be a Sufi
- The relevance of Sufism in modern life

About the Author

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years. A prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment, he is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

Acknowledgements

This book has come about as a result of a direct question and request from Michael Mann as to the reality of Sufism. He knows that I am not an academic, nor am I interested in debate or controversy. He also knows that whatever I say will come from my heart and is based on my experience. I thank him for his trust, persistence and patience.

Dr. Latimah Peerwani nursed this book all along, and verified and researched many of the historical facts. Without her discipline, loyalty and hard work, this book would not have been produced.

The excellent copy-editing was the work of Ahmad Thomson.

Introduction



Sufism and Islam cannot be separated, in the same way that higher consciousness or awakening cannot be separated from Islam. Islam is not a historical phenomenon that began 1,400 years ago. It is the timeless art of awakening by means of submission. Sufism is the heart of Islam. It is as ancient as the rise of human consciousness.

In this work, we attempt to present an overview of the meaning of Sufism. We describe its origins and practices, and the historical background out of which Sufism, as it is known today, arose in the East and then spread throughout the rest of the world. We also attempt to show that the Sufis are the upholders of the real message of Islam. Sufism only arises when abuse of Islam is rampant. Otherwise, Sufism and real Islam are one and the same.

The rise of Sufism began after the first century of Islam as a struggle against the increasing distortions and misrepresentations of its teachings, especially as perpetrated by the leadership of the day. Rulers or kings could often be seen to be using the name of Islam to justify their own ends, or to be discarding those aspects of its teachings which did not suit their purposes or extravagant lifestyle. It is from this time onwards that history records the growing revival, renewal and militancy among many groups of sincere Muslims throughout the expanding Muslim world who were eager to restore the pure and original message brought by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This was a spontaneous awakening of individuals discovering the true prophetic way who were inspired by the inner light of awakening and fulfillment. Sufism spread across the land without its being a centrally organized movement. The Sufi brotherhood was a reality without much of an outer co-ordination or organization. Its reality was the awakening of the original ascetic and joyful qualities within people's hearts and the acceptance

of the outer prophetic law. Sufism bore similarities to ascetic mysticism, yet it also allowed for spiritual militancy in many instances. The brotherhood which was experienced by the Sufis was due mostly to their inner conditioning and state of their hearts, rather than to adherence to any particular theological doctrine or other ethnic or traditional bondages.

The Sufi movement in Islam echoed similar movements in other major religions, such as Cabbalism in Judaism, Gnosticism or Unitarianism in Christianity and, in a way, the advent of Buddhism where Hinduism is concerned. Also, as with other spiritual movements and revivals, we find instances of some Sufis taking things to extremes, and even distorting the multi-dimensions of Islam. Excess esotericism, or the rejection of the bounds of outer behavior or the balanced prophetic way, are examples of this phenomenon, although they are the exception rather than the rule.

What is relevant to us today about Sufism is that it has maintained a clear thread and line of direct transmission of wisdom back to original Islam. The key to Sufism is that of inner awakening, freedom and joy through recognition of outer restriction by choice and discrimination. The numerous studies which are currently being published in an attempt to understand and predict the direction of Islamic revival, such as the studies on the Sufis of Russia or on the Sufi brotherhoods in certain Middle Eastern countries, and so on, are all based on the fears of the various governments concerned of a revival which will place the leadership of the Muslims in the hands of those who are closest to emulating and living the way of life of the Prophet Muhammad. And this, of course, is a great threat to the existing authorities in most of the so-called Muslim countries today.

The reason that the majority of current studies on Sufism are of little use in a practical sense is because of the nature of inner awakening itself, which is the core of Sufism. Writing books about inner awakening is only really possible if one has experienced it, just as understanding of such books is only really possible if one genuinely desires, or has already attained, such awakening. The Sufi is the locus of connecting the outer, physical reality with a timeless, spaceless dimension which is experienced within the self. The Sufi lives like the tip of the iceberg which is apparent in the seen world, while experiencing aspects of the hidden and veiled world which is

the foundation of what is visible, and which forms the rest of its reality. He does his best to understand the causal, physical outer life while awakening to an immense inner Reality, which encompasses both the known and the unknown worlds, the unitive Reality of the seen and the unseen, of time and space and non-time-space.

It is for this reason that the inner life of the Sufi has no bounds, and yet he acknowledges and accepts the outer bounds with courtesy towards nature and the natural creation. The Sufi is totally content with the immeasurable bliss within. Yet he struggles outwardly towards a better quality of life on earth and does his best without being overly concerned about the ultimate results. Outer struggle and work are necessary companions to inner purification and contentment.

Genuine Sufis are essentially similar wherever they come from, in that they share an inner light and awakening, and an outer courtesy and service to humanity. Apparent differences between Sufis tend to relate to matters concerning spiritual practices or prescriptions for the purification of hearts. The sweet fruit of Sufism is the same. It is only the trees which may look different and which may flower in different seasons.

In this work, we have tried to show that those who claim that it is possible to have Sufism without Islam are only looking at one side of the story. Inner purity is generally attainable, but without its being contained outwardly, it will not result in any real flourishing of a spiritual culture or an enlightened environment. Inner light and joy may be sufficient for an individual living in a cave, but once we start interacting with others, we need to know where and what the bounds are for that social interaction to be able to take place, and this is where we find that the laws of Islam are necessary and inseparable from Sufism.

So the relevance of Sufism today is greater than it has been in any other age, for nowadays we can across cultural and political boundaries much more easily, because of ease of access through communications, travel and closeness of the world. The message of Sufism is more urgent now, especially due to the fact that the world is increasingly becoming bound by materialism and consumerism. The awakening to the inner life of man is a necessary condition of his fulfillment as a human being. It comes as the pinnacle of his struggle with the elements and the fulfillment

of his basic needs. Once our outer needs are met, then the inner must also be fulfilled. The two are so interlinked that those who are awakened to both the outer and inner realities see them as inseparable and continuous in the one creation, unified universe, and such a being is described by the Sufi master, Ibn `Arabi, in these words:

My heart has become capable of every form:

It is a pasture for gazelles,

And a monastery for Christian monks,

And a temple for idols,

And the pilgrim to Ka`bah,

And the tablets of the Torah,

And the Book of the Qur'an.

I follow the religion of Love:

Whatever way Love's camel takes,

That is my religion and my faith.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

London, England, 1990

Chapter 1: Definitions of Sufism



The term Sufism, which has become over the ages very popularly used, and often with a wide range of meanings, originates from three Arabic letters *sa*, *wa* and *fa*. There have been many opinions on the reason for its origin from *sa wa fa*. According to some the word is derived from *safa* which means purity. According to another opinion it is derived from the Arabic verb *safwe* which means those who are selected. This meaning is quoted frequently in Sufi literature. Some think that the word is derived from the word *saf* which means line or row, implying those early Muslims who stood in the first row in prayer or supplication or holy war. Yet others believe that it is derived from *suffa* which was a low verandah made of clay and slightly elevated off the ground outside the Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina, where the poor and good-hearted people who followed him often sat. Some assume that the origin of the word Sufism is from *suf* which means wool, which implies that the people who were interested in inner knowledges cared less about their outer appearances and often took to wearing one simple garment all the year round which was made of wool.

Whatever its origin, the term Sufism has come to mean those who are interested in inner knowledge, those who are interested in finding a way or practice towards inner awakening and enlightenment.

It is important to note that this term was hardly ever used in the first two centuries of Islam. Many critics of the Sufis, or the enemies, remind us that this term was never heard of during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, or of the people who came after him, or of the people who came after them.

However, during the second and third centuries following the advent of Islam in 622 some people began to call themselves Sufis, or to use other similar terms related to Sufism which meant that they were following the path of self-purification, the purification of the 'heart', and the improvement of the quality of their character and behavior in order to reach the station of those who worship God as if they see Him, knowing that although they do not see Him, He sees them. This is what the term Sufism came to mean throughout the ages within the Islamic context.

I quote below a few great Sufi masters' definitions:

Imam Junayd of Baghdad (d. 910) defines Sufism as 'adopting every higher quality and leaving every low quality'. Shaykh Abu'l Hasan ash-Shadhili (d. 1258), the great North African spiritual master, defines Sufism as 'the practice and the training of the self through adoration and worship to return the self to the path of Lordship'. Shaykh Ahmad Zorruq (d. 1494) of Morocco defines Sufism as

the science by means of which you can put right the 'heart' and make it exclusive to God, using your knowledge of the way of Islam, particularly jurisprudence and its related knowledges, to improve your actions and keep within the bounds of the Islamic Law in order for wisdom to become apparent.

He also adds: 'Its foundation is the knowledge of Unity, and you need thereafter the sweetness of trust and certainty, otherwise you will not be able to bring about the necessary healing of the "heart".' According to Shaykh Ibn `Ajiba (d. 1809),

Sufism is a science by means of which you learn how to behave in order to be in the presence of the ever-present Lord through purifying your inner being and sweetening it with good actions. The path of Sufism begins as a science, its middle is actions and its end is divine gifts.

Shaykh as-Suyuti said, ‘The Sufi is the one who persists in purity with God, and good character with creation.’

From many of the recorded sayings and writings on Sufism such as these, it can be concluded that the basis of Sufism is the purification of the ‘heart’ and safeguarding it from any affliction, and that its end product is the correct and harmonious relationship between man and his Creator. So the Sufi is the one whom God has enabled to purify his ‘heart’ and to establish his relationship with Him and His creation through treading upon the correct path, as best exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Within its traditional Islamic context, Sufism is based on courtesy which ultimately leads to universal courtesy and awareness. Courtesy starts with the outer, and the true Sufi practices the outer cleansing and keeping within the bounds of what is permitted by God. It starts with following the Islamic Law, that is, by upholding the appropriate laws and requirements of Islam, which means the path of submission to God. So Sufism begins with acquiring the knowledge of the outer practices in order to develop, evolve and enliven the inner awakened state.

It is erroneous to imagine that a Sufi can end up with the fruits of Sufism, which are inner light, certainty and knowledge of Allah, without having maintained an outer protective shell which is based upon adherence to the requirements of the outer laws. This correct outer behavior -- physical behavior – is based on making supplications and doing the prayers and all the other ritual acts of worship established by the Prophet Muhammad in order to achieve watchfulness of the ‘heart’, with its accompanying moods and states. Then one can progress on the purification ladder from one’s base intentions towards higher aspirations, from the awareness of greed and pride towards humility and noble contentment. This inner work needs to be continued in a well-contained and maintained outer situation.

Chapter 2: The Early Development of Sufism



Al-Kindi (d. tenth century) refers to the appearance of a small community in Alexandria in Egypt in the ninth century which enjoined good and spoke out against evil. They were called Sufis. According to *Muruj adh-Dhahab al-Mas'ludi*, Sufis first appeared during the time of the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun. According to Abu'l-Qasim Qushayri, the Sufis appeared in the ninth century, about two hundred years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The question arises, why did it apparently take so many years for people to take serious interest in the inner sciences? A brief retrospective glance at the early history of Islam may shed some light on this matter.

Let us transpose ourselves to Arabia at the beginning of seventh century AD. What we find is a society of disunited Arab tribes who for centuries had been involved in an established tradition of warfare, idol-worship and other tribal values. Although the Arabs of that time engaged in commerce outside Arabia, they were little influenced by other cultures. The Byzantine Empire and the forays of Nebuchadnezzar into Arabia really had little impact upon them. So we find a people who had been carrying on their traditional nomadic way of life for centuries with little change. Suddenly an incredible 'Prophetic Light' manifests before them. This light begins to clearly identify and destroy the inhumanities and injustices in their society.

The incredible being who brought this new light of knowledge was the Prophet Muhammad. For 23 years Muhammad sang the eternal truth that man is born into this world in order to learn the ways of creation while journeying back to his source, the One Creator, for although man is free in his essence he is constrained and restricted by the outer laws that govern existence.

Muhammad spoke the same eternal truth which was spoken by thousands of divine messengers before him, and he spoke it in the contemporary language of his land, a language which was the

highest cultural achievement of and a gift to those people. The Arabs had no other artistic heritage other than their language. The Prophet expounded the eternal truth to a people who had immersed in the darkness of brutal ignorance for centuries. After years of effort, he had gathered a handful of supporters, most of whom had been persecuted and forced to flee to Ethiopia to seek protection under a benign Christian ruler called the Negus. Having withdrawn from Mecca to Medina in AD 622 – the point from which Muslim dating begins, and the event which is known as the Hijra – Muhammad established a new community of people from different parts of Arabia, but chiefly from Mecca and Medina. This community's outward orientation during worship of God Alone was the Ka`bah, a cube-shaped building made of stone which was originally erected by the Prophet Abraham in Mecca, but its day-today orientation was the blessed Prophet himself. They followed this being, his teachings and his explanations of the Qur'anic injunctions which were revealed to him, inwardly oriented to their Creator. They worshipped God Alone and followed the Prophet who lived by knowledge and love of God.

In the last ten years of the Prophet's life, and especially during the last three years, events began to move quickly. During this period, thousands of Bedouins whose tendency was to go where power and victory prevailed, saw Islam dominating their land more and more, and accordingly they all embraced Islam in their thousands. When Muhammad died, the nascent Muslim community suffered a great shock which resulted in a hasty and tense election of Abu Bakr as the first leader of the community.

The Prophet Muhammad had indicated on numerous occasions to whom the Muslims should refer about matters concerning the way of Islam after his death, like a responsible doctor who, when about to go on leave or retire, tells his patients to whom they should refer in his absence. A doctor knows his patients' condition better than anyone else. It was quite natural for a spiritual master like Muhammad to point out who was best suited to run the affairs of the community after his death, in accordance with the divine laws which had been revealed to him. However, a disagreement arose as to whether the Prophet had specifically appointed Ali as his successor, or whether he had simply mentioned him as the greatest among them in knowledge and virtue. The outcome was that before the Prophet was buried, the Arabs started lobbying for power. Those

who were from Medina wanted to elect one from among themselves as their leader. At the last moment, two of the closest companions of the Prophet, Abu Bakr and `Umar, managed to join the circle and, with the support of `Umar, Abu Bakr was elected as leader of the community, being the respected elder and acknowledged sincere companion of the Prophet.

Abu Bakr's leadership lasted for two years, a period which was full of internal strife. The Arab psyche does not like to be subjugated in any way, for theirs is a free-spirited mentality. One common method of subjugation is the compulsory paying of tax money to another. The paying of the Islamic alms tax, which Abu Bakr enforced in the case of those who refused to pay it, was interpreted by some as being a form of subjugation to which they did not wish to submit. Thus most of the tribes who had recently joined the Islamic movement suddenly found that they had to pay up and actually give something away, rather than simply benefiting them for the booty. This was a cause of dissension within the rapidly expanding Muslim community. Besides this, there were false claimants to prophethood and Abu Bakr's period of leadership was mostly spent in suppressing internal strife.

After the death of Abu Bakr in 634, `Umar, who had already been appointed by Abu Bakr as his vice-regent, became the next leader of the Muslim community. During the 10 years of his leadership there was a vast expansion of Islam. Egypt and the Persian and Byzantine Empires were conquered, including Jerusalem, the keys of which were given to `Umar in person by the Christians. `Umar was exemplary in his simplicity and lived most frugally. He was fatally stabbed by a Persian slave whilst praying in the mosque in 644.

The next leader, `Uthman, was appointed by a group of people who had been selected by `Umar to choose his successor. He came from the `Umayyad clan, some of whose members had been arch-enemies of the Prophet. Many of the `Umayyads had only embraced Islam after the conquest of Mecca by the Prophet and his followers, when they felt that there was no other option left for them. They accepted Islam reluctantly, and largely continued to live in the manner to which they had been accustomed in the past. `Uthman himself did not care much for worldly matters, but allowed many members of his clan to live as they wished. He appointed many members of his clan to live as they wished. He appointed many members of the `Umayyad clan

to key positions in the governance of the newly acquired Muslim territories, and accordingly there are those who have accused him of nepotism. In the first 6 years of his leadership there was continued territorial expansion by the Muslims, as well as consolidation of the lands which had already been conquered. In reality, however, it was the start of a reversal to rulership by men of greed rather than a continuation of Islamic governance by men of spiritual knowledge and piety.

During the rule of `Uthman, which lasted for 12 years, many of the Muslims fell back considerably into the pre-Islamic way of ignorance, superstitions and tribalism. The booty from the Persian, Byzantine and Egyptian Empires poured into Mecca and Medina, resulting in an era of opulent decay and frivolity. Large houses and palaces began to be constructed during this period. One architect at this time was Abu Lu'lu, the Persian slave who had murdered `Umar because `Umar had imposed a substantial tax on him. In `Umar's time, a house had usually consisted of a small square plot of land on which two or three rooms were built. On one side of these rooms was a courtyard, in the middle of which was a well, and in the corner a container for storing grain. It was all built on one level. However, during the time of `Uthman, many palaces were built, and people began to vie with each other in constructing grander buildings.

After `Uthman's murder in 656, which occurred while he was reciting the Qur'an, Ali was popularly elected as the next leader of the Muslims. His rule lasted for nearly 6 years and was full of internal strife and warfare. By that time many people called themselves Muslims but did not totally know or imbibe the Muhammadan way of life. We find Muslims swearing by the Qur'an, but going against its real meaning. In the year 656 the first mass swearing to a lie took place. The Prophet had warned his wife, Ayesha, that one day she would find herself fighting on the wrong side, and would thereby commit the worst grievance, in a place called Hawab, and that the dogs of Hawab would bark at her. Many years later, while passing by this place on her way to the battle of Jamal to fight against Ali, she heard the barking of dogs and remembered the prophetic warning. She asked what the place was called and was told that it was Hawab. However some of her companions brought 40 so-called Muslims to swear falsely on the Qur'an that it was not Hawab. Again, during the battle of Siffin in 657, another incident falsely swearing on the Qur'an took place.

After Imam `Ali's martyrdom in 661, in which he was fatally stabbed while in prostration during the prayer, his son Imam Hasan was in a natural and deserved position to be the next leader of the Muslims. However Mu`awiya, the `Ummayyad governor of Syria who was trying to secure the position of ruler for himself and his clan, began to incite people against Imam Hasan. Imam Hasan had a large army at his disposal. He knew the weaknesses of his people and did not want dissension within his army. He also realized the cleverness and treachery of Mu`awiya. He did not wish to see the blood of Muslims futilely shed. So he accepted a truce offered by Mu`awiya whereby he gave up any claim to the leadership of the Muslims without relinquishing his exalted spiritual station. Just like Imam `Ali, who had not simply sat aside when he was not elected as the first Muslim leader, but had done his best to put right what was going wrong during the years of his predecessors' rule, so Imam Hasan had no other option than to accept the fact that although he was the best of people at that time, yet he could not lead the Muslims. His acceptance of the truce was not a relinquishment of his true spiritual station, but rather an indication of it. Since it was not possible to translate his inner greatness into an outer statesmanship without having Muslim kill Muslim, the only alternative was to accept the conditions of the truce, which also stipulated that after him his brother Imam Husayn would be the next leader of the Muslims. However, Mu`awiya very cleverly reneged on all the terms of the truce after the murder of Imam Hasan in 661, and appointed his decadent son Yazid to be his successor. Accordingly Imam Husayn revolted against Mu`awiya and Yazid.

Imam Husayn was invited by the people of Kufa in Iraq to join them and was promised great support against Mu`awiya. The Kufans were a new community with fewer vested interests than the people of Mecca and Medina. By this time, Mecca had become an important center for producing wine and music, and dancing girls were the order of the day. In pre-Islamic times, Arabs had honored prostitutes who often sat on the same chair as an Arab ruler and gave him advice. This tradition had been revived in the time of Mu`awiya, and even though Kufa was a new city with a new Muslim community, some of its inhabitants had also reverted back to the old ways of the pre-Islamic period, although they did not have the traditions of the desert and the backwardness of the nomadic bedouins. Despite this situation, several thousand physically strong

Kufans voiced their support for Imam Husayn and wanted him to lead them. Accordingly Imam Husayn marched towards Kufa to continue his secular and spiritual leadership.

When he was half way to Kufa, Imam Husayn received the news that his emissary had been killed by the soldiers of Yazid. He had no alternative but to continue his journey. Yazid's troops intercepted him and insisted that he acknowledge the leadership of Yazid, who was known to be a drunkard who openly flouted the laws of Islam. Imam Husayn had no option but to fight against such a betrayal and corruption of Islam. In the ensuing battle of Karbala, about 72 members of his family were martyred, including babies and children who either died of thirst or from their enemies' arrows. In the end, Imam Husayn was martyred and beheaded. The surviving women and members of his family were dragged in chains and made to walk across the burning desert to Damascus, where they were brought to the court of Yazid.

The battle of Karbala in 661 marked an important turning point in the history of Islam. It served as a pointed reminder to those Muslims who had abandoned the unitive path of Islam to return to it. The way of Islam was revived by the death of Imam Husayn since it reminded many people of the need to follow spiritual leadership, and not merely the worldly rule of greedy kings, and to honor the sovereignty of God on this earth by following the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It also reminded the people that whoever was chosen as a temporal ruler should also be the most qualified person spiritually: he should be the most evolved person in consciousness, pious, humble and accessible to people, in order to uplift them, and not a ruler over them who, while living in affluence and luxury, terrorized them.

It was during that many of the present-day Muslim customs and habits originated. Within seventy years of Muhammad's death, most of the basic Islamic tenets and teachings were being ignored by many so-called Muslims, although of course there were also those who embodied and understood this noble teaching. Thus many of the so-called cultural and ethnic habits that we see in Muslims today are not derived from the original teachings of Islam, but trace their origins back to that period of the corrupt `Ummayyad dynasty. Indeed dynastic rule itself was forbidden by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The separation of men and women within the same house began in Damascus. There were men who wanted to have dancing girls in their palaces

and so they created for the women of the household ladies' quarters in order to separate them from the men's quarters, which had not existed in houses before. The mosque, which had been the center of the community where the general public met, and which was the center of economic, social and political exchange as well as a place of worship, ceased to be so. The mosque became a place of ritualistic worship and lost its pivotal position in the life of the community. The caliph grew fat, often drank and did not want to leave his palace. Accordingly the palace became the center of power and government activities. In order not to have his debauchery openly exposed, the caliph separated the women and the children from himself, and thus the home was divided and fragmented.

During this period of corrupt `Ummayyad rule, more conquests were taking place and more and more people were embracing Islam. On the whole, however, the rulers were mostly oppressive and worldly, and although there were many sincere and wise Muslims who understood and embodied the teachings of Islam, they were prevented from actually governing their communities by those who were hungry for power and wealth. Occasionally, a decent ruler would emerge, such as an 8th-century ruler called `Umar ibn `Abd al-Aziz (d. 717) who ruled for only two years. During this period he revived the original teaching of the blessed Prophet and stopped people from cursing Imam `Ali and the family of the Prophet from the pulpit in the mosques. However rulers such as he were the exception rather than the general rule.

Sincere and pious Muslims could not tolerate injustice and oppression indefinitely, and there emerged a movement led by Abu Muslim Khurasani committed to re-establishing justice and the true way of Islam. To begin with, it was a popular revolutionary movement against the `Ummayyads in favor of the Hashimites and the immediate family of the Prophet. However, when the cause was won, and the `Ummayyad dynasty was brought to an end in 749, the rulership of Muslim society was usurped by the Abbasids on the pretext of their being related to the family of Muhammad, although the connection was remote.

So by the year 750 another dynastic rulership had been established. In the years that followed, it was not unusual for a king to order some members of his family to be killed in order to end a power struggle or to remove any possible contender for his position. For example, Ma'mun

killed his brother Amin, his rival to the Abbasid throne. Some women were engaged in trickery behind the scenes, and kings aspired to become emperors and live in luxury and opulence. This was the prevailing situation in Muslim society only 200 years after the advent of Islam. There is no doubt that there also existed people of great wisdom and virtue and seekers after truth, as well as well-meaning scholars and men of knowledge and light, in the Muslim community, but on the other hand we find tyrannical and decadent Abbasid kings who called themselves rulers and yet distorted the Muhammadan model. There were many attempts by Muslims to bring the unjust caliphate to an end, but most of these were unsuccessful. Zayd ibn Ali and many others revolted against their unjust rulers, but they were put to the sword.

It was these circumstances of blatant political and social contradictions that gave rise to the emergence of the Sufis, pious and thoughtful Muslims under the general umbrella of Islam, wanting to distinguish themselves from the ruling party and their worldly supporters. So we find the Sufi movement beginning as a natural consequence of Muslim society accepting and following corrupt dynasty rulership rather than following the King of kings, God the Almighty, through following its true representatives on this earth.

Muslims who were aware of the real prophetic teachings, but unable to change the existing situation, started devoting their life to prayers and the discipline of inner purification. Imam `Ali Zayn al-`Abidin, the son of Imam Husayn, is just one of many prominent examples. These Muslims could not turn their energy outwardly against the evil regimes, so they were compelled to turn it inwardly against the evil within the human self. These are the people who later came to be called the Sufis.

Another group who gathered round the spiritual leaders who were descended from the Prophet Muhammad, in order to receive the true teachings of Islam, also rejected the caliphs and kings who prolonged corrupt dynastic rule. They were called Shi`a, which means the followers, the party, the group or the partisans.

The title of Imam was not only used by both of these groups to denote a qualified and recognized spiritual leader, but also, in the Shi`a Islamic tradition, the term took on an added meaning, being

used to designate 12 particular spiritual masters who are descended from the Prophet Muhammad. Each master, in his lifetime, confirmed the qualifications of and named his successor, the next Imam. The Sufi orders, a similar designation was accorded to the head of the order. The title of Shaykh, or spiritual master, could only be conferred by a recognized Shaykh upon another.

Whereas the Shi`as simply refused to follow the kingly caliphs and generally isolated themselves, the Sufis tolerated these rulers, saying that they could not deny their actual existence and therefore they had to abide by the laws of society and its ruler. However they sought inner enlightenment and adopted the Sufi path. From the Sufi point of view, it is said that if you cannot change the kings, then change yourself. If you cannot change the government, then change your lower self that is governing you individually from within.

What the first Sufis did can be done by anyone who is seeking the higher meaning in life. Hence it is superficial to say that Sufism came into existence 200 years after the Prophet Muhammad's death, or that it originated from the poor and good-hearted simple people who were among the earliest followers of the Prophet. Both these views are true as well as false. Sufism is a movement that began to take form, identity and size when Islamic leadership or rulership deviated from the original teachings of Islam. It was at this stage that the Sufi circles began to grow. These circles became a sign of protection as well as a sign of identity which differentiated between a real Muslim (that is, a Sufi) and the one who deviated from the original Muhammadan code.

The Shi`as, as already noted earlier, did not accept the generally held opinion of most Muslims that, as regards a corrupt regime, to have a tyrant ruler is better than having anarchy. So whenever it was possible, the Shi`as tried to do away with unjust rulers and in turn they were often massacred. The Sufis, as we have already seen, addressed themselves to man's inner problems and, therefore, developed the science of the self. When Imam Jujayd was asked, 'When did the name Sufi originate?' he said, 'Sufism was a reality without a name, but now in our time, it is a name without a reality.'

Throughout the history of Islamic civilization, we occasionally find a Sufi master rising to denounce openly a regime which has deviated from the original Muhammadi path to an unacceptable degree. A true Sufi does not accept the esoteric path only, because he is a man of Unity. He does not separate the inner from the outer. He distinguishes between them and recognizes where one stops and the other begins. He does not say that he is solely a person of inner and become a recluse. The Sufi spiritual masters were not recluses. They had the vision of totality. From the Sufi point of view, if you start at one end you end up at the other end. If you start with outer purity, you end up at the other end by purifying your inner self. If you start by purifying your inner self, you end up being concerned with the outer and with society.

If you want to know why a tree is so big and robust and can withstand the onslaught of hurricanes, you have to dig deep in order to discover the depth of its roots. One reflects the other and traces the story of the other. If you want to have a strong outer situation, then you need a strong inner situation. For example, a galleon or sailing ship carrying a full cargo will only cross the tumultuous seas if it has a strong mast and a very large sail. In the same way, the Sufis were saying, the more involved a person is in a worldly situation, the more concerned and involved he ought to be in a spiritual situation. Then there is a balance. You cannot have the one without the other. This is the meaning behind the observation that he who is seeking the world is in reality seeking a spiritual one, but he is unaware of it. The greedy person is in need of security. However the ultimate real security is inner contentment and certainty. If he seeks it outwardly, it is because the outer quest is easier. It is gross and physical and therefore more tangible and workable. The inner is more subtle and difficult to work. He who is arrogant outwardly is actually insecure inwardly, which is why he puts a show of arrogance. He who is inwardly insecure protects himself outwardly elevating himself.

These are the laws of the self which were discussed, taught and practiced in the Sufi circles. This does not mean that they were not known before this time and that they emerged only 200 years after the Prophet's lifetime. These types of knowledge were known both before and during the time of Muhammad and practiced without being formalized or labeled. It is like someone cooking a meal and eating it without having any name for the dish or a recipe book. So Sufism

existed at the time of the Prophet without that label actually being given to it. That is the meaning of Imam Junayd's saying, 'Sufism was a reality without a name.' It was not an objective science to be studied by orientalists and analyzed and disseminated by linguists. There is a big difference between merely collecting recipes and actually cooking and eating. Nowadays there are hardly any real cooks anywhere, but there are many people who collect and exchange recipes, such as 'There was an emergence of Sufism in the 9th century', which does not mean anything if one contemplates deeply. Statements that Sufism emerged two centuries after Prophet Muhammad's lifetime are superficial unless one considers the backdrop of the political history of Islam. For a reflective mind, it becomes quite clear that the emergence of Sufism out into the open was a reaction to the oppressive and unjust external situation caused by the ruling party which had deviated from the original Islamic way.

To highlight our previous comments, we see that within fifty years after Prophet Muhammad's death, not only do we have a reversal of the Muslim situation back to racism, feudalism and a class system of the haves and have-nots, together with the earlier pre-Islamic Arab family and tribal social structures, but also we see that the situation was now worse than in pre-Islamic times because of the confidence which the new religion had given the Arabs. Now that these people were the rulers, they used the frontal protection of the name of Islam to hide behind and justify their actions.

Within a 100 years of Prophet Muhammad's death, even more changes had taken place within the new Islamic society. Religious teaching in the mosques began to take on a conventional form. In the time of the Prophet, the mosque was simple in its architecture. There were no minarets. The idea of the minaret was introduced at a later stage, since this was a good way of transmitting the sound of the call to prayer over a long distance. Gradually, the mosque grew more sophisticated in design. Alongside these developments, the teaching of the religion of Islam began to take place in an increasingly formalized way. People began teaching the Qur'an and the recorded actions and sayings of the Prophet and jurisprudence in a more formal, standardized manner. The emergence of the Sufis after the death of Prophet Muhammad was not to bring any new teaching, but simply to keep the spirit and original form of Islam, its full meaning and inner

transmission, alive, rather than solely adhering to the formal aspects of the state religion which by then had begun to take shape. At the time of Muhammad's death, there were people who knew and understood the Qur'an and the recorded actions and sayings of the Prophet, and who were applying them in their lives. The sciences of religion which appeared later, such as theology and Qur'anic exegesis, hardly existed in these early days. Alongside the emergence of these theological sciences, the search for inner revival also began to take place. Previously they were not separated, and the real Muslims lived more simply and spontaneously.

Within a few hundred years of Prophet Muhammad's death, the political power of the Muslims started waning. Muslim Spain, which had been conquered in 756, was at this time beset with strife, largely because it too had settled for dynastic rule. There were power struggles and turmoil in Cordoba, rulers of small kingdoms throughout Andalusia were fighting against each other and Muslims were shedding the blood of Muslims. In the East, there was Abbasid decadence and internal division. The Fatimids, who were the rulers of Egypt, had also become politically weak. Most of the scholars of Sufism regard the pinnacle of the Sufi movement as having occurred around the 10th century. Mansur al-Hallaj, who was martyred in 923, is often referred to in this context.

It was during this period of social, political, spiritual and moral decadence and decline that the Sufi movement grew in strength to revive the true way of Islam, as has already been discussed earlier. In this sense, I regard the Sufi movement as a parallel to the prophethood of Jesus, whose message was not to destroy the Law of Moses, but to revive the spirit of the Law in order to rebalance it. As a result, we do not find Jesus changing the already existing Mosaic Law, but confirming it, while showing its true application and meaning. It was a later convert, Paul, and others, who brought about what is called Christianity. In the same way, it was during this period, in which many of the Muslims had lost sight of the true application and meaning of Islam, that major Sufi writings on spiritual and moral disciplines appeared in order to guide the people who desired balance, purity, self-knowledge and inner illumination.

One of the earliest documents on Sufism is that of `Abdar-Rahman as-Sulami who was born in 938 in Nishapur, in present-day Iran. Nishapur at that time was a great center of learning. As-

Sulami, in accordance with the tradition of his day, memorized the Qur'an by heart, learned Arabic grammar and studied the recorded actions and sayings of the Prophet and the other theological sciences. Like any other person whose soul is not sufficiently nourished by conventional religious teaching, and who has the capability and means to nourish it further, he began to travel extensively, especially between Balkh and Bukhara. Those areas were at that time very much alive with spiritual teachers and awakened souls. As-Sulami traveled westwards and spent a considerable length of time in Baghdad, Cairo and Mecca. He collected the wisdom of as many Sufi saints as possible and compiled it in his work *Tabaqat as-Sufiyya*. This is the earliest collection of biographies of Sufis. It contains the biographies of more than 1000 Sufis whom he encountered during his travels. Many of the written works of the Sufi masters which he mentioned in his book are no longer traceable. Accordingly this document of as-Sulami is an important historical account of what was happening in the Sufi world up to his day. In it, one finds out the situation regarding the search for truth and the revival of the inner meaning of the way of Islam, and the continuation of the transformative element of this way of life, during the 9th and 10th centuries.

As well as as-Sulami's work, there are other major works on Sufism, such as *Qut al-Qulub* by Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 996), *Risalah al-Qushayriyya* by Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1072), *Ihya Ulum ad-Din* by Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), and the treatises of `Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani (d. 116), to name but a few. These works later became the basis of Sufi studies and the further development of the science of Sufism. In all these major Sufi works, there is a balanced teaching of both the outer code of conduct, or Islamic Law, and the inner reality of existence. These works, especially the *Ihya `Ulum ad-Din*, were considered to be basic Sufi reference works for a long period of time, for they were the result of the transformative experience of those men and were used by them and their successors as a foundation course for teaching the science of Sufism. These men aimed at bringing about an awakening of human consciousness that resonated with or was close to the inward state of the Prophet Muhammad. The aim and the ultimate goal of Sufism in its formative as well as in its later years was none other than to strive to resonate with, or become like a tuning fork vibrating with, the same frequency as Muhammad.

The science of Sufism has always been directed towards emulating and embodying the Prophetic model, so as to be illuminated and transformed by its light, in a form which is clearly understandable experientially in a programmable way by a sincere follower. This may be achieved, for example, by starting with certainty through knowledge, which is obtaining information about the purpose of man's life on this earth and his ultimate destiny through theoretical knowledge, then progressing to certainty through vision, which is when knowledge begins to grow within oneself through one's personal experience, and then finally arriving at certainty through experiencing reality, which is knowledge through your own being, through your primal being, which is now activated.

Chapter 3: Sufi Orders (Brotherhoods)



In the early centuries of Islam, Sufis were not organized into particular circles or orders. However, as time went by, the teaching and personal example of Sufis living in the spiritually decreed code of life began to attract many groups of people. Between the 9th and 11th centuries, we find that various Sufi Orders, which included adepts from all strata of society, began to emerge. As these Sufi Orders, or brotherhoods, came into existence, the center of Sufi activity was no longer the private house, school or work place of the spiritual master. A more institutional structure was given to their gatherings, and the Sufi Orders began to use centers which existed specifically for these gatherings. A Sufi center was usually called a *khaneqah* or *zawiyya*. The Turks called their Sufi sanctuary a *tekke*. In North Africa such a center was called a *ribat*, the name which was also used to describe the frontier fortresses of the Sufi soldiers who defended the way of Islam and fought against those who tried to destroy it. In the Indian sub-Continent a Sufi center was called a *jam`at khana* or *khanegah*.

In the same way that the various schools of Islamic Law which emerged in the early centuries after the Prophet Muhammad's death were meant to define a clear path for the application of that law, so the Sufi Orders which emerged during the same period also intended to define a simple path for the practice of inner purification. In the same way that many great schools of Islamic Law ceased to be propagated and accordingly ended, likewise many great Sufi Orders faced a similar situation. During the 9th century, more than 30 schools of Islamic Law existed, but later on this number was reduced to 5 or 6. During the 12th century, you could not count the number of Sufi Orders, partly because there were so many, and partly because they were not yet defined as such. Most of the great spiritual masters and teachers of the Sufi Orders and schools of law did not expect that their teachings would be given a defined and often a rigid interpretation at a

later stage after their deaths, or that the Sufi Orders and schools of law would be named after them. However, the preservation of the Sufi Orders was often partly a result of their physical isolation as well as the direction that mainstream Islam took.

A noticeable trend within these Sufi Orders is that many of them intermingled, often strengthening each other and at times weakening each other. Most of the Sufi Orders kept a record of their lineage, that is their chain of transmission of knowledge from master to master, which was often traced back to one of the Shi`a spiritual leaders and accordingly back through Imam `Ali to the Prophet Muhammad, as a proof of their authenticity and authority. The only exception to this is the Naqshbandi Sufi Order whose lineage of transmission of knowledge traces back through Abu Bakr, the first leader of the Muslim community in Medina, to Muhammad.

The following are a few of the Sufi Orders which are still established today, each with its own predominating characteristics. Seekers of knowledge can be members of one or more of the Sufi Orders, as indeed they often follow more than one spiritual master. The following are only a sample of those Sufi Orders with which the author has personal familiarity.

The Qadiri Order

The Qadiri Order was founded by Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani (d. 1166) from Gilan in Persia, who eventually settled in Baghdad in Iraq. After his death, his Sufi Order was propagated by his sons. The Qadiri Order has spread to many places, including Syria, Turkey, some parts of Africa such as Cameroun, the Congo, Mauritania and Tanzania, and in the Caucasus, Chechen and Ferghana in the [former] Soviet Union, as well as elsewhere.

The Rifa`i Order

Founded by Shykh Ahmad ar-Rifa`i (d. 1182) in Basra, the Rifa`i Order has spread to Egypt, Syria, Anatolia in Turkey, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, and more recently to North America.

The Shadhili Order

The Shadhili Order crystallized around Shaykh Abu'l-Hasan ash-Shadhili of Morocco (d. 1258) and eventually became one of the greatest Sufi Orders, having an extraordinarily large following. Today it is found in North Africa, Egypt, Kenya and Tanzania, the Middle East, Sri Lanka and elsewhere, including the West and North America.

The Mevlavi Order

The Mevlavi or Mawlawi Order centers around Mawlana Jalal ud-Din Rumi of Qonya in Turkey (d. 1273). Today it is mostly found in Anatolia in Turkey and more recently in North America. The followers of this order are also known as whirling dervishes.

The Naqshbandi Order

The Naqshbandi Order takes its name from Shaykh Baha ud-Din Naqshband of Bukhara (d. 1390). It is widely spread in central Asia, the Volga, the Caucasus, the north-west and south-west of China, Indonesia, the Indian sub-Continent, Turkey, Europe and North America. This is the only known Sufi Order which traces the genealogy of its lineage of transmission of knowledge back through the first Muslim ruler, Abu Bakr, unlike the rest of the known Sufi Orders which trace their origins back to one of the Shi`a spiritual leaders, and therefore through Imam `Ali, and so to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The Bektashi Order

The Bektashi Order was founded by Hajji Bektash of Khurasan (d. 1338). Shi`a ideas strongly permeate this Sufi Order. It is limited to Anatolia in Turkey and was most powerful up until the early 20th century. The order is regarded as a follower of Shi`a Islamic Law.

The Ni`amatullah Order

The Ni`amatullah Order was founded by Shaykh Nur ud-Din Muhammad Ni`amatullah (d. 1431) in Mahan near Kirman in South-west Iran. Its followers are found mostly in Iran and India.

The Tijani Order

The Tijani Order was founded by Shaykh Abbas Ahmad ibn at-Tijani, an Algerian Berber (d. 1815). It has spread from Algeria to the south of the Sahara and into western and central Sudan, Egypt, Senegal, West Africa and northern Nigeria, as well as being represented in the West and in North America.

The Jarrahi Order

The Jarrahi Order was founded by Shaykh Nur ud-Din Muhammad al-Jarrah of Istanbul (d. 1720). It is limited mostly in Turkey, with some representation in the West and in North America.

The Chishti Order

The most influential Sufi Order in the sub-Continent of India and Pakistan has been the Chishti Order, which takes its name from Khwaja Abu Ishaq Shami Chishti (d. 966). Its spread has been primarily within south-east Asia.

Sufi Orders, like other movements, have tended to be cyclical in nature. A Sufi Order has generally had a cycle of 2 to 3 hundred years before weakening and decaying. Whenever there has been a need for it, a Sufi Order begins to rise, then reaches its climax, and then gradually declines and disintegrates.

One observable trend in the history of Sufism has been that whenever there has been a lack of Islamic source material, such as the Qur'an or the original way of Muhammad, within a Sufi Order, then it has tended to be dominated by the stronger and older culture of its environment. This adulteration is noticeable in the Chishti Order of south-east Asia and in the Sufi Orders of Indonesia which have integrated many elements of Hindu and Buddhist customs into their practices. Similarly the Sufi Orders of Africa below the region of Sudan have integrated some of the African tribal religious customs into their practices. All these Sufi orders seem to have taken on some of the color of cultishness in these remote regions.

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