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the Sufis

During the same time that the fiqh and kalam (law and theology) were being formed there also arose the mystical movement known as the Sufis

the word actually means wool and refers to the rough wool garments the first ascetics wore which became their trademark.

the rise of the movement had many causes but important among them was the increasing distance between ordinary Muslims and their religious leaders.

as the law and theology became established sciences, they grew more specialized and made greater demands on the people.

the majority of people could not follow the involved arguments and the result was little guidance was found in them.

with mystical leaders the situation was entirely different.

they offered guidance at the level of the common mans needs and their piety was highly charged with emotional content that provided warmth of religious experience otherwise lacking

by the 6th Islamic century (12th cent. C.E.) mysticism had such a hold in the life of the community that it touched virtually everyone including many of the learned custodians of the law.

for more than five hundred years and into our own cent., some form of mystical piety has been the effective religion of most the people in Islamic lands.

the coming of reform and modernism has criticized this but in such areas as Sindh, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran especially

among rural people, it is still the reality of Islam for the majority.

There are many different Sufi organizations, the most famous of which is the whirling Dervishes founded by Rumi of Iran but popular in Turkey. (more later.)

One writer defined Sufis saying:

"The Sufis are they whose spirits have been freed from the pollution of humanity, purified from carnal taint, and released from concupiscence, so that they have found rest with God in the first rank and the highest degree, and have fled from all save Him."

The Qur'an and life of Muhammad give spiritual nourishment to persons of mystical temperament.

such verses as "Whether ye turn to the East or the West, there is the Face of God," and

God is nearer to thee than thy jugular vein.

The most famous for mystics is the so called "Light Verse" of Surah 24:35ff.

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth;
the likeness of His light is as a niche
 Wherein is a lamp
 (the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering
star)
kindled from a Blessed Tree,
an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West
Whose oil will nigh would shine, even if no fire touched it;
Light upon Light.

These verses have been commented on by thousands of Sufis who see them as an unambiguous teaching of God's presence in all things, places, and times.

The way the Qur'an was given to the prophet is seen as having mystical significance in that Gabriel was seen and direct

communication with the spiritual reality.

Whether Muhammad could be called a mystic in the technical sense is debatable but he had cultivated the habit of fasting, contemplation and prayer and his life, even when successful, was modest and self denying.

Thus he could be seen as the model of Sufi discipline.

most important was Muhammad's famous Night Journey from Makkah to Jerusalem, where he ascended through the Seven Heavens to meet face to face with God before the throne.

this is based on a verse in the Qur'an (Surah 17:1) and has given rise to many interpretations.

for some this journey showed the souls ascent from earthly the heavenly truth. for others it generated a cult of imitation of the Prophet whose access to the Divine presence was seen as the unique key opening the way for other men to attain the high prize.

even tho at a later period the practice of Christians, neo-platonists and even Buddhists were influencing the Muslims the rise of the Sufis was an Islamic phenomena which sprang from the communities faith.

Three stages of Growth

I. the Golden age of mysticism

the appearance of ascetics in the first Islamic century. the first principle was a single master mystic with a circle of disciples with intimate relationships.

these were itinerant, with no place to live and a minimum

of rules but a common life. this was the basic form thill the 10th cent., c.e.

since asceticism itself is not necessarily mystical there also developed an inner discipline which sought to destroy the hold of thoughts, emotions, and desires to seek God.

→ Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah (d. 801) was a renowned woman who is looked upon as a kind of ideal mystic. She gave eloquent expression to this all-consuming love in her prayers:

her most famous statement was

"O God, if I worship Thee for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thy own sake, grudge me not Thy everlasting beauty."
or again:

O God, whatsoever Thou has apportioned to me of worldly things, do Thou give that to Thy enemies; and whatsoever Thou hast apportioned to me in the world to come, give that to Thy friends; for Thou sufficest me."

the Sufi's were an intellectual and aristocratic movement and emotionally aristocratic as well.

they used exercises to induce ecstasy as well as meditation and contemplation.

however the important thing was not the intellectual teaching but the direct experience of immediate intimacy with God that was the goal desired.

the various sufi schools differed in their technique, but in general all agree upon a spiritual pilgrimage that leads the devotee through ascending spiritual stages that are attainable by sheer human effort until the limit of man's self-perfectibility is reached.

thereafter there are a variety of states which are the gift of God's grace to those who seek him.

the journey reaches its climax in Tawhid or unification with God

this however must finally come to fana which is living in that state where the personality is lost and there is renunciation of the desire of union with God.

Fana must finally give way to Baga which is the remaining or subsisting in God as a permanent condition even tho one may continue to be physically present in the world.

this is given to few and is an arduous journey but they, who

the second period was the formative period in the 13th cent. C.E. when rules were and brotherhoods were organized. the transmission of doctrine, the mystical methods etc. were passed on through communities which were solidified and in some cases still exist today.

The Third period was the 15th cent. C.E. when the Sufis became really popular.

it was at this time that communities resembling monasteries developed tho they resisted anything really resembling monasticism.

they consider there places a center from which the work of instruction and propagation and other activities of the order may be conducted.

the result is an organization somewhat resembling a monastery

but the sufis may not live there. but are rather engaged as wandering mendicants.

→ The Sufis became responsible for bringing Islam to the people.

the sufis propagated the worship of saints and the tombs became a place of pilgrimage.

a Wali is a person who is himself of the highest spiritual attainment, and this penetration to the very Divine Being has conferred on him miraculous powers by which he may be recognized.

even after death, walis are believed to retain miracle-working ability thus one of the most popular forms of piety was visiting the tombs of sufi saints.

these are scattered thruout Islamic lands and some attract hundreds of thousands of pilgrims at celebrations in the saints honor.

it is thought that there exists in the world at any given time a comprehensive hierarchy of saints whose many degrees and stages culminate in the highest spiritual authority who is called the Qutb, the pole or pivot.

whenever some member of the heirarchy passes away he is replaced by another so the invisible spiritual structure of the universe remains always intact.

these saints represent the means of the mediation of Divine Truth in the world.

the key method of worship is Dhikr and each sufi brotherhood has its own unique form.

this simply means remembering the name of God or

"recollection" in obedience to a verse of the Qur'an which says:
"Remember God always."

typically members of a brotherhoods meet each week on Thurs.
Evening for the celebration of Dhikr, which is the richest
ceremonial known to the Islamic tradition.

it is based upon the continued repetition of a verbal formula
that is different for each brotherhood.

in some cases only the name of God, "Allah" is spoken while
others may chant "Allahu akbar" (God is most great). or the 99
names of God are used as found in the Qur'an.

often the dhikr is accompanied by swaying movements of the
sufis who stand with arms linked, and its tempo tends to increase
with the length of the repetition.

the object of this form of devotion is to fix the mystic's
mind on the unique reality of God so that all else is driven from
the consciousness. its climax is an ecstasy which to a greater
or lesser degree for individuals approximates the desired union
with the Divine Nature.

the most famous and best know dhikr in the western world are
the Mawlawiyah or so called whirling Dervishes of Turkey founded
by Rumi in the 13th Cent. C.E.

this order was abolished by law at the time of the Turkish
revolution in the 1920's along with many others.

Sufism was not considered orthodox by many and dies out
after the 17th century.

by the 20th cent. little overt mysticism as the state religion
took over.

the study of philosophy and mysticism was pushed aside as not being exact and strict enough.

the majority of sufis accept Moslem law, the Sharia, but many feel once one is in union with God there is no need for it.

however, the practice of the sharia is the minimum starting point for beginning the quest, tho experience is the key.

doctrine is secondary to experience and is only used to rationalize their experience.

do
→ The Seven stages of Perfection

these seven stages are associated with colors

1. purification of the soul-from thoughts and desires that are natural to humans, that is detachment. breast is the center of the experience and there is a blue light.

2. Substituting with love- key concept in sufism. substituting impure love with the pure love of allah which is reciprocal.

instead of legalism its emphasis is on God's love for the world and the soul. he loves the soul and thus loves himself.

When Allah looks at soul of human its like looking in a mirror. the emphasis on the soul is a slike into Greek philosophy with its body/soul dicotomy.

center is in heart and the light is yellow.

3. Passion stage where the passion of the soul for Allah becomes all consuming. desire of soul for God discussed in sexual terms.

center is in the spirit and the light is red.

4. Union is stage where ones own carnal mind is completely subdued. one only desires what Allah wants. center is again the heart and the light is white meaning limitless.

5. Transmutation of the Self the soul is satisfied in Allah. passing away of the self in God and from the self.

no longer conscience of individual desires

does not mean there is no longer a 'self' but there is no distinction between God and the soul that can be experienced.

the light is green and represents the 'mystery of mysteries.'.

6. wonder is stage where one is still aware of individual self but in union with Allah. stage of joy and transcendence but also bewilderment.

stage of approved soul with black light.

7. everlasting or abiding in God. the soul is clarified (complete). union is no longer a transient experience but soul achieves a continued presence in God.

the mystics individuality is not lost but perfected and eternalized.

the light is colorless.

between the 5th and 7th stages one loses the sense of self and then regains it perfected in Allah.

four categories of experience

1. stages along path to fana which are acquired by effort. process of purifying the world out of the soul.

2. states of experience which are the seven stages just listed and are by grace of Allah.

3. gnostic genius Marifa- refers to mystical intuitive knowledge or the revealing of spiritual truth.

is a gift which has nothing to do with ones place on the path.

a gift with which some are born.

4. Saintship-wilaya. "protege of God . some are under the protection of Allah and this has no relationship to the path of perfection.

based on the Qur'an 10:63 where it says there is no fear for those under allah's care.

there are two types:

1. those chosen to be proteges of Allah for all eternity with no consideration of the path.

2. those picked out by allah to receive special favors which also has nothing to do with the path.

one can be a mystic of the highest order without being a Wilaya.

Ibn Arabi said all prophets are also wilaya buyt that the wilaya aspect is higher than the prophetic aspect.

Mohammad is the seal of the prophets so all wilaya partake in his spirit.

Sufi Doctrine

Shirk is the worst sin, means association. to associate anything with God is worst sin. ie, Christians are committing

shirk by saying Jesus is God.

truth is exestential, experiential--song, exercise and dance are used to teach.

Repentance- something done by thse who are elect and is repentence from inattention to God, no sin. somehow forgetting God.

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Abu Hamid ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058-1111)

wrote "the destruction of philosophy" . he wanted to restore emphasis on religion and to synthesize mystical doctrine with orthodoxy. This was his ultimate concern. He was the greatest muslim scholar.

elements of mystical creed

1. Qur'anic - the concept of supreme creator. God created by an act of free will not by thinking as the neo-platonists said.

Man can be connected to God by reason which is a gift.

the sufi concept was that Allah dwells in the soul which is his instrument.

reason and faith are 2 beginning steps but one must go on to experience to know God as creator.

Ghazali uses the scripture about light (already quoted). says it is talking about primary light, uncreated.

other objects are only light figurativly (as reason).

all light gets its life from God.

the heirarchy of beings get lighter the higher they go in the spheres.

all beings receive light from Allah and all are purely derivative in relation to Allah.

only Allah possess essential being--everything derives being from Allah.

only Allah makes things be from moment to moment. he sustains existence from moment to moment

in the mystical experience we realize we derive our being from Allah

everything except God is pure non-being.

a key concept is that of derivation. I am because Allah is.

human is created in Allah's likeness, is a microcosm of whole universe. any value of human is derived from Allah.

only human being who knows himself can attain to vision of Allah (union).

when one experiences this one experiences God the merciful not God the Lord as he can never be portrayed in words.

one can't talk about God in himself as it's a divine mystery.

highest knowledge is direct mystical experience but must have gift of prophetic spirit to experience God.

highest vision was of Allah the Creator. those who obtain this recognize divine unity--not identity--complete dependence and attention and loss of all interest in self. (wants to taste sugar, not be sugar as Sankara)

reason takes us to a point but only experience brings one to Allah.

the core of religion is to repent of one's sins, and purify the heart of all but God, and by exercise of religion attain a

virtuous character. this was his solution.a

Sufi methods of great value. one performs the 5 pillars from the heart thus one combines the mysticism of the sufis with law and tradition. he took a moderate position

Al-Halladi (d. 922)

condemned at an inquisition in Mar. 922 for saying "I am truth and truth is God. lost his head--literally.

He was a monist, ie, all reality is one.

the meaning of the Qur'an is derived from the total appropriation into consciousness of an individual to get the divine meaning.

can contain all knowledge only if exkperience it, totally internalize it then become one with the Divine.

center of path is repition of creed. "there is no God but Allah".

interiorization of this is done by power of allah and results in anialation of selfhood.

experience is to be enjoyed and possessed by Allah, not the mystic. Goal is what Allah wants.

"I am image of divne," "appearance of divine".

intention was to deny opposition between himself and allah.

said: "where Allah is nothing is" (only Allah)

while Al-Ghazali said: "Where Allah is everything is".

sounds monistic but implies otherwise.

misunderstood by traditional muslims.

creation of world seen as unimportant, has value only in

relation to Allah.

said true sufi should experience world as manifestation of Allah and unimportant.

Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (1207- 1273)

Father and a teacher of the children of rich people.

at 37 he met a mystic and he himself became the founder of an order of mystics, the whirling dervishes which are the best known of all the sufi groups today.

he had the concept of the soul as a mirror of Allah.

Love was the key word for him and was the main relation between God and the Soul (his ultimate concern).

love was the supreme principle and is a bridge for Divine love.

human's love is the result of God's love.

love a person has for Allah is really Allah's love for Allah--in loving the soul God loves himself.

all action is God's action. humans appropriate God's actions.

Rumi says we are both determined and have free will

God is the cause, compels us, yet we're also free to choose.

how should we act?

obedience to it. act as if have free will

even if you don't and find out it's God's action in our life.

Emmanations come out from God--world is always divine emanating himself.

the universe is projected and reflected image of God, a

mirror.

each part of world reflects mirror above him. world is in
some sense divine.

beyond the universe is nothing.

perfect man is polished mirror--microcosm that reflects the
Divine.

Rumi wasn't sure about reincarnation said maybe/maybe not.

believed Muhammad was divinized, made the logos..

The path begins with mortifying the flesh as the body is bad.

we're bound to do the wrong thing--have a propensity to leave God
and do evil

Evil-God created pain and grief to manifest happiness by its
opposite.

one must have spiritual director who has come to union.

must recognize our failure before we can begin to grow--choose
self-abnegation.

pride and desire will inhibit one

he is not concerned with reason but writes hymns, stories and
poetry.

at present Sufism is passing thru a period of decline, tho it is still very much alive.

modernization of Islamic society has weakened virtually every one of its traditional institutions in a more or less radical way, and the Sufi brotherhoods are no exception.

to many of those who are leaders of the struggle toward development and modernization Sufism has appeared as a villain.

these see the Sufi cult of saints, the visitation to tombs, and the belief in miracles as departures from true Islam and as reasons for the loss of spiritual vitality

furthermore, they consider Sufi cosmological and philosophical teachings to be obscurantist and to act as an impediment to the acceptance of progressive and scientific ways of understanding.

the conservatives have almost always felt that the Sufis were an aberration and not true Islamic thinkers and they have persecuted them over the years as, for example, al-Haladj.

thus there is virtual unanimity among the leadership, both intellectual and religious, in turning away from Sufi practice and condemning it.