

HEIRS OF THE PROPHETS

An Account of the Clergy and Priests of Islam,
the Personnel of the Mosque and "Holy Men"

by

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CHAPTER TEN

MYSTICISM AND THE DARWISH ORDERS

THE mystics in Islam are called *sufis* from *suf*, wool, because the early mystics used it for their outer garment. The system itself is known as *Sufism* and goes back, some say, to Mohammed and the Koran.

"Islam is essentially the lengthened shadow of one man," says Professor Archer. "Mohammed founded it and his spirit dominates it."

He takes up the question of Mohammed's pathology and finds a mystical element in the man himself, in his idea of God, and in some of his religious experiences and practices. Mohammed was not an ascetic, but he seemed to practice certain methods of self-hypnotism. His ecstasy was the result often of personal effort. 68

According to Nicholson, the Mystics of Islam borrowed not only from Christianity and Neo-Platonism, but from Gnosticism and Buddhism. Many gospel texts and sayings of Jesus, most of them apocryphal, are cited in the oldest *Sufi* writings. From Christianity they took the use of the woolen dress, the vows of silence, the litanies (*Zikr*), and other ascetic practices. Their teaching also has many interesting parallels which Nicholson summarizes as follows:

"The same expressions are applied to the founder of Islam which are used by St. John, St. Paul, and later mystical theologians concerning Christ. Thus, Mohammed is called the Light of God, he is said to have existed before the creation of the world, he is adored as the source of all life, actual and possible, he is the Perfect Man in whom all the divine attributes are manifested, and a *Sufi* tradition ascribes to him the saying, 'He that hath seen me hath seen Allah.' In the Moslem scheme, however, the Logos doctrine occupies a subordinate place, as it obviously must when the whole duty of man is believed to consist in realizing the unity of God." 69

Neoplatonism gave them the doctrine of emanation and ecstasy. The following version of the doctrine of the seventy thousand veils as expounded to Canon Gairdner by a modern darwish, shows clear traces of Gnosticism:

“Seventy Thousand Veils separate Allah, the One reality, from the world of matter and of sense. And every soul passes before his birth through these seventy thousand. The inner half of these are veils of light; the outer half, veils of darkness. For every one of the veils of light passed through, in this journey towards birth, the soul puts off a divine quality; and for every one of the dark veils, it puts on an earthly quality. Thus the child is born weeping, for the soul knows its separation from Allah, the one Reality. And when the child cries in its sleep, it is because the soul remembers something of what it has lost.”

In regard to Buddhist influence, Professor Goldziher has called attention to the fact that in the eleventh century, the teaching of Buddha exerted considerable influence in eastern Persia, especially at Balkh, a city famous for the number of *sufis* who dwelt in it. From the Buddhists came the use of the rosary (afterwards adopted by Christians in Europe), and perhaps also the doctrine of *fana* or absorption into God.

“While *fana*” says Nicholson, “in its pantheistic form is radically different from nirvana, the terms coincide so closely in other ways that we cannot regard them as being altogether unconnected. *Fana* has an ethical aspect; it involves the extinction of all passions and desires. The passing away of evil qualities and of the evil actions which they produce is said to be brought about by the continuance of the corresponding good qualities and actions.”

The cultivation of character by the contemplation of God in a mystical sense, was the real goal. To know God was to be like Him, and to be like Him ended in absorption or ecstasy. And this is the spiritual aim and goal of *Sufism*.

The leading *Sufis* organized their pupils into orders and each had a special ritual (*Zikr*) to attain this ecstasy.

“Islam like Christianity,” says Dr. M. T. Titus “has its monastic orders and saints, the underlying basis of which is the mystic interpretation of the religious life known as *Sufism*. No matter where one goes in India one finds their influence powerful and active.”

These “Confreries Mussulmanes” (Coppolani) are found in every part of the world of Islam. They have their organizations (*tariqas*), hierarchies, special dress, initiation ceremonies, rituals (*zikr*), and monasteries (*zawiya*).

“Their home is the mosque, and there they gather the circles who hang upon their words. In the fourth and fifth centuries of Islam, oratories were built for them. Their sanctity becomes an asset to the community; living or dead, their presence is a protection; whom they bless, prosper; whom they curse, are doomed” (Margoliouth, *Mohammedanism*, p. 199).

The lives of these saints form a vast, popular library and their miracles before and after death are manifold. To become a *Sufi* is the Islamic equivalent of entering the monastic life. We are not concerned here, primarily, with their origin, teaching, or mysticism, but with the fact that there are such religious orders in Islam, and of Islam, as powerful and numerous as the various orders of monks in the Roman Catholic Church. 70

Dr. Macdonald says that the parallel between Romanism and Islam in “the way” of salvation “could be worked out” (*Religious Life and Attitude in Islam*, p. 219).

I have attempted it thus:

<i>Popular Romanism</i>	<i>Sufi Islam</i>
The Pope	Khalifa-Mahdi-Qutb
Religious Orders	Darwishes
Pilgrimage	Pilgrimage
Rosary	Rosary (Wird)
Prayers and fasting	Prayers and fasting
Miracles of Saints	Miracles (Karamat)
Saint-worship	Saint-worship
Salvation by works	Salvation by works
New Mediators (Mary and Saints)	New Mediators (Mohammed and Saints)
Spiritual Hierarchy	Spiritual Hierarchy

Different hierarchies belong to different systems; the lowest rank of one of these consists of three hundred “heroes,” while the “Pole of Poles” constitutes the head (Margoliouth, p. 206).

The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* lists over one hundred and fifty orders and sub-orders of these Islamic fraternities, who live in monasteries, wear special dress, and are initiated into the order as brethren. The principal orders number thirty-two. Massignon gives an extensive bibliography on these Religious Orders (*Tarifa*, Encyc. of Islam), and the curious reader will find in the beautifully illustrated work of Dupont-Coppolani (Algiers, 1897) many parallels to the religious orders of the Roman Catholic Church. If these saints and darwishes are not “clergy and priests,” what are they?

Goldziher devotes one hundred pages to saint-worship in Islam. He traces its origin to the first century, portrays its character, extent, its extravagances, its strange hierarchical nature, in the “state-church” of Islam, so as to create “a bridge of mediators for intercession” (Muh. *Studien*, Vol. II, pp. 285 ff). From the seventh century these orders were gathered in monasteries or convents called *khanakas*, *tekkes*, or *zawiyahs*. There were convents even for women in Syria in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Every order included a grand-master or *pir* who had absolute authority over the other members. They were sworn to be as inert in his hand “as the corpse in the hands of those who wash their dead.” 71

And it is interesting that Louis Rinn in his standard work on the *Marabouts et Khouan of Algeria* entitled his second chapter, “Clerge investi et categorie, comprend le clerge musulman, investi et salarie au meme titre que celui des autres cultes reconnus par les lois francaises. La seconde categorie, *marabouts*, exercent les devoirs du sacerdoce . . .” George Swan, writing on Saintship in Islam (*The Moslem World*, Vol. V., pp. 232 ff.) gave a complete table of the spiritual hierarchy of the *Sufi* orders, their grades, functions, and spiritual attainments. He is thoroughly acquainted with the whole system in Egypt and has lived close to the people as missionary in the Delta villages. Here is his table:

THE SPIRITUAL HIERARCHY IN ISLAM AND ITS GRADED VIRTUES

Al-Qutb al-gawth	The Pole	All the Virtues mentioned below belong to him
Al-IMâMân		az-zuhd asceticism
Two Lieutenants:—	outward	al-wara' extreme reverence
(a) the <i>Imam</i> of the Right, Deputy and Successor of the <i>Qutb</i> - concerned with the Heavenlies.	works	al-'amr-bil-ma'ruf enjoining of benevolence
		an-nahy'an il-munkar forbidding of evil
(b) the <i>Imam</i> of the Left — concerned with the Earthlies.	inward	as-sidq truthfulness
	works	al-'ikhlas sincerity
		al-hiya' shamefacedness
		al-muraqaba godly fear
Four al-'Awtad (sing. watad — tent-peg) (The stations, the 4 corners of the Universe)	outward	kathrat-as-siyam much fasting
	works	qiyam al-lail rising by night
		kathrat-al-'awtar much prayers
		al-istigh-far bil-as-har asking forgiveness in the dawns
	inward	at-tawak-kul God-reliance
	works	at-tafwtd God-committal
		ath-thiqa confidence
		at-taslim surrender
Seven al-'Abddl (sing. badal — substitute)	outward	as-samt (-silence) remembering only God
		(outward) unresponsiveness to details
		(inward)
		as-sahar (-watchfulness) for physical sleep
		(outward)
		(inward) for heart-sleep
		al-gu' (-hunger) physical hunger
		(outward)
		(inward) soul-hunger
		al-'uzla (-reclusion) from human fellowship
		(outward)
		(inward) from intimacy with men
	inward	at-tagrid self-emptying
		at-tafrid seclusion
		al-gam' union
		at-taw hid uniting
	outward	al-futuwa generosity
		at-tawadu' humility
Forty an-Nuqaba' (sing. Naqlb — noble) (the burden-bearers)		al-'adab refinement
	inward	kathrat-al-'ibada devoutness
		as-sabr patience
		ar-rida glad contentment
		albh-shukr thankfulness
		al-hiya' shamefacedness
	outward	kathrat-al-'ibiida devoutness
		at-tahaquq biz-zuhada realized asceticism
		at-tajarrud 'an-al-irada will-lessness
		quwat al-Mujahada power in spiritual effort
Three Hundred an-Nuqaba' (sing. naqlb — piercing of sight)	inward	at-tawba repentance turning from world to God
		al-'inaba self-examination
		al-muhiisaba at-tafakkur meditation
		al-i'tisiim chastity
		ar-ryada religious exercises

In regard to saint-worship, E. Montet, Professor in the University of Geneva, wrote:

“The worship of saints, often described by the terms *marabouts* in North Africa, is a generally established practice in Islam.

Wherever this religion exists, there saints are honored and invoked as mediators. Without doubt this form of religious expression is more advanced in North Africa than elsewhere, and the farther one travels toward the west of the continent the greater becomes the number of saints and the more zealous their devotees, until in Morocco we find the most highly developed belief in the power of *marabouts*” (*Moslem World*, July, 1913).

And it was from these societies especially that there arose the *walis*, the “friends of Allah.” That they are chosen of God above their fellow men appears from manifest tokens of a miraculous nature (*karamāt*). Their prayers can heal the sick; their blessings bring happiness for time and eternity, and their curse, misery. These influences are believed to issue from their graves after their death; hence vows are made at, and presents brought to their holy tombs.

In the popular belief, their mediation with Allah (who is of course too exalted to occupy himself with the small wants of his creatures), is almost indispensable, and the request for their good offices differs little from a prayer (*The Achenese*, p. 154).

A recent example of the popular belief in the superior virtue of saints comes from Yunnan S. W. China:

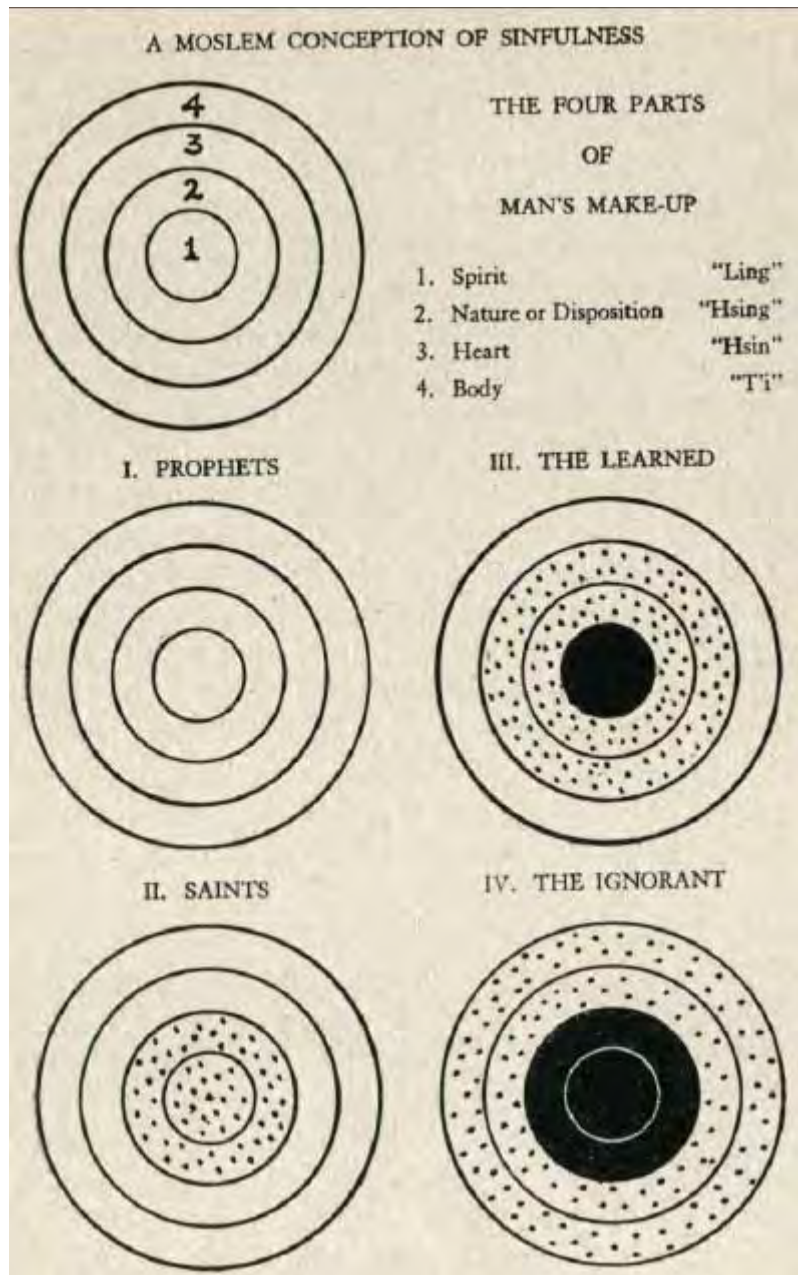
“The diagrams I send,” writes Raymond H. Joyce, “are approximate reproductions from those in an Arabic book shown me by a priest in a mosque. They illustrate the relative degrees of sinfulness of the four classes of persons in the four parts of their make-up:

- Prophets
- *Sheng Jen*, completely clean;
- Saints — *Hsien Jen*, the virtuous;
- Pious — those who perform all the five duties.

They renounce the world; to whom gold is no different from stone. Sin to them is to forget God but for a moment. The world is not destroyed because of their prayers. Having attained a certain standard, God promotes them to this class; the learned, *chih-che* — the instructed; such as the *ahung*, *muezzin*, *imam*, etc., or any who study the Koran; The ignorant, *yume* — the unlearned, stupid” (Illustration and text from “*Friends of Chinese Moslems*,” 1944).

Because prophets, saints, and martyrs have this superior virtue, intercession for ordinary sinners is one of their attributes. All Moslems believe that the Prophet Mohammed intercedes for believers now and at the last day.

The doctrine is stated most fully by the Shiahs although it is not strange to orthodox Islam.



Mullah Mohammed Baqir-i-Majlisi in his chapter on *Shafa'a*, intercession, in *Haq-ul-Yakin* states categorically:

“And as for intercession, know that there is no difference of belief among Muslims. It is a fundamental tenet of the religion of Islam that the apostle of God will intercede at the resurrection for his own people and perhaps for all peoples. The controversy which exists is, as to whether intercession is only for the increase of benefits to believers who are worthy of reward, or whether it is also for the decrease of punishment among the sinners of his people. The prevailing belief is that he will intercede for both.”

In the *Majma'u'l-Bayan*, (Collection of Explanation), it is said that “intercession is proved to us for the Apostle of God and his chosen companions who are in his path, and for the *imams* of his pure household, and for the just and believers; and God will give-salvation by their intercession to many sinners. Also that is confirmed which they have related in the narratives of our Companions from His Excellency the Apostle who said, I shall intercede on the Day of Resurrection and my intercession will be accepted, and ‘Ali will intercede and his intercession will be accepted, and my Household will intercede and be accepted; and the one among believers who will intercede the least will intercede for forty persons among his brethren all of whom were worthy of the fire.” 72

The *wali*, or patron saint, (plural, *auliya*) is fully treated by Goldziher in Volume II of his *Muhammed-anische Studien* (pp. 287-295). The word is used in the Koran in the sense of “friend of God.” The title was given to the prophet and even to God himself in the list of ninety-nine names. It is almost a synonym of the Hebrew *goel*, redeemer, so writes Goldziher. Today the word signifies a Moslem saint.

Not only, as Hudjwiri says, “has he influence with God, he can bind and loosen, but he also has the gift of miracles (*karamat*). He can transform himself (*tatawtur*), transport himself to a distance, speak diverse tongues, revive the dead, exercise levitation.” Hudjwiri even goes so far as to say that the *auliya* govern the universe, bring rain from heaven and influence the tide of battle (*Encyc. of Islam, Wali*, by Carra de Vaux).

Goldziher mentions instances of all these spiritual powers on the part of the *wali*, under twenty categories, in such saints as Ahmad-al-Bcdawi of Tanta, Ibrahim-al-Dasuki, and several others in North Africa and the Near East.

“As in Roman Catholic worship, saints are patrons of towns, villages, trades, and corporations.”

While living, the *wali* blesses, intercedes, heals, and helps. When dead, his grave becomes a shrine that often rivals Mecca in its annual pilgrimage.

Goldziher states (p. 290) that “soon in the circles of saint-worship the *walis* received higher rank than the prophets.”

The orthodox theologians naturally opposed this teaching but saint-cult waxed stronger down the centuries. Even oaths were sworn *by the saints*, as by Allah (p. 339); intercession and forgiveness were sought at their shrine (p. 309), the relics of the saints worked miracles (p. 356); and most astonishing of all, this saint-worship, by the dogma of *Ijma*, finally received the stamp of approval even of Al-Ghazali in orthodox Islam (pp. 368-377).

So everywhere, from Morocco to China, from Turkey to Capetown, it is the *wali* alive or dead, who exercises such priestly functions between Allah and the Moslem laity; and we recall that of these, ninety per cent are illiterate (Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions*, p. 222). “Every Moslem village has its patron saint; every country has its national saints; every province of life has its own human rulers who are intermediate between the Creator and common mortals” (Hurgronje, *Mohammedanism*, p. 79).

But if mysticism is the religion of these leaders of the masses, we must realize that it is Moslem not Christian mysticism. And we also need to bear in mind that mysticism is always a revolt against external authority.

As Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield remarked: "Mysticism is religion, and supplies a refuge for men of religious minds who find it no longer possible for them to rest on 'external authority.' Once turn away from revelation and little choice remains to you but the choice between mysticism and rationalism. There is not so much choice between these things, it is true, as enthusiasts on either side are apt to imagine. The difference between them is very much a matter of temperament, or perhaps we may even say of temperature. The mystic blows hot, the rationalist cold. Warm up a rationalist and you find yourself with a mystic on your hands. The history of thought illustrates repeatedly the easy passage from one to the other. Each centers himself in himself, and the human self is not so big that it makes any large difference where within yourself you take your center. Nevertheless, just because mysticism blows hot, its 'eccentricity' is the more attractive to men of lively religious feeling."

And this holds true also of the history of mysticism in Islam. It is illustrated by the lives and the theological views of many of the great *Sufis* including Al-Ghazali." 73.

68. Archer, *Mystical Elements in Mohammed*. Yale, 1924.

69. *The Mystics of Islam*.

70. M. T. Titus, *Indian Islam*, pp. 110-130.

71. Henri Massé, *Islam*, pp. 212, 213, and L. M. J. Garrett, *Mysticism and Magic in Turkey*, ch. Vi and viii. According to Westermarck (Vol. II, p. 57) it is at the shrines of these saints that *istikhara*, divination, is asked by dream or rosary. Like the Urim and Thummim of the Jewish priest in ancient Israel.

72. Translated in *Moslem World*, Vol. XXXI, p. 280 ff.

73. Cf. Zwemer — *A Moslem Seeker after God. Life of Al-Ghazali*, Chapters VIII and IX.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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