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SUFI DOCTRINE AND METHOD*

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At-Taṣawwuf

Sufism, *Taṣawwuf*,[1] which is the esoteric or inward (*bāṭin*) aspect of Islam, is to be distinguished from exoteric or "external" (*ẓāhir*) Islam just as direct contemplation of spiritual or divine realities is distinguishable from the fulfilling of the laws which translate them in the individual order in connection with the conditions of a particular phase of humanity. Whereas the ordinary way of believers is directed towards obtaining a state of blessedness after death, a state which may be attained through indirect and, as it were, symbolical participation in Divine Truths by carrying out prescribed works, Sufism contains its end or aim within itself in the sense that it can give access to direct knowledge of the eternal.

This knowledge, being one with its object, delivers from the limited and inevitably changing state of the ego. The spiritual state of *baqā'*, to which Sufi contemplatives aspire (the word signifies pure "subsistence" beyond all form), is the same as the state of *mokṣa* or

* Editors' Note: This article is a selection of three chapters from Burckhardt's classic text on Sufism, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, which is widely regarded as one of the finest treatments of the subject.

[1] The most usual explanation is that this word means only "to wear wool (*ṣūf*)," the first Sufis having worn, it is said, only garments of pure wool. Now what has never yet been pointed out is that many Jewish and Christian ascetics of these early times covered themselves, in imitation of St. John the Baptist in the desert, only with sheepskins. It may be that this example was also followed by some of the early Sufis. None the less "to wear wool" can only be an external and popular meaning of the term *Taṣawwuf*, which is equivalent, in its numerical symbolism, to *al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyya*, "Divine Wisdom." Al-Bīrunī suggested a derivation of *ṣūfī*, plural of *ṣūfiya*, from the Greek *Sophia*, wisdom, but this is etymologically doubtful because the Greek letter *sigma* normally becomes *sīn* (s) in Arabic and not *ṣād* (ṣ). It may be, however, that there is here an intentional, symbolical assonance.

"deliverance" spoken of in Hindu doctrines, just as the "extinction" (*al-fanā'*) of the individuality which precedes the "subsistence" is analogous to *nirvāṇa*, taken as a negative idea.

For Sufism to permit of such a possibility it must be identified with the very kernel (*al-lubb*) of the traditional form which is its support. It cannot be something super-added to Islam, for it would then be something peripheral in relation to the spiritual means of Islam. On the contrary, it is in fact closer to their superhuman source than is the religious exoterism and it participates actively, though in a wholly inward way, in the function of revelation which manifested this traditional form and continues to keep it alive.

This "central" role of Sufism at the heart of the Islamic world may be veiled from those who examine it from outside because esoterism, while it is conscious of the significance of forms, is at the same time in a position of intellectual sovereignty in relation to them and can thus assimilate to itself—at any rate for the exposition of its doctrine—certain ideas or symbols derived from a heritage different from its own traditional background.

It may appear strange that Sufism should on the one hand be the "spirit" or "heart" of Islam (*rūḥ al-islām* or *qalb al-islām*) and on the other hand represent at the same time the outlook which is, in the Islamic world, the most free in relation to the mental framework of that world, though it is important to note that this true and wholly inward freedom must not be confused with any movements of rebellion against the tradition; such movements are not intellectually free in relation to the forms which they deny because they fail to understand them. Now this role of Sufism in the Islamic world[2] is indeed like that of the heart in man, for the heart is the vital center of the organism and also, in its subtle reality, the "seat" of an essence which transcends all individual form.

[2] This refers to Sufism in itself, not to its initiatic organizations. Human groups may take on more or less contingent functions despite their connection with Sufism; the spiritual elite is hardly to be recognized from outside. Again, it is a well-known fact that many of the most eminent defenders of Islamic orthodoxy, such as ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī, al-Ghazzālī, or the Sultan Ṣalāḥ ad-Din (Saladin) were connected with Sufism.

Because orientalists are anxious to bring everything down to the historical level it could hardly be expected that they would explain this double aspect of Sufism otherwise than as the result of influences coming into Islam from outside and, according to their various preoccupations, they have indeed attributed the origins of Sufism to Persian, Hindu, Neoplatonic, or Christian sources. But these diverse attributions have ended by canceling one another, the more so because there is no adequate reason for doubting the historical authenticity of the spiritual "descent" of the Sufi masters, a descent which can be traced in an unbroken "chain" (*silsila*) back to the Prophet himself.

The decisive argument in favor of the Muhammadan origin of Sufism lies, however, in Sufism itself. If Sufic wisdom came from a source outside Islam, those who aspire to that wisdom—which is assuredly neither bookish nor purely mental in its nature—could not rely on the symbolism of the Qur'ān for realizing that wisdom ever afresh, whereas in fact everything that forms an integral part of the spiritual method of Sufism is constantly and of necessity drawn out of the Qur'ān and from the teaching of the Prophet.

Orientalists who uphold the thesis of a non-Muslim origin of Sufism generally make much of the fact that in the first centuries of Islam Sufi doctrine does not appear with all the metaphysical developments found in later times. Now in so far as this point is valid for an esoteric tradition—a tradition, that is, which is mainly transmitted by oral instruction—it proves the very contrary of what they try to maintain.

The first Sufis expressed themselves in a language very close to that of the Qur'ān and their concise and synthetic expressions already imply all the essentials of the doctrine. If, at a later stage, the doctrine became more explicit and was further elaborated, this is something perfectly normal to which parallels can be found in every spiritual tradition. Doctrine grows, not so much by the addition of new knowledge, as by the need to refute errors and to reanimate a diminishing power of intuition.

Moreover, since doctrinal truths are susceptible to limitless development and since the Islamic civilization had absorbed certain pre-Islamic inheritances, Sufi masters could, in their oral or written teaching, make use of ideas borrowed from those inheritances pro-

vided they were adequate for expressing those truths which had to be made accessible to the intellectually gifted men of their age and which were already implicit in strictly Sufic symbolism in a succinct form.

Such, for example, was the case as regards cosmology, a science derived from the pure metaphysic which alone constitutes the indispensable doctrinal foundation of Sufism. Sufi cosmology was very largely expressed by means of ideas which had already been defined by such ancient masters as Empedocles and Plotinus. Again, those Sufi masters who had had a philosophical training could not ignore the validity of the teachings of Plato, and the Platonism attributed to them is of the same order as the Platonism of the Christian Greek Fathers whose doctrine remains none the less essentially apostolic.

The orthodoxy of Sufism is not only shown in its maintaining of Islamic forms; it is equally expressed in its organic development from the teaching of the Prophet and in particular by its ability to assimilate all forms of spiritual expression which are not in their essence foreign to Islam. This applies, not only to doctrinal forms, but also to ancillary matters connected with art.[3]

Certainly there were contacts between early Sufis and Christian contemplatives, as is proved by the case of the Sufi Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, but the most immediate explanation of the kinship between Sufism and Christian monasticism does not lie in historical events. As ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī explains in his book *al-Insān al-Kāmil* ("Universal Man") the message of Christ unveils certain inner—and therefore esoteric—aspects of the monotheism of Abraham.

In a certain sense Christian dogmas, which can be all reduced to the dogma of the two natures of Christ, the divine and the human, sum up in a "historical" form all that Sufism teaches on union with God. Moreover, Sufis hold that the Lord Jesus (*Sayyidnā ʿĪsa*) is of all the Divine Envoys (*rusūl*) the most perfect type of contemplative saint. To offer the left cheek to him who smites one on the right is true spiritual detachment; it is a voluntary withdrawal from the interplay of cosmic actions and reactions.

[3] Certain Sufis deliberately manifested forms which, though not contrary to the spirit of the Tradition, shocked the commonalty of exoterists. This was a way of making themselves free from the psychic elements and mental habits of the collectivity surrounding them.

It is none the less true that for Sufis the person of Christ does not stand in the same perspective as it does for Christians. Despite many likenesses the Sufi way differs greatly from the way of Christian contemplatives. We may here refer to the picture in which the different traditional ways are depicted as the radii of a circle which are united only at one single point. The nearer the radii are to the center, the nearer they are to one another; none the less they coincide only at the center where they cease to be radii. It is clear that this distinction of one way from another does not prevent the intellect from placing itself by an intuitive anticipation at the center where all ways converge.

To make the inner constitution of Sufism quite clear it should be added that it always includes as indispensable elements, first, a doctrine, secondly, an initiation and, thirdly, a spiritual method. The doctrine is, as it were, a symbolical prefiguring of the knowledge to be attained; it is also, in its manifestation, a fruit of that knowledge.

The quintessence of Sufi doctrine comes from the Prophet, but, as there is no esoterism without a certain inspiration, the doctrine is continually manifested afresh by the mouth of masters. Oral teaching is moreover superior, since it is direct and "personal," to what can be gleaned from writings. Writings play only a secondary part as a preparation, a complement, or an aid to memory and for this reason the historical continuity of Sufi teaching sometimes eludes the researches of scholars.

As for initiation in Sufism, this consists in the transmission of a spiritual influence (*baraka*) and must be conferred by a representative of a "chain" reaching back to the Prophet. In most cases it is transmitted by the master who also communicates the method and confers the means of spiritual concentration that are appropriate to the aptitudes of the disciple. The general framework of the method is the Islamic Law, although there have always been isolated Sufis who, by reason of the exceptional nature of their contemplative state, no longer took part in the ordinary ritual of Islam.

In order to forestall any objection which might be raised on this account to what had already been said about the Muhammadan origin of Sufism, it must here be clearly stated that the spiritual supports on which the principal methods of Sufism are based, and which can in certain circumstances take the place of the ordinary ritual of Islam,

appear as the very keystones of the whole Islamic symbolism; it is indeed this sense that they were given by the Prophet himself.

Initiation generally takes the form of a pact (*bayʿa*) between the candidate and the spiritual master (*al-murshid*) who represents the Prophet. This pact implies perfect submission of the disciple to the master in all that concerns spiritual life and it can never be dissolved unilaterally by the will of the disciple.

The different "branches" of the spiritual "family tree" of Sufism correspond quite naturally to different "paths" (*ṭuruq*). Each great master from whom the start of a specific branch can be traced has authority to adapt the method to the aptitude of a particular category of those who are gifted for spiritual life. Thus the various "paths" correspond to various "vocations" all of them orientated to the same goal, and are in no sense schisms or "sects" within Sufism, although partial deviations have also arisen from time to time and given birth to sects in the strict sense. The outward sign of a sectarian tendency is always the quantitative and "dynamic" manner in which propagation takes place. Authentic Sufism can never become a "movement"[4] for the very good reason that it appeals to what is most "static" in man, to wit, contemplative intellect.[5]

In this connection it should be noted that, if Islam has been able to remain intact throughout the centuries despite the changes in human psychology and the ethnic differences between the Islamic peoples, this is assuredly not because of the relatively dynamic character it possesses as a collective form but because from its very origin it includes a possibility of intellectual contemplation which transcends the affective currents of the human soul.

[4] In some *ṭuruq*, such as the Qādiriyya, the Darqāwiyya, and the Naqshbandiyya, the presence of "outer circles" of initiates in addition to the inner circle of the elite results in a certain popular expansion. But this is not to be confused with the expansion of sectarian movements, since the outer circles do not stand in opposition to exoterism of which they are very often in fact an intensified form.

[5] What is in these days usually called the "intellect" is really only the discursive faculty, the very dynamism and agitation of which distinguishes it from the intellect proper which is in itself motionless being always direct and serene in operation.

Sufism and Mysticism

Scientific works commonly define Sufism as "Muslim mysticism" and we too would readily adopt the epithet "mystical" to designate that which distinguishes Sufism from the simply religious aspect of Islam if that word still bore the meaning given it by the Greek Fathers of the early Christian Church and those who followed their spiritual line: they used it to designate what is related to knowledge of "the mysteries." Unfortunately the word "mysticism"—and also the word "mystical"—has been abused and extended to cover religious manifestations which are strongly marked with individualistic subjectivity and governed by a mentality which does not look beyond the horizons of exoterism.

It is true that there are in the East, as in the West, borderline cases such as that of the *majdhūb* in whom the Divine attraction (*al-jadhb*) strongly predominates so as to invalidate the working of the mental faculties with the result that the *majdhūb* cannot give doctrinal formulation to his contemplative state. It may also be that a state of spiritual realization comes about in exceptional cases almost without the support of a regular method, for "the Spirit bloweth whither It listeth." None the less the term *Taṣawwuf* is applied in the Islamic world only to regular contemplative ways which include both an esoteric doctrine and transmission from one master to another. So *Taṣawwuf* could only be translated as "mysticism" on condition that the latter term was explicitly given its strict meaning, which is also its original meaning. If the word were understood in that sense it would clearly be legitimate to compare Sufis to true Christian mystics. All the same a shade of meaning enters here which, while it does not touch the meaning of the word "mysticism" taken by itself, explains why it does not seem satisfactory in all its contexts to transpose it into Sufism. Christian contemplatives, and especially those who came after the Middle Ages, are indeed related to those Muslim contemplatives who followed the way of spiritual love (*al-maḥabba*), the *bhakti mārga* of Hinduism, but only very rarely are they related to those Eastern contemplatives who were of a purely intellectual order, such as Ibn ʿArabī or, in the Hindu world, Śrī Śaṅkarāchārya.[6]

[6] There is in this fact nothing implying any superiority of one tradition over

Now, spiritual love is in a sense intermediate between glowing devotion and knowledge; moreover, the language of the *bhakta* projects, even into the realm of final union, the polarity from which love springs. This is no doubt one reason why, in the Christian world, the distinction between true mysticism and individualistic "mysticism" is not always clearly marked, whereas in the world of Islam esoterism always involves a metaphysical view of things—even in its bhaktic forms—and is thus clearly separated from exoterism, which can in this case be much more readily defined as the common "Law."[7]

Every complete way of contemplation, such as the Sufi way or Christian mysticism (in the original meaning of that word), is distinct from a way of devotion, such as is wrongly called "mystical," in that it implies an active intellectual attitude. Such an attitude is by no means to be understood in the sense of a sort of individualism with an intellectual air to it: on the contrary it implies a disposition to open oneself to the essential Reality (*al-Ḥaqīqa*), which transcends discursive thought and so also a possibility of placing oneself intellectually beyond all individual subjectivity.

That there may be no misunderstanding about what has just been said it must be clearly stated that the Sufi also realizes an attitude of perpetual adoration molded by the religious form. Like every believer he must pray and, in general, conform to the revealed Law since his individual human nature will always remain passive in relation to Divine Reality or Truth whatever the degree of his spiritual identification with it. "The servant (i.e. the individual) always remains the servant" (*al-ʿabd yabqā-l-ʿabd*), as a Moroccan master said to the author. In this relationship the Divine Presence will therefore manifest Itself as Grace. But the intelligence of the Sufi, inasmuch as it is directly identified with the "Divine Ray," is in a certain manner withdrawn,

another; it shows only tendencies which are conditioned by the genius and temperament of the peoples concerned. Because of this bhaktic character of Christian mysticism some orientalists have found it possible to assert that Ibn ʿArabī was "not a real mystic."

[7] The structure of Islam does not admit of stages in some sense intermediate between exoterism and esoterism such as the Christian monastic state, the original role of which was to constitute a direct framework for the Christian way of contemplation.

in its spiritual actuality and its own modes of expression, from the framework imposed on the individual by religion and also by reason, and in this sense the inner nature of the Sufi is not receptivity but pure act.

It goes without saying that not every contemplative who follows the Sufi way comes to realize a state of knowledge which is beyond form, for clearly that does not depend on his will alone. None the less the end in view not only determines the intellectual horizon but also brings into play spiritual means which, being as it were a prefiguring of that end, permit the contemplative to take up an active position in relation to his own psychic form.

Instead of identifying himself with his empirical "I" he fashions that "I" by virtue of an element which is symbolically and implicitly non-individual. The Qurʾān says: "We shall strike vanity with truth and it will bring it to naught" (21:18). The Sufi ʿAbd as-Salām ibn Mashīsh prayed: "Strike with me on vanity that I may bring it to naught." To the extent that he is effectively emancipated the contemplative ceases to be such-and-such a person and "becomes" the Truth on which he has meditated and the Divine Name which he invokes.

The intellectual essence of Sufism makes imprints even on the purely human aspects of the way which may in practice coincide with the religious virtues. In the Sufi perspective the virtues are nothing other than human images or "subjective traces" of universal Truth;[8] hence the incompatibility between the spirit of Sufism and the "moralistic" conception of virtue, which is quantitative and individualistic.[9]

Since the doctrine is both the very foundation of the way and the fruit of the contemplation which is its goal,[10] the difference between

[8] It will be recalled that for Plotinus virtue is intermediate between the soul and intelligence.

[9] A quantitative conception of virtue results from the religious consideration of merit or even from a purely social point of view. The qualitative conception on the other hand has in view the analogical relation between a cosmic or Divine quality and a human virtue. Of necessity the religious conception of virtue remains individualistic since it values virtue only from the point of view of individual salvation.

[10] Some orientalists would like artificially to separate doctrine from "spiritual experience." They see doctrine as a "conceptualizing" anticipating a purely

Sufism and religious mysticism can be reduced to a question of doctrine. This can be clearly expressed by saying that the believer whose doctrinal outlook is limited to that of exoterism always maintains a fundamental and irreducible separation between the Divinity and himself whereas the Sufi recognizes, at least in principle, the essential unity of all beings, or—to put the same thing in negative terms—the unreality of all that appears separate from God.

It is necessary to keep in view this double aspect of esoteric orientation because it may happen that an exoterist—and particularly a religious mystic—will also affirm that in the sight of God he is nothing. If, however, this affirmation carried with it for him all its metaphysical implications, he would logically be forced to admit at the same time the positive aspect of the same truth, which is that the essence of his own reality, in virtue of which he is *not* "nothing," is mysteriously identical with God. As Meister Eckhart wrote: "There is somewhat in the soul which is uncreate and uncreatable; if all the soul were such it would be uncreate and uncreatable; and this somewhat is Intellect." This is a truth which all esoterism admits *a priori*, whatever the manner in which it is expressed.

A purely religious teaching on the other hand either does not take it into account or even explicitly denies it, because of the danger that the great majority of believers would confuse the Divine Intellect with its human, "created" reflection and would not be able to conceive of their transcendent unity except in the likeness of a substance the quasi-material coherence of which would be contrary to the essential uniqueness of every being. It is true that the Intellect has a "created" aspect both in the human and in the cosmic order, but the whole scope of the meaning that can be given to the word "Intellect"[11] is not what concerns us here since, independently of this question, esoterism

subjective "experience." They forget two things: first, that the doctrine ensues from a state of knowledge which is the goal of the way and secondly, that God does not lie.

[11] The doctrine of the Christian contemplatives of the Orthodox Church, though clearly esoteric, maintains an apparently irreducible distinction between the "Uncreated Light" and the *nous* or intellect, which is a human, and so created faculty, created to know that Light. Here the "identity of essence" is

is characterized by its affirmation of the essentially divine nature of knowledge.

Exoterism stands on the level of formal intelligence which is conditioned by its objects, which are partial and mutually exclusive truths. As for esoterism, it realizes that intelligence which is beyond forms and it alone moves freely in its limitless space and sees how relative truths are delimited.[12]

This brings us to a further point which must be made clear, a point, moreover, indirectly connected with the distinction drawn above between true mysticism and individualistic "mysticism." Those who stand "outside" often attribute to Sufis the pretension of being able to attain to God by the sole means of their own will. In truth it is precisely the man whose orientation is towards action and merit—that is, exoteric—who most often tends to look on everything from the point of an effort of will, and from this arises his lack of understanding of the purely contemplative point of view which envisages the way first of all in relation to knowledge.

In the principial order will does in fact depend on knowledge and not *vice versa*, knowledge being by its nature "impersonal." Although its development, starting from the symbolism transmitted by the traditional teaching, does include a certain logical process, knowledge is none the less a divine gift which man could not take to himself by his own initiative. If this is taken into account it is easier to understand what was said above about the nature of those spiritual means which are strictly "initiatic" and are as it were a prefiguring of the non-human goal of the Way. While every human effort, every effort of the will to get beyond the limitations of individuality is doomed to fall back

expressed by the immanence of the "Uncreated Light" and its presence in the heart. From the point of view of method the distinction between the intellect and Light is a safeguard against a "luciferian" confusion of the intellectual organ with the Divine Intellect. The Divine Intellect immanent in the world may even be conceived as the "void," for the Intellect which "grasps" all cannot itself be "grasped." The intrinsic orthodoxy of this point of view—which is also the Buddhist point of view—is seen in the identification of the essential reality of everything with this "void" (*śūnya*).

[12] The Qurʾān says: "God created the Heavens and the earth by the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*)" (64:3).

on itself, those means which are, so to say, of the same nature as the supra-individual Truth (*al-Ḥaqīqa*) which they evoke and prefigure can, and alone can, loosen the knot of microcosmic individuation—the egocentric illusion, as the Vedantists would say—since only the Truth in its universal and supra-mental reality can consume its opposite without leaving of it any residue.

By comparison with this radical negation of the "I" (*nafs*) any means which spring from the will alone, such as asceticism (*az-zuhd*) can play only a preparatory and ancillary part.[13] It may be added that it is for this reason that such means never acquired in Sufism the almost absolute importance they had, for instance, for certain Christian monks; and this is true even in cases where they were in fact strictly practiced in one or another *ṭarīqa*.

A Sufi symbolism which has the advantage of lying outside the realm of any psychological analysis will serve to sum up what has just been said. The picture it gives is this: The Spirit (*ar-Rūḥ*) and the soul (*an-nafs*) engage in battle for the possession of their common son the heart (*al-qalb*). By *ar-Rūḥ* is here to be understood the intellectual principle which transcends the individual nature[14] and by *an-nafs* the psyche, the centrifugal tendencies of which determine the diffuse and inconstant domain of the "I." As for *al-qalb*, the heart, this represents the central organ of the soul, corresponding to the vital center of the physical organism. *Al-qalb* is in a sense the point of intersection of the "vertical" ray, which is *ar-Rūḥ*, with the "horizontal" plane, which is *an-nafs*.

Now it is said that the heart takes on the nature of that one of the two elements generating it which gains the victory in this battle. Inasmuch as the *nafs* has the upper hand the heart is "veiled" by her, for the soul, which takes herself to be an autonomous whole, in a

[13] Sufis see in the body not only the soil which nourishes the passions but also its spiritually positive aspect which is that of a picture or *résumé* of the cosmos. In Sufi writings the expression the "temple" (*haykal*) will be found to designate the body. Muḥyi ʾd-Dīn ibn ʿArabī in the chapter on Moses in his *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* compares it to "the ark where dwells the Peace (*Sakīnah*) of the Lord."

[14] The word *rūḥ* can also have a more particular meaning, that of "vital spirit." This is the sense in which it is most frequently used in cosmology.

way envelops it in her "veil" (*ḥijāb*). At the same time the *nafs* is an accomplice of the "world" in its multiple and changing aspect because she passively espouses the cosmic condition of form. Now form divides and binds whereas the Spirit, which is above form, unites and at the same time distinguishes reality from appearance. If, on the contrary, the Spirit gains the victory over the soul, then the heart will be transformed into Spirit and will at the same time transmute the soul suffusing her with spiritual light. Then too the heart reveals itself as what it really is, that is as the tabernacle (*mishkāt*) of the Divine Mystery (*sirr*) in man.

In this picture the Spirit appears with a masculine function in relation to the soul, which is feminine. But the Spirit is receptive and so feminine in its turn in relation to the Supreme Being, from which it is, however, distinguished only by its cosmic character inasmuch as it is polarized with respect to created beings. In essence *ar-Rūḥ* is identified with the Divine Act or Order (*al-Amr*) which is symbolized in the Qurʾān by the creating Word "Be" (*kun*) and is the immediate and eternal "enunciation" of the Supreme Being: ". . . and they will question you about the Spirit: say: The Spirit is of the Order of my Lord, but you have received but little knowledge" (Qurʾān, 17:85).

In the process of his spiritual liberation the contemplative is reintegrated into the Spirit and by It into the primordial enunciation of God by which "all things were made . . . and nothing that was made was made without it" (St. John's Gospel).[15] Moreover, the name "Sufi" means, strictly speaking, one who is essentially identified with the Divine Act; hence the saying that the "Sufi is not created" (*aṣ-ṣufi lam yukhlaq*), which can also be understood as meaning that the being who is thus reintegrated into the Divine Reality recognizes himself in it "such as he was" from all eternity according to his "principial possibility, immutable in its state of non-manifestation"—to quote Muḥyi ʾd-Dīn ibn ʿArabī. Then all his created modalities are revealed, whether they are temporal or non-temporal, as mere inconsistent reflections of this principial possibility.[16]

[15] For the Alexandrines too liberation is brought about in three stages which respectively correspond to the Holy Spirit, the Word, and God the Father.

[16] If it is legitimate to speak of the principial, or divine, possibility of every being, this possibility being the very reason for his "personal uniqueness," it

Rites

A rite is an action the very form of which is the result of a Divine Revelation. Thus the perpetuation of a rite is itself a mode of Revelation, and Revelation is present in the rite in both its aspects—the intellectual and the ontological. To carry out a rite is not only to enact a symbol but also to participate, even if only virtually, in a certain mode of being, a mode which has an extra-human and universal extension. The meaning of the rite coincides with the ontological essence of its form.

For people of modern education and outlook a rite is usually no more than an aid in promoting an ethical attitude; it seems to them that it is from this attitude alone and from nothing else that the rite derives its efficacy—if indeed such people recognize in rites any efficacy at all. What they fail to see is the implicitly universal nature of the qualitative form of rites. Certainly a rite bears fruit only if it is carried out with an intention (*niya*) that conforms to its meaning, for according to a saying of the Prophet, "the value of actions is only through their intentions," though this clearly does not mean that the intention is independent of the form of the action.[17] It is precisely because the inward attitude is wedded to the formal quality of the rite—a quality which manifests a reality both ontological and intellectual—that the act transcends the domain of the individual soul.

The quintessence of Muslim rites, which could be called their "sacramental" element, is the Divine Speech for which they provide a vehicle. This speech is moreover contained in the Qurʾān, the recitation of the text of which by itself constitutes a rite. In certain cases this recitation is concentrated on a single phrase repeated a definite number of times with the aim of actualizing its deep truth and its particular grace. This practice is the more common in Islam because the Qurʾān is

does not follow from this that there is any multiplicity whatever in the divine order, for there cannot be any uniqueness outside the Divine Unity. This truth is a paradox only on the level of discursive reason. It is hard to conceive only because we almost inevitably forge for ourselves a "substantial" picture of the Divine Unity.

[17] Rites of consecration are an exception because their bearing is purely objective. It is enough that one should be qualified to carry them out and that one should observe the prescribed and indispensable rules.

composed in great part of concise formulas with a rhythmical sonority such as lend themselves to litanies and incantations. For exoterism ejaculatory practices can have only a secondary importance; outside esoterism they are never used methodically, but within it they in fact constitute a basic method.

All repetitive recitation of sacred formulas or sacred speech, whether it be aloud or inward, is designated by the generic term *dhikr*. As has already been noted this term bears at the same time the meanings "mention," "recollection," "evocation," and "memory." Sufism makes of invocation, which is *dhikr* in the strict and narrow sense of the term, the central instrument of its method. In this it is in agreement with most traditions of the present cycle of humanity.[18] To understand the scope of this method we must recall that, according to the revealed expression, the world was created by the Speech (*al-Amr*, *al-Kalīma*) of God, and this indicates a real analogy between the Universal Spirit (*ar-Rūḥ*) and speech. In invocation the ontological character of the ritual act is very directly expressed: here the simple enunciation of the Divine Name, analogous to the primordial and limitless "enunciation" of Being, is the symbol of a state or an undifferentiated knowledge superior to mere rational "knowing."

The Divine Name, revealed by God Himself, implies a Divine Presence which becomes operative to the extent that the Name takes possession of the mind of him who invokes It. Man cannot concentrate directly on the Infinite, but, by concentrating on the symbol of the Infinite, attains to the Infinite Itself. When the individual subject is identified with the Name to the point where every mental projection has been absorbed by the form of the Name, the Divine Essence of the Name manifests spontaneously, for this sacred form leads to nothing outside itself; it has no positive relationship except with its Essence

[18] This cycle begins approximately with what is called the "historical" period. The analogy between the Muslim *dhikr* and the Hindu *japa-yoga* and also with the methods of incantation of Hesychast Christianity and of certain schools of Buddhism is very remarkable. It would, however, be false to attribute a non-Islamic origin to the Muslim *dhikr*, first because this hypothesis is quite unnecessary, secondly because it is contradicted by the facts, and thirdly because fundamental spiritual realities cannot fail to manifest themselves at the core of every traditional civilization.

and finally its limits are dissolved in that Essence. Thus union with the Divine Name becomes Union (*al-waṣl*) with God Himself.

The meaning "recollection" implied in the word *dhikr* indirectly shows up man's ordinary state of forgetfulness and unconsciousness (*ghafla*). Man has forgotten his own pre-temporal state in God and this fundamental forgetfulness carries in its train other forms of forgetfulness and of unconsciousness. According to a saying of the Prophet, "this world is accursed and all it contains is accursed save only the invocation (or: the memory) of God (*dhikru ʾLlāh*)." The Qurʾān says: "Assuredly prayer prevents passionate transgressions and grave sins but the invocation of God (*dhikruʾLlāh*) is greater" (29:45). According to some this means that the mentioning, or the remembering, of God constitutes the quintessence of prayer; according to others it indicates the excellence of invocation as compared with prayer.

Other Scriptural foundations of the invocation of the Name—or the Names—of God are to be found in the following passages of the Qurʾān: "Remember Me and I will remember you . . ." or: "Mention Me and I will mention you . . ." (2:152); "Invoke your Lord with humility and in secret. . . . And invoke Him with fear and desire; Verily the Mercy of God is nigh to those who practice the 'virtues' (*al-muḥsinīn*), those who practice *al-iḥsān*, the deepening by 'poverty' (*al-faqr*) or by 'sincerity' (*al-ikhlāṣ*) of 'faith' (*al-īmān*) and 'submission' to God (*al-islām*)" (7:55, 56). The mention in this passage of "humility" (*taḍarruʿ*), of "secrecy" (*khufya*), of "fear" (*khawf*) and of "desire" (*ṭamaʿ*) is of the very greatest technical importance. "To God belong the Fairest Names: invoke Him by them" (7:180); "O ye who believe! when ye meet a (hostile) band be firm and remember God often in order that ye may succeed" (8:45). The esoteric meaning of this "band" is "the soul which incites to evil" (*an-nafs al-ammāra*) and with this goes a transposition of the literal meaning, which concerns the "lesser holy war" (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*), to the plane of the "greater holy war" (*al-jihād al-akbar*). "Those who believe and whose hearts rest in security in the recollection (or: the invocation) of God; Verily is it not through the recollection of God that their hearts find rest in security?" (13:28).

By implication the state of the soul of the profane man is here compared to a disturbance or agitation through its being dispersed

in multiplicity, which is at the very antipodes of the Divine Unity. "Say: Call on *Allāh* (the synthesis of all the Divine Names which is also transcendent as compared with their differentiation) or call on *ar-Raḥmān* (the Bliss-with-Mercy or the Beauty-with-Goodness intrinsic in God); in whatever manner ye invoke Him, His are the most beautiful Names" (17:110); "In the Messenger of God ye have a beautiful example of him whose hope is in God and the Last Day and who invokes God much" (33:21); "O ye who believe! invoke God with a frequent invocation (*dhikran kathīrā*)" (33:41); "And call on God with a pure heart (or: with a pure religion) (*mukhliṣīna lahu-d-dīn*) . . ." (40:14); "Your Lord has said: Call Me and I will answer you . . ." (40:60); "Is it not time for those who believe to humble their hearts at the remembrance of God? . . ." (57:16); "Call on (or: Remember) the Name of thy Lord and consecrate thyself to Him with (perfect) consecration" (73:8); "Happy is he who purifies himself and invokes the Name of his Lord and prayeth" (87:14, 15).

To these passages from the Qur'ān must be added some of the sayings of the Prophet: "It is in pronouncing Thy Name that I must die and live." Here the connection between the Name, "death," and "life" includes a most important initiatic meaning. "'There is a means for polishing everything which removes rust; what polishes the heart is the invocation of God, and no action puts so far off the chastisement of God as this invocation.'[19] The companions said: 'Is not fighting against infidels like unto it?' He replied: 'No: not even if you fight on till your sword is broken'"; "Never do men gather together to invoke (or: to remember) God without their being surrounded by angels, without the Divine Favor covering them, without Peace (*as-sakīna*) descending on them and without God remembering them with those who surround Him"; "The Prophet said: 'The solitaries shall be the first.' They asked: 'Who are the solitaries (*al-mufridūn*)?' And he

[19] According to the *Viṣṇu-Dharma-Uttara* "water suffices to put out fire and the rising of the sun (to drive away) shadows; in the age of Kali repetition of the Name of *Hari* (*Viṣṇu*) suffices to destroy all errors. The Name of *Hari*, precisely the Name, the Name which is my life; there is not, no, there surely is no other way." In the *Mānava Dharma-Śāstra* it is said: "Beyond doubt a brahmin (priest) will succeed by nothing but *japa* (invocation). Whether

replied: 'Those who invoke much'"; "A Bedouin came to the Prophet and asked: 'Who is the best among men.' The Prophet answered: 'Blessed is that person whose life is long and his actions good.' The Bedouin said: 'O Prophet! What is the best and the best rewarded of actions?' He replied: 'The best of actions is this: to separate yourself from the world and to die while your tongue is moist with repeating the Name of God'";[20] "A man said: 'O Prophet of God, truly the laws of Islam are many. Tell me a thing by which I can obtain the rewards.' The Prophet answered: 'Let your tongue be ever moist with mentioning God.'"

* * *

The universal character of invocation is indirectly expressed by the simplicity of its form and by its power of assimilating to itself all those acts of life whose direct and elemental nature has an affinity with the "existential" aspect of the rite. Thus the *dhikr* easily imposes its sway on breathing, the double rhythm of which sums up not only every manifestation of life but also, symbolically, the whole of existence.

Just as the rhythm inherent in the sacred words imposes itself on the movement of breathing, so the rhythm of breathing in its turn can impose itself on all the movements of the body. Herein lies the principle of the sacred dance practiced in Sufi communities.[21] This practice is the more remarkable since the Muslim religion as such is rather hostile both to dancing and to music, for the identification through the medium of a cosmic rhythm with a spiritual or divine

he carries out other rites or not he is a perfect brahmin." Likewise also the *Mahābhārata* teaches that "of all functions (*dharmas*) *japa* (invocation) is for me the highest function" and that "of all sacrifices I am the sacrifice of *japa*."

[20] Kabīr said: "Just as a fish loves water and the miser loves silver and a mother loves her child so also Bhagat loves the Name. The eyes stream through looking at the path and the heart has become a pustule from ceaselessly invoking the Name."

[21] According to a *ḥadīth*, "He who does not vibrate at remembrance of the Friend has no friend." This saying is one of the scriptural foundations of the dance of the dervishes.

reality has no place in a religious perspective which maintains a strict and exclusive distinction between Creator and creature. Also there are practical reasons for banishing dancing from religious worship, for the psychic results accompanying the sacred dance might lead to deviation. None the less the dance offers too direct and too primordial a spiritual support for it not to be found in regular or occasional use in the esoterism of the monotheistic religions.[22]

It is related that the first Sufis founded their dancing *dhikr* on the dances of the Arab warriors. Later, Sufi orders in the East, such as the Naqshabandis, adapted certain techniques of *hatha-yoga* and so differentiated their form of dance. Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, who founded the Mevlevī order, drew the inspiration for the collective *dhikr* of his community from the popular dances and music of Asia Minor.[23] If the dances and music of the dervishes are mentioned here it is because these are among the best known of the manifestations of Sufism; they belong, however, to a collective and so to a rather peripheral aspect of *taṣawwuf* and many masters have pronounced against their too general

[22] A Psalm in the Bible says: "Let them praise His Name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and the harp." It is known that the sacred dance exists in Jewish esoterism, finding its model in the dancing of King David before the Ark of the Covenant. The apocryphal Gospel of the Childhood speaks of the Virgin as a child dancing on the altar steps, and certain folk customs allow us to conclude that these models were imitated in mediaeval Christianity. St Theresa of Avila and her nuns danced to the sound of tambourines. Mā Ananda Moyi has said: "During the *samkīrtana* (the "spiritual concert" which is the Hindu equivalent of the Muslim *samāʿ*, or rather, of *ḥadra* or *ʿimāra*) do not pay attention to the dance or the musical accompaniment but concentrate on His Name. . . . When you pronounce the Name of God your spirit begins to appreciate the *samkīrtana* and its music predisposes you to the contemplation of divine things. Just as you should make *pūjās* and pray, you should also take part in *samkīrtanas*."

[23] An aesthetic feeling can be a support for intuition for the same reason as a doctrinal idea and to the extent to which the beauty of a form reveals an intellectual essence. But the particular efficacy of such a means as music lies in the fact that it speaks first of all to feeling, which it clarifies and sublimates. Perfect harmony of the active intelligence (the reason) and the passive intelligence (feeling or sensibility), prefigures the spiritual state—*al-ḥāl*.

use. In any case, exercises of this kind ought never to preponderate over the practice of solitary *dhikr*.

Preferably invocation is practiced during a retreat (*khalwa*), but it can equally be combined with all sorts of external activities. It requires the authorization (*idhn*) of a spiritual master. Without this authorization the dervish would not enjoy the spiritual help brought to him through the initiatic chain (*silsila*) and moreover his purely individual initiative would run the risk of finding itself in flagrant contradiction to the essentially non-individual character of the symbol, and from this might arise incalculable psychic reactions.[24]

[24] "When man has made himself familiar with *dhikr*," says al-Ghazzālī, "he separates himself (inwardly) from all else. Now at death he is separated from all that is not God. . . . What remains is only invocation. If this invocation is familiar to him, he finds his pleasure in it and rejoices that the obstacles which turned him aside from it have been put away, so that he finds himself as if alone with his Beloved. . . ." In another text al-Ghazzālī expresses himself thus: "You must be alone in a retreat . . . and, being seated, concentrate your thought on God without other inner occupation. This you will accomplish, first pronouncing the Name of God with your tongue, ceaselessly repeating: *Allāh*, *Allāh*, without letting the attention go. The result will be a state in which you will feel without effort on your part this Name in the spontaneous movement of your tongue" (from his *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm ad-Dīn*). Methods of incantation are diverse, as are spiritual possibilities. At this point we must once again insist on the danger of giving oneself up to such practices outside their traditional framework and their normal conditions.

"Sufi Doctrine and Method" by Titus Burckhardt

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