Ideals and Realities of Islam



Seyyed Hossein Nasr

with a Preface by
Titus Burckhardt
and a Foreword by
Huston Smith

NEW REVISED EDITION

ABC International Group, Inc.

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Seyyed Hossein Nasr asserts the moral right to
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PREFACE

I was recently given the chance of speaking with one of the most eminent representatives of the Islamic culture in the ancient town of Fez. Faithful guardian of traditional wisdom, skilled in the sciences of the exterior (*al-ẓāhir*) and of the interior (*al-bāṭin*), aristocrat by birth and in spirit, dignified and almost majestic in his white cloak, he did not mince his words in telling me what he thought of the mentality of his contemporaries:

"It is certain that some pious men, true contemplatives and even saints still exist, because according to the Prophet there will be today, in his community, a nucleus of enlightened men. But as for what we call Islamic culture, I must be frank in telling you that there is no longer such a thing in this country." Surely he was exaggerating, as his own existence proved the contrary. "And how did this deficiency come about?" I asked him. "Aeroplanes have subjugated our minds," he said, smiling.

He was seeing correctly; but this capitulation of traditional cultures in the face of modern technology is not a phenomenon limited to the world of Islam; it is general; it is most obvious in Christian countries, where it is corroding religion itself. Every day we are a party to some new compromise, some new concession made by church dignitaries to "open up" to the modern world, to something essentially agnostic and practically anti-religious. The science which invented the machine enjoyed such extraordinary prestige that many are tempted to admit that it is right, even in areas where it is patently incompetent. It is as if it had seized every objective thought of which modern man is

capable, only allowing the other camp—that of religion—the argument of its own subjective belief. And so we can see those things on the surface of humanity today and disregarded by those nuclei of spiritual science to which my interlocutor was alluding.

It may be that the European world—and we understand this in its widest sense, including white Americans—as used as it is to separating religion and current life, is relatively insensitive to the drama—to the tragedy—which is being played out in countries of traditional culture, and notably in the Islamic world, where religion has never been considered a "private affair" and where one never admitted to a division between the "sacred" domain and the "profane" domain of human life. The world built by Islam was a perfectly homogenous cosmos, where the very least human activity was based on the prophetic models which, themselves, translate precisely the *tawḥīd*, the "consciousness of the divine Unity." This transparent spiritual order of social and individual life has been gravely threatened, if not effectively destroyed, by the eruption of the modern European world, whose diverse inventions, even when they appeared to be harmless and spiritually neutral, are often comprised of fatally irreligious aspects like, for example, the widespread use of European clothing, which seem to be worn expressly to hinder one's gestures during the canonical prayer. Pure and simple coincidence, certain people would insinuate; as much as to say that the dignity and beauty of the traditional costume are only due to chance.

In order to cope with the difficulties of the modern world, scholarly instruction is Westernized. This has been done to create a new mentality which has only very vague ties with traditional heritage, whose often concise and symbolic language has appeared ever since to be strangely "archaic" and whose inner richness, embracing body, mind and spirit, is simply ignored.

Is it this ignorance, incubated and hatched in the very bosom of a world which is basically traditional—for still the *muezzin* announces the prayer times from the minaret, still all the people fast during the sacred month of Ramaḍān, and still

the verses of the Quran are pronounced on all occasions and in all places—is it this ignorance of the inner which is going to reunite with that of the outer to cause the collapse of the "house of Islam (*dār al-islām*)"; or will it produce the contrary, the realization of an awakening from its perennial nucleus, from the sacred science of Islam, an awakening corroborated and amplified by an understanding of the spiritual elite of all true religions? For the differences between these religions, if they are effective, are not inseparable for those who see the spiritual realities "of the inner": to regain the center of a circle—being here the world or the human soul—one can ascribe to it any regular shape, an equilateral triangle, a square, a hexagon, etc., then construct, at the edges of this shape, the perpendiculars which meet at the intended point. Similarly, each religion represents a certain spiritual "economy," which supports it; that is to say that it is able to regain from within itself the divine center of all things. A triangle is not a square, and a hexagon is not an octagon; however, each of these shapes is, in some way, an image of the center.

But I do not wish to anticipate the contents of this book which gives me hope that the awakening of which I have been speaking will come about effectively. Seyyed Hossein Nasr dominates his subject. He never succumbs to any of the traps which so often distort the perspective of those who write about Islam: the academic history telling, avoiding spiritual realities which are by definition ahistoric; religious exclusivity with its naive, blinkered view of other religions; sentimental universality, which intends to erase the limits, however real, of a religion; modernism, which projects its democratic and scientific ideology onto the essentially theocratic framework of Islam.

The author unites in his person an Islamic structure which encompasses two points of view: that of religious law and contemplation, and a supreme knowledge of modern scientific methods. His writing is one of many proofs that the true Islamic culture is far from dead.

Titus Burckhardt

FOREWORD

Ten years ago I was returning from a professional conference in the Midwest. Bad weather closed the local airport and threw me together with a colleague in world religions for a long train ride home. The re-routing was bothersome, but it turned out not to be a total loss for in the course of it my companion said something memorable. Long hours together and our shared inconvenience lowered the inhibitions to the point where, around midnight, they triggered a confession. "I've been teaching world religions for fifteen years," my friend confided, "and I still don't know what the Upanishads are talking about . . . ." As their meaning had come pouring through me on first reading I could scarcely believe my ears, but my friend was only half through and the balance of his statement left me as dumfounded as its beginning. ". . . but when I get to Islam"—wreaths of smiles and relief—"I'm home!" The reason this astonished me was that my difficulties with Islam over the years have rivaled his with Hinduism. Carlyle's admission concerning the Quran had become an annual litany: "As toilsome reading as I ever undertook. A wearisome, confused jumble, crude, incondite. Nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through [it]." I wince to think how far I could have extended his admission on my reading of Islam generally.

With a single sentence my friend brought home to me more compellingly than anyone before or since the extent to which temperamental (karmic?) differences affect our responses to the great traditions. It is not for that reason that I mention it, however, but because it sets the stage for the most succinct way I

can identify my debt to the author of the book in hand. Thanks to him, and the companions in Islam to whom he has introduced me, my train friend's sympatico with that tradition no longer surprises. No other faith now interests me more, and in none are explorations more rewarding. Over the Arab world, too, the heavens have opened.

I

The name of Seyyed Hossein Nasr first came to my attention through an invitation to a supper party in his honor at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions. An out-of-town conflict forced me to decline, but my wife accepted and I returned to raves of an evening with one of the most impressive men—and beautiful women, his wife—my wife could recall. On the strength of her hyperbole, I took pains the next time he visited Cambridge to invite him to my class. His lecture was a landmark. I shall pass over his presence as a person and refer only to what he said. Beginning with the paradox that what is deepest in the tradition is also most accessible to outsiders—"The Gita belongs to the world, but try to read The Laws of Manu and you go mad"—he proceeded to unfold Islam from its mystical [Sufi] center. For the first time I saw unmistakably that Islam contained treasures that I had not suspected, treasures that could be discerned not only by Muslims but by me.

II

Each of the great religious traditions contains at some level the fullness of truth: truth sufficient unto salvation. This substantial truth "outs" in these traditions, however, in guises that are conspicuously different. To see how revelations surface differently in different traditions is rewarding, but readers of this book, products in the main of a civilization shaped by Judaism and Christianity, face special difficulties in seeing truth in Islam. Conceptually, as well as geographically, Islam is the West's closest neighbor; we share not only common borders but a common theological vocabulary, though we use it at times to say different things. These commonalties would bode well for

understanding were it not for an awkward fact: toward the meeting of minds proximity guarantees nothing. Family disputes are the most virulent kind, and bad blood is nowhere more evident than along borders.

Barriers to Euro-Arabian understanding that have arisen from political conflict I leave to historians, remarking only that recognition is growing of the extent to which Western accounts have been biased in the West's favor; Norman Daniel's Islam and the West: The Making of an Image outlines the history of the distortion in the greatest detail to date. To say that there are no objective grounds for charging that the Muslim world has been more violent than the Christian is, we now see, if anything an understatement. The stereotype of Islam as a "religion of the sword" was forged in animus as much as in ignorance.

Unlike the animosities that were born of politics, theological differences bear directly on this book, so I shall mention several. Islam denies the divinity of Christ, it takes explicit stands regarding social structures, and it claims to be the final revelation, superseding Christianity in ways comparable to those in which Christianity claims to have "fulfilled" Judaism. Nothing anyone says will totally relieve the tensions these claims provoke, but this book does, I think, help to turn them into creative tensions, tensions that tone up the Christian positions themselves by bracing them against alternatives in which even outsiders can detect a certain logic

a. Islam and Society. H. Richard Niebuhr's minor classic, Christ and Culture, delineates five stances Christianity has assumed toward its social milieu. Defining culture as "the artificial secondary environment [including social organization, customs, and values] which man superimposes on the natural," he points out that Christianity has positioned itself against culture, with culture, above culture, paradoxically toward culture, and with intent to transform culture. Islam harbors no such range of options. That Christ left the social and religious spheres disjoined—"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"—is not surprising; given the historical circumstances he had no alternative, for his people, being subjugated, had no political options. When

his religion triumphed under Constantine it had to take on, so to speak, the social order beginning with the Council of Arles, 314 A.D., but by then its foundations had set; social guidelines could be added but not incorporated. Muhammad's circumstances were different, so it is not surprising that revelation surfaced differently through them. During its first decade his mission was persecuted, but no ethnic difference divided him from those in power, and the power-odds he faced, though formidable, were not insuperable. The stance toward social issues these circumstances permitted is instructive. The Prophet never disdained society and politics nor relegated them to secondary importance as if his mission were essentially to men's souls standing solitary before their Maker. Society was his medium as much as was spirit; indeed society was an aspect of spirit, for if man is unity, replicating in microcosm the unity of God Himself, how can his social dimension be divorced from salvation? As the Prophet rose in the end to power, he provides history's clearest glimpse of the way an instrument of revelation, a "Messenger of God," deals with affairs of state when confronted by them. Moses is his closest approximation in this respect, but he remains an approximation only inasmuch as the society with which he dealt was exclusively tribal, whereas Mecca and Medina were full-fledged cities. In assuming axiomatically that issues of power with all their ambiguities and complexities fall, too, under God's aegis, Muhammad made it impossible from the start for Muslims to dismiss the earthly as the worldly, the social as the profane. It was part of his mission to reduce "worldly" and "profane" to null classes.

b. Christ's Divinity. Islam denies it; nothing this book says is going to change that. But note: (1) Regard for Christ is not precluded; the Quran hails him not only as a prophet—authentic channel of God's revelation—but as unique among these in having been born of a virgin. (2) Muslims can understand what it means to love Christ and try to emulate him, for their affection for their own Prophet and efforts to follow in his steps are no less fervent. (3) Insofar as it is a question of faith's having a center, here too Islam has its counterpart, the Quran occupying

a position roughly equivalent to Christ's in Christianity.

It remains true, however, that Islam is not a "centered" religion to the degree that Christianity is. Where the latter rides imagery of center, pivot, and focus, these fitting Christ perfectly, Islam is like a block. Or to change the metaphors, if Christianity is like a centering fire, Islam is like a sheet of snow.* Importance adheres to its totality, through which it spreads more or less evenly, unifying and leveling concomitantly. The totality is, of course, God and His will-filled Being in the world. The Quran is the window to this totality, and this, as we have noted, gives Islam a kind of center, but once sufficiently different to be termed inverse. It is, as it were, a diffused center—only paradoxical formulation will do—in that it becomes adequate, i.e., central, only insofar as it gathers man's total will and deploys it onto the total world, every aspect, every corner, in the ways the "uncreated Book" enjoins.

c. The Final Revelation. Each of the great historical revelations is, as we have said, in its own way complete. From a planetary perspective, however, there is in Islam's claim to be the final revelation and Muhammad the "Seal of the Prophets" a plausibility which to other faiths is thought-provoking if not disturbing. (1) We have seen that the Quran incorporates the social order into the religious. This is, on the one hand, a recovery, it having been so included in all early—"whole," tribal and ethnic—cultures. The inclusion is likewise logically indicated; the sacred/profane dichotomy may be required as an expedient in times and places, but it can never, from the religious point of view, be considered normative. Buddhism and Christianity, the other universal and missionary religions, do not embrace society. The ethnic religions—Hinduism, Judaism, and, in a different way, Confucianism and Shinto—do, but with a specificity which makes them unexportable. Islam (a) addresses society (b) in terms that are simple and supple enough to apply to a vari-

*Both sets of images come from Frithjof Schuon whose Understanding Islam (George Allen & Unwin, 1963) Dr. Nasr acclaims on page xxv of the present book "the best work in English on the meaning of Islam and why Muslims believe in it." The book has a valuable sequel, Dimensions of Islam, 1970, by the same author and publisher.

ety of cultures—to date from Morocco to Jakarta—yet not vacuous; it is this double fact that makes it look as if it has the religious/social complex distinctively in hand. (2) By not deifying Muhammad, which deification would require that he be the devotional focus of everyone, and by explicitly recognizing other "People of the Book" too as recipients of revelation, Islam eases the tension between historical faiths. That Hindus, Buddhists, and Chinese are not listed among such people is no obstacle. As they lay outside the Prophet's world, they are no more excluded by his silence than revelations on distant planets would be excluded by the Quran's neglect of them.

The differences cited thus far are sharp and specific and therefore, like rough edges, the ones most likely to bruise and discomfit. Traditions can also be compared at a more abstract level, however, in which case they do not conflict, they are simply different, like different worlds: animal and mineral, or Jupiter and Mars. Granted that the difference is one of emphasis only, Christianity appears as a religion of the will, Islam as a religion of the intellect.

Christ enjoined his disciples to be perfect; the Quran does not. I have heard Muslims say that if God had wanted another sinless species He would have created man as angel; as it was, He created him between angel and demon to complete the ladder of possibilities. When I first heard this view it sounded like a counsel of complacency, like rationalization for human weaknesses. Today it looks otherwise. Christ's injunction makes not only an extravagant demand; it is a demand that focuses on man's will. The Christian's will is constantly being put to the test; heroism permanently beckons. By comparison Muslim injunctions are indeed pedestrian, but for a reason—this is the insight that has recently come to me, again through Mr. Schuon. Islam's *Sharīᶜah* (Law, Chapter IV) is a far-reaching codex, not to perfect the will—that aim would accord to will a centrality that would divert from other concerns—but rather to calm it; place it in equilibrium so that life can get on to other things, specifically to contemplation: perception of the divine immutability and perfection. Correlatively, whereas the pitfall

for the Christian is sin, for the Muslim it is forgetfulness. In the end the goals converge; the merciful see God and those who see God become merciful. But along the way the routes diverge.

III

Every depiction of a faith proceeds from a perspective, and I find myself wanting to set forth systematically, if only in capsule, the perspective from which I see Professor Nasr's depiction proceeding. The wish arises in part from the thought that it may help the import of certain passages in the book to body forth more amply, but also because it is a perspective which I believe deserves attention in its own right, being in my judgment the one which at this juncture in human understanding best equips us to see the truth in each of the historical traditions without prejudicing the truth in others.

Ultimate reality, name it the Absolute if you will, is beyond the reach of mind and language. It is "the Tao that cannot be told," the Brahman that is Nirguna (without qualities), Israel's I AM, the Godhead of Christian apophatic theology, and Islam's Allah as the Supreme Name Itself. From this indescribable Absolute, Pure Being derives; as it is immaterial it doesn't register on man's senses or laboratory instruments, but unlike the Absolute it can be conceived. On this level stand "the Tao that can be told of," Saguna (qualified) Brahman, Yahweh, the Logos, and Allah. After this come the archetypes or noumenal being (page 132), and then the phenomenal world in which we discernibly live: the spatio-temporal-material world of multiplicity, change, and individuation.

These are the four principal levels of existence. Religions are concerned with the relation of man's phenomenal life to the upper spheres. There are two lines of connection. First, as the Absolute would not be such were it anywhere absent, it must be in man. It is, in the form of Intellect, capitalized to indicate that the word is used in this book in a technical sense I shall presently indicate. Intellect is present in us all, but it is too deep-lying for most persons to detect, so a second link to the Absolute is needed. This is Revelation, the way the Ultimate

erupts overtly, for human collectivities on the phenomenal plane.

First, intellect. On page 131 Professor Nasr writes: "The intellect . . . is not reason which is, at best, its mental image. Intellectus is not ratio." Ratio we know; it is reason as generally understood in the modern West. What is intellectus?

In India it is known as buddhi, the faculty that understands directly, not indirectly by reflection through the lower mental faculties (manas, mind) among which reason rightfully dominates. Meister Eckhardt speaks of it when he writes: "There is something in the soul which is uncreated and uncreatable; . . . this is the intellect." St. Thomas is on its track when he characterizes intellectus as intuitive knowing in contrast to ratio which thinks discursively. Plotinus, Proclus, Dionysius, St. Bonaventure, and Nicolas of Cusa all in one way or another make intellection central to their epistemologies; there is no point in adding other names. Intellectual knowledge is direct knowledge in that it operates without intervening concepts. It is adequational in that it adequates the knower to its object; it knows by becoming what it knows and thereby transcends the subject-object dichotomy. In so doing it offers itself as the only complete knowledge, for distinction implies distance and in cognition distance spells ignorance. As the object of the intellect is timeless and one and the intellect can be adequated to this object, indeed at some level is this object, it follows that the intellect too is trans-personal and eternal in some respect. Which is why Greek gnosis says, "Know thyself," Christ said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you," and it is written in the Hadith, "Who knows himself knows his Lord."

If the foregoing seems obscure to the point of unintelligibility, that is precisely why it must be supplemented by another map showing where man is and pointing the way to his destiny. This complementing map—there is one to fit the terrain of each of the great historical traditions, but they all belong to the same genre—is provided by revelation. People differ in psycho-spiritual makeup as much as if not more than in body build. In relatively few is intellect in the technical sense here used prominent enough to render the preceding page intelligible, to fewer

still will it seem plausible, and for almost none will it be self-evident. In Islam, these few are Sufis (Chapter V). Because their number is small, and equally because they too had to get where they are and be stabilized there, the Absolute must connect with man in other, more exoteric ways, exoteric here denoting ways that connect with more obvious human faculties: man's capacity to understand language and be moved by convincing example. Revelation in its verbal and personified modes.

God surfaces verbally in the Islamic tradition in the Quran. For most Muslims divinity discloses itself more there than through the intellect, but even for them the book is far from transparent. All sacred texts present difficulties; in the final analysis these spring from the incommensurable disproportion between Spirit, with its infinity, and the limited resources of human language. "It is as though the poverty-stricken coagulation which is the language of mortal man were under the formidable pressure of the Heavenly Word broken into fragments, or as if God, in order to express a thousand truths, had but a dozen words at His command and so was compelled to make use of allusions heavy with meaning, of ellipses, abridgements, and symbolic syntheses."* This holds for all sacred texts, but the Quran presents Westerners with special difficulties springing from the Arab's taste for verbal symbolism and "depth" reading. The Arab extracts much from a few words. When, for example, the Quran notes that "the world beyond is better for you than this lower world," or announces, "Say: Allah! then leave them to their empty play," it can evoke for a Muslim a mystical doctrine as profound and complete as any more explicitly catalogued. Moreover, many phrases and verses in the Quran function as mantras; commencing as sentences that convey thoughts, they become transformed, through use, into beings, powers or talismans. The soul of the pious Muslim comes to be woven of these sacred formulas. In them he works, rests, lives, and dies.

As for the Prophet—the way Being erupted in the Arab

* F. Schuon, Understanding Islam, pp. 44-45.

world in human life—he serves as a kind of heavenly mold, ready to receive the inflow of Muslims' intelligence and will. With their wills, Muslims love him and seek to imitate him to the smallest details of everyday life. With respect to intelligence the Prophet represents the unfathomable Logos. When Christ said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me," it is the Logos who spoke. For the Christian this universal Word is appropriately identified with Jesus of Nazareth. For the Muslim it is the Quran as conveyed through Muhammad. Paralleling Christ's human and divine natures, Muhammad is not the Absolute, yet the Absolute truly and distinctively announces itself through him.

IV

But I am beginning to trespass on the book. Let me close by returning for a moment to its author.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a contemporary man or no such man exists. To begin with, he knows science. I merely teach at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; he holds an M.I.T. degree, atop which stands one from Harvard University in the history of science. At the same time he remains integrally rooted in tradition, in his case the tradition of Islam. It remains for him normative; science he knows, but it is revelation that he reveres. I chanced to be passing through Tehran in 1970 while newspapers were carrying front page announcements that he had been appointed the head of that year's official *ḥajj* from Iran, the pilgrimage to Mecca which annually draws from that land some 20,000 participants.

His range can be described another way. He is a ranking scholar; his publications are innumerable and he rides the international conference/lecture circuit with the intellectual elite of our time. Concomitantly he is a man of piety. I have been in gatherings with him only to have him slip away because one of the stipulated hours for prayer has arrived.

To claim that anyone speaks for Islam as a whole would be presumptuous, but Professor Nasr may come as close to doing so as anyone today. When the Aga Khan Chair of Islamic Studies was established at the American University of Beirut,

he was appointed its first occupant. I hear that the lectures there delivered, subsequently expanded into this book, have been well received not only in his own Shi'ite land, but by the Sunni *'ulamā'* in India, Pakistan, and the Arab World. Perhaps it is enough to cause the reader to turn the page expectantly.

Huston Smith, Professor of Philosophy
Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
21 February 1972

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Introduction to the First Edition

In the Name of Allah—Most Merciful and Most Compassionate

The essays comprising this book grew out of a series of public lectures delivered at the American University of Beirut during the academic year 1964-65. During this time the Aga Khan Chair of Islamic studies was established at the University and I was invited to become its first occupant. Situated in Beirut, at the meeting place between East and West, between the Islamic world and the Occident, in a land where different branches of Islam and Christianity are well represented, the new Chair is meant to occupy a vital position in the world of Islamic studies, according to the wish of its donor. And it is in complying with his wish that this book is launched as the first written contribution from this Chair of Islamic studies to the world outside.

To fulfill the wish of His Highness the Aga Khan to convey the Chair's significance beyond the walls of the classrooms of the American University of Beirut, I undertook a series of fifteen public lectures entitled "Dimensions of Islam" in which both the religion of Islam and diverse aspects of the civilization created by this tradition were discussed. This volume contains the texts of the first six lectures dealing with Islam itself. It is hoped that it will be possible to publish the second part of the series dealing with the spiritual, intellectual and artistic life of Islam and the interaction between Islam and other civilizations in a separate volume. I have been encouraged in undertaking

this task by the enthusiasm of a large and receptive audience and the request of many people near and far to have the lectures in printed form.

It is my belief that the duty of the Aga Khan Chair is to endeavor to present Islam and its intellectual treasures in a contemporary language, faithfully, and without deviating from the traditional point of view. It should also undertake the task of carrying out a dialogue with other religions, particularly Christianity, which meets Islam in Lebanon. And it should seek to study the different schools within Islam which are again well represented in the country where the Chair is located.

This situation of the Chair in a Western-oriented university in the East also places a particular responsibility upon it. It is urgent for the Islamic world today to come to know modernism in its true nature and to give the Islamic answer to so many pseudo-intellectual fads that parade as the truth and allure the younger generation away from the eternal truths contained within Islam. The Chair is eminently suited to undertake this challenge. It could be instrumental in the task that the Islamic world faces to answer the claims of such modern ideas as materialism, evolution, scientism, existentialism, historicism, etc. In this way it could also aid in providing an Islamic answer to the studies of the orientalists—many of which are in fact based on such modern notions.

In many parts of the Islamic world, particularly in those countries where modern education is more prevalent, the younger generation has no knowledge of the intellectual and spiritual aspects of Islam, and is completely defenseless before the onslaught of modernism. That is why with the first contact with Western science, philosophy or literature so many young Muslims lose their spiritual balance and feel estranged from their own tradition. Everywhere there is a profound need for presenting the verities of Islam, especially in their intellectual and spiritual aspect, in a language which those brought up in the modern educational system can comprehend.

There are very few works in European languages which treat Islam from its own point of view, from within the tradi-

tion. And as far as the languages of the Islamic people are concerned, many good works exist in them which are, however, couched in arguments addressed to the traditional Muslim intelligentsia in whose mind there are not the same doubts and difficulties that face the modernized segment of society. The arguments of the traditional religious authorities are completely valid and their language is all that it should be. It is not they who should be criticized. Rather, the anomalous situation of the times has brought about a condition in which the language and line of argument has to be modified to appeal to and be understood by the Western educated Muslims or those who are affected by the modern mentality.

It is our hope that the Chair can become instrumental in the realization of all these goals which are vital to the Islamic world and towards whose solution all Muslims should endeavor. And it is as a very humble contribution towards the achievement of some of these ends that this volume is presented.

This book seeks most of all to outline the essential aspects of Islam as an ever-living force, and not just as a matter of historical interest, in a language that is contemporary and in fact is addressed to those who are acquainted with the dialectic of modern thought. Moreover, I have tried to answer in many cases the charges made by Western works against Islam, especially as it concerns such fundamental elements of the faith as the Quran and the *Ḥadīth*. The whole line of argument is therefore colored by what has been written already on Islam in European languages, so that some of the discussions may even appear redundant to someone not acquainted with such writings. I have not sought to criticize orientalism purely and simply but to present the point of view of Islam and show why in several instances the view of certain Western scholars cannot be accepted by Muslims.

Also in these essays I have attempted to present what is most universal in Islam and underlies the beliefs of all the orthodox branches of the tradition. Throughout the book, especially when treating the very difficult and delicate problem of the relation between Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism, it has not been my

aim to gloss over sentimentally the existing differences, because these differences of perspective have been providentially placed within Islam. Rather, my task has been to show that these two major groups in Islam are unified in the essential principles, and that each presents an interpretation of the faith which is complete in itself. Likewise, it has been my aim to discuss the central role of Sufism and its unifying function in Islam in both the intellectual and social domains.

Finally, without devoting a particular essay to the study of other religions, I have made references to other great traditions trying to show the profound similarities which exist between all religions. At the same time I have avoided the prevalent view of considering all religions to be exactly the same, by pointing to both the similarities and the differences of structure between Islam and other religions, and especially Christianity, to which more reference has been made than to other religions considering the audience to which these lectures were addressed. Moreover, although a separate study has not been devoted to the discussion of different modern ideas, the Islamic response to many modern challenges has been stated either directly or by allusion.

The question treated in each essay constitutes the subject of not only one but of many books so that it has not been possible to be exhaustive. I have in fact sought in each essay to remain faithful as far as possible to the original lecture so that the length of each chapter is determined by the lecture's limited duration. It has been my aim in treating each subject to concern myself with the principles involved and not the detailed history which can be found in many other sources.

In drawing the material for these essays I have relied first and foremost on Islamic sources, on the Quran, the *Ḥadīth* and traditional authorities. It is in fact the traditional Muslim view that I have sought to present here. But also, I have drawn from those works of orientalists which are of value from a scientific and historical point of view, especially the writings of Sir Hamilton Gibb, Louis Massignon and Henry Corbin. As far as sources in European languages are concerned, I have also

relied substantially for both the means of presentation and the method of approach on the works of contemporary traditional authors in the West such as Titus Burckhardt, Marco Pallis, Martin Lings, René Guénon, and especially Frithjof Schuon, whose *Understanding Islam* has been a guidance for me. I believe this work to be the most outstanding ever written in a European language on why Muslims believe in Islam and why Islam offers to man all that he needs religiously and spiritually.

In order to enable readers of this work to carry out their studies further, I have given a selected annotated bibliography for each chapter. The list of works cited has been drawn most of all from writings of Muslim authors and also of those orientalists who are sympathetic towards Islam or whose works are of special scholarly value. In no case has the bibliography meant to be exhaustive and its scope has been limited to works in European languages, especially in English and French.

In conclusion I wish to thank His Highness the Aga Khan for having made it possible for me to deliver the lectures which form the basis of this work. I am also grateful to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and especially the Department of History of the American University of Beirut for having sponsored these public lectures, and to Professor Yusuf Ibish and Mr. Kamal Khan for the innumerable ways in which they have facilitated my activities as the first occupant of the Aga Khan Chair and have aided in the realization of this volume.

It is hoped that this collection of essays and the public lectures upon which they are based will serve as a humble foundation for the activities of the Aga Khan Chair of Islamic Studies at the American University of Beirut. May the Chair be honored to become one of the most important of its kind. May it realize its full possibilities with the Will of Allah.

Beirut
Ramaḍān 1384
January 1965

Introduction to the New Edition

This book was written some three decades ago to present Islam in its various dimensions to the Western world and also to those Muslims with a modern education who have been torn away from the integral Islamic tradition or who remain unaware of some of its more inward and basic teachings. Since this work saw the light of day, much has occurred in the Islamic world and also in the relation between the Islamic world and the West as well as in the dialogue between Islam and Christianity to which this book has sought to make a humble contribution. And yet, since our perspective in this work has been the essential and metahistorical truths of Islam as traditionally understood, none of the events of the past years, whether they be political or otherwise, have affected its message. This book continues to be read widely in the Western world in both the original English and in many translations in languages ranging from French to Polish and it has also been widely disseminated in the Islamic world in several languages such as Arabic, Turkish and Indonesian. Hence the need felt for this new edition after numerous reprintings of the original English text.

Since this work was written in the tranquil atmosphere of the Lebanon of 1964-5, politicized forms of Islam have erupted upon the international arena and phenomena of very different characters have come to be categorized together as "fundamentalism." Modernist interpretations of Islam have also continued

as has the self-appointed task of a large number of Western Islamicists to dismantle the whole structure of Islam on the basis of whatever "ism" happens to be fashionable, whether it be historicism or deconstructionism. And yet, the intellectual dimension of traditional Islam has also become more vocal and continues to attract to an ever greater degree a number of young Muslim scholars and thinkers often with a modern education, a phenomenon which was not perceptible a generation ago and for which the present book has been perhaps a humble catalyst.

The very events of the past two decades have increased greatly in the West interest in matters Islamic. The Islamic Revolution of Iran has transformed the political landscape of the Middle East. The Lebanese civil war caused not only untold devastation, but also increased enmity between Muslims and Christians who had lived peacefully together in the area for centuries before the European penetration into the Levant and even during most of the ensuing period. The Iran-Iraqi War, followed by the Persian Gulf War, only accentuated the importance of the Islamic world for the Western consciousness and the ever increasing significance of Islam within that world. More recently the rise of Islamic forces among the Palestinians, the massacre of Muslims in Kashmir and on an even more extensive scale in Bosnia, not to talk of the communal riots and massacres in India, have helped to retain the Islamic element at the center of the political stage, while the ascendency of Islamic elements in the Sudan and Algeria through every different political means has caused alarm in both Europe and America. Certain forces are in fact seeking to depict the Islamic world as the next great enemy of the West now that the Communist world has collapsed.

Indeed, greater awareness of Islam has been created as a result of these and other major international events, but with this rise in awareness has come an even greater distortion of the image of Islam, much of it deliberate, and the dire need for better understanding and continuous meaningful dialogue between Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the West and

Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and the Far Eastern traditions in lands to the East. In this confusion between Islam, as it has been lived and practiced over the centuries, and politically violent forces which have taken recourse to Islam in societies in which religion is still strong, it is necessary more than ever before to reassert the truths of traditional Islam to which the present book is dedicated and to distinguish between the eternal message of Islam and current reactions to modernism and Western domination over the Islamic world which, despite their varied natures, have come to be categorized together as "Islamic fundamentalism."

In fact it was this task to which we addressed ourselves in our *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London, K.P.I., 1987), without such a work in any way replacing the present one concerned with the exposition of traditional Islamic teachings themselves.

During the past three decades since the present book was first published, studies of traditional Islam have as a matter of fact been continuously increasing in the Islamic world itself and a whole generation of Muslim thinkers and scholars have come to the fore who have a grasp of both traditional Islamic teachings and the modern world, and who are producing works of significance based on the traditional Islamic point of view, works ranging from the defense of the *Ḥadīth* against orientalist attacks to the Islamic understanding of Islamic science.

These groups are found all over the Islamic world, in Malaysia and Indonesia, in the Indo-Pakistani Subcontinent as well as Iran, in the Arab World as well as Turkey where one would expect the appearance of such scholars least of all. Such traditionally inclined scholars were also found among the Muslims of Bosnia before the horrendous devastation which has threatened the culture of a whole people. The impact of the works of such groups, which are neither modernists nor fundamentalists, which are not among the class of *ʿulamāʾ* and yet know the traditional Islamic sciences and whose perspective is close to that of the present work is bound to increase and become much more evident in the future.

As for the Western intellectual scene, parallel with the flooding of the book market in recent years with works on Islam, which for the most part only augment the distorted view of this religion and help to propagate and accentuate the existing distorted image, serious works of a traditional character have continued to appear since the present book was first written. Several of Frithjof Schuon's later works have dealt directly and with his usual depth of penetration with Islam, especially his *Dimensions of Islam, Sufism, Veil and Quintessence and Christianity/Islam—Essays on Esoteric Ecumenism* while most of the later books of Titus Burckhardt written shortly before his death such as *The Art of Islam, Moorish Culture in Islam* and *Letters of a Sufi Master*, as well as his posthumous collection of essays *Mirror of the Intellect*, deal in a masterly fashion with various Islamic subjects from the traditional perspective. Likewise, Martin Lings continues to produce major works dealing with Islam including his unique biography of the Prophet entitled *Muhammad*, as well as *What is Sufism*? and *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy*.

Other works of a traditional character dealing with various facets of Islam include Victor Danner's *The Islamic Tradition*, Gai Eaton's *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, Roger Du Pasquier's *The Unveiling of Islam*, Sachiko Murata's *The Tao of Islam* and several works of William Chittick dealing with Sufism as well as his *The Faith and Practice of Islam*. To this list must be added a number of works written by Western Islamicists with sympathy and understanding of Islam such as *Islam, And Muhammad is His Messenger* and *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam* by Annemarie Schimmel and *Islam—The Straight Path* by John Esposito.

In discussing the Western intellectual scene, one must note also the appearance to an ever greater extent of works written by traditional Islamic authorities but rendered into European languages. Although most of these works address the traditional Islamic audience without awareness of the types of questions which present themselves to the Western reader and despite the fact that many of the works translated are not ren-

dered in a completely satisfactory manner, this body of writings is a significant addition to the corpus of books on traditional Islam in Western languages.

Altogether, amidst the sea of publications on Islam in English and other Western languages, those dealing with the subject from the traditional point of view continue to grow like an ever expanding island which alone provides a safe haven in the middle of the confusing storm raging at sea and threatening the very safety of whoever embarks to journey upon its waters. And yet, this sea must be crossed and understanding needs to be created between the West and especially whatever religious element remains within it and Islam. In this journey the traditional works are indispensable to calm the hysteria created by the media about the danger of an Islamic wave destroying the secular bastion of the West, to make available an intellectual response to the challenges posed by modern Western thought to Islam and, in fact, all religion, and finally to provide a ground where dialogue based on mutual respect can be carried out between Muslims, Christians and Jews as well as followers of other religions.

This book was written for the purpose of expounding the meaning of traditional Islam in a contemporary language for both Westerners and those Muslims whose minds have been molded by modern education, and of opening another door for dialogue with Christianity and also Judaism. This aim still needs to be achieved and the goal of mutual understanding must be sought more than ever before. Nearly three decades ago this book took a humble step towards the attainment of this goal. May this new edition continue to serve the cause of bringing about better comprehension of Islam in the West and creating greater awareness by Muslims of the need to be able to respond intelligibly to challenges posed by the West to their religion and to carry out meaningful religious dialogue with other communities to whom God has also spoken.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr
Wa mā tawfīqī illā bi'Llāh
Cairo, January, 1993

1

ISLAM—THE LAST RELIGION AND THE PRIMORDIAL RELIGION—ITS UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR TRAITS

Every revealed religion is *the* religion and *a* religion, *the* religion in as much as it contains within itself the Truth and means of attaining the Truth, *a* religion since it emphasizes a particular aspect of the Truth in conformity with the spiritual and psychological needs of the humanity for whom it is destined and to whom it is addressed. Religion itself is derived from the word *religio* whose root meaning is to bind. It is that which binds man to the truth. As such every religion possesses ultimately two essential elements which are its basis and foundation: a doctrine which distinguishes between the Absolute and the relative, between the absolutely Real and the relatively real, between that which has absolute value and that whose value is relative; and a method of concentrating upon the Real, of attaching oneself to the Absolute and living according to the Will of Heaven in accordance with the purpose and meaning of human existence.

These two elements, the doctrine and the method, the means of distinguishing between what is Real and what appears to be real, and attaching oneself to the Real, exist in every orthodox and integral religion and are in fact the essence of every religion. No religion, whether it be Islam or Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism, can be without a doctrine

as to what is Absolute and what is relative. Only the doctrinal language differs from one tradition to another. Nor can any religion be without a method of concentrating on the Real and living according to It although the means again differ in different traditional climates.

Every religion is rooted in a transcendent Reality that stands above the world of change and becoming. Yet, no religion has claimed that the world on its own level of existence is completely unreal. Even the Hindu *māyā* is not so much illusion as the "Divine play" or *līlā* which veils and hides the Absolute. Were the world and the soul to be completely unreal, there would be no meaning in trying to attach the soul to the Real, to the Absolute. The doctrine is thus a discrimination between the Absolute and the relative and between grades of reality, degrees of universal existence. And the method is precisely the means of attaching the relatively real to the absolutely Real once one realizes that the reality of the soul and the world that surrounds it is not absolute but relative, that both the soul and the world derive their sustenance from a Reality that transcends both the soul *and* the world.

Now, Islam like every orthodox religion is comprised of a doctrine and a method and it is for us to see how the Islamic revelation deals with these cardinal elements, how it envisages the relation between man and God. It is of course God who is the Absolute and man the relative. And it is for man to come to realize this truth, to know that only God is God, that is, only He is the Absolute, and that man is a relative being who stands before Him given the free choice of either accepting or rejecting His Will.

This relation between man and God, or the relative and the Absolute is central in every religion. Only each religion emphasizes a certain aspect of this relationship, while inwardly it contains the Truth as such in its teachings, whatever the outward limitations of its forms might be. That is why to have lived any religion fully is to have lived all religions and there is nothing more meaningless and even pernicious than to create a syncretism from various religions with a claim to universality

while in reality one is doing nothing less than destroying the revealed forms which alone make the attachment of the relative to the Absolute, of man to God, possible. Without the "dictum of Heaven," without revelation in its universal sense, no religion is possible and man cannot attach himself to God without God having Himself, through His grace, provided the means for man to do so. Every orthodox religion is the choice of Heaven and while still intact contains both the doctrine and the method which "save" man from his wretched terrestrial condition and open to him the gates of Heaven.

In the confrontation of man and God, Islam does not emphasize the descent or incarnation or manifestation of the Absolute, nor the fallen, imperfect and sinful nature of man. Rather, it considers man as he is in his essential nature and God as He is in His absolute Reality. The Islamic perspective is based upon the consideration of the Divine Being as He is in Himself not as He is incarnated in history. It is based on the Absolute and not on the "descent of the Absolute." Likewise, Islam considers man not as what he has become after that very significant event which Christianity calls original sin and "fall" but as man is in his primordial nature, in his *fiṭrah*, a nature which he bears deep down within his soul.

It might of course be said that not only Islam but every religion is based on God and man's relation to Him. But there are certain religions which emphasize a particular incarnation of the Divinity or various manifestations of the Absolute. In the non-theistic climate of Buddhism emphasis is laid on the "Void" and the Buddha himself who is the "manifestation of the Void" (or *shunyā*); and in Christianity it is the personality of Christ that is particularly emphasized and is central so that quite naturally the religion that Christ founded is called Christianity. But the case of Islam is quite different and for this very reason it is fallacious to call Islam Mohammadanism, although this term has been used so long in Western languages that it might be difficult to eradicate its use completely.

Islam is a religion based not on the personality of the founder but on Allah Himself. The Prophet is the channel

through whom man has received a message pertaining to the nature of the Absolute and subsequently the relative, a message which contains a doctrine and a method. Therefore, it is Allah Himself who is the central reality of the religion, and the role of the Prophet in Islam and Christ in Christianity are thereby quite different at the same time that naturally as "messengers of God" they also bear similarities to each other. Islam emphasizes over and over again not how God has manifested Himself but what His nature is—nature in the common meaning of the word not in the philosophical sense, for philosophically speaking Allah has no nature. It would, therefore, be more in conformity with the Islamic perspective to call it "Allahism" if need be rather than the still persisting Mohammadanism.

As for man, Islam legislates for him according to his real nature as he is with all the possibilities inherent in the human state as such. But what does "man as he is" mean? Seen in his ordinary condition man is a weak and negligent being. He is usually subservient to his surroundings and a prisoner of his own lust and animal passions. He does not know what it really means to be man and does not live to the full potentialities of his human condition. Were it to be otherwise he would need no religion and revelation to guide him. Islam without in any way overlooking the limited and weak aspect of human nature does not consider man in his aspect as a perverted will but essentially as a theomorphic being who as the vicegerent (*khalīfah*) of God on earth is the central theophany (*tajallī*) of God's Names and Qualities.

There is something "God-like" in man as attested to by the Quranic statement, (Pickthall translation): "I have made him and have breathed into him my spirit" (Quran 15:29), and by the tradition, "God created Adam upon His own form." God created Adam, the prototype of man, upon "His own form," i.e., as a mirror reflecting in a central and conscious manner His Names and Qualities. There is, therefore, something of a "sacred nature" (*malakūtī*) in man; and it is in the light of this profound nature in man that Islam envisages him.

This belief is not, however, in any way anthropomorphic, for the Divine Essence (*al-Dhāt*) remains absolutely transcendent and no religion has emphasized the transcendent aspect of God more than Islam. The Islamic concept of man as a theomorphic being is not an anthropomorphism. It does not make God into man. Rather, the Islamic revelation conceives of man as this theomorphic being and addresses itself to that something in man which is in the "form of the Divine." That something is first of all an intelligence that can discern between the true and the false or the real and the illusory and is naturally led to Unity or *tawḥīd*. Secondly, it is a will to choose freely between the true and the false, and thirdly it is the power of speech, of the word, to be able to express the relationship between the Divinity and man. In Islam man is not first of all a perverted will who also possesses intelligence but an intelligence, which leads "naturally" to the assertion of the Divine, who also possesses will and speech.

Now, intelligence, will and speech are all essentially Divine Qualities. It is God who has as one of His Qualities knowledge which is connected to the Divine Intellect. The Name *al-ʿAlīm*, He who knows, is one of the Divine Names, and it is also God who possesses Will and absolute freedom. Being infinite, there is nothing outside of Him to act as an obstacle to His freedom. God is the Infinite and only the Infinite is absolutely free. Also the Word belongs to God. It comes from Him, belongs to Him and returns to Him. The qualities of intelligence, will and speech are thus Divine Qualities which God has given in trust to man, and through them leads man back to Himself.

Islam takes these three elements, namely intelligence, will and speech, which one might say God has allowed man to "borrow," and makes them the basis of the religion, carrying these elements to the most profound and universal level of their meaning. Islam asks what intelligence is and what its real nature is. The real nature of intelligence is ultimately to come to realize that *Lā ilāha illaʾLlāh*, that is to come to know that in the end there is only one Absolute Reality. It is to realize the absolute nature of Allah and the relativity of all else that is

other than He. Moreover, it is only this truth which the intelligence can know in an absolute sense. Everything else it knows only relatively. Only this certainty belongs to the very nature of man. It is only this knowledge which man can attain with absolute certitude.

What is the nature of the will? It is to be able to choose, to choose freely between two alternatives, between the Real and the unreal, between the True and the false, between the Absolute and the relative. Were man not to be free, religion would have no real meaning. Free will is necessary to the religious conception of man and this is as much true of Islam as of any other religion. Let us here clear away one of most malicious misunderstandings about Islam, namely the belief that Islam is fatalistic in the popular sense of the word. The common conception of Islam in the Western world has in fact become more than anything else centered on this so-called fatalism in which human free will and initiative have no role. The truth of the matter is otherwise. Were Islam to be fatalistic it would not be able to conquer half the known world in seventy years. It is actually absurd to call one of the most virile, active and energetic civilizations which the world has known fatalistic.

What Islam does emphasize is complete confidence in God, reliance on His Will and the realization that only God is absolutely free because only He is infinite. But man by virtue of his theomorphic nature shares in this freedom of will which really belongs to God. In an absolute sense, only God is free because only He is absolutely real. But from the human point of view to the degree that man is real he is also free. This question is, of course, one of the most difficult to solve from the point of view of human reason, for the dichotomy between free will and determinism is one that transcends the domain of discursive thought and can only be comprehended through that intellectual intuition which alone can realize the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Its discussion has a long history in Christian and Jewish theology as well as in Islam. What is, however, emphasized in Islam is that freedom in an absolute sense belongs to God alone. Nevertheless, we share in this freedom and there-

fore bear the responsibility of having to choose. Were this responsibility not to be incumbent upon us there would be no real meaning to religious faith.

As for speech, it is the most direct manifestation of what we are, of our innermost being. We cannot express our being in any way more directly than in speech. Speech is in a sense the external form of what we are inwardly. Islam, therefore, makes it central in its rites which revolve most of all around prayer. The central rite of Islam, which has been called the main pillar of religion (*rukn al-dīn*), is the daily prayers (*ṣalāh*) which in their ever recurring rhythm integrate man's life into a spiritual center. In Sufism, moreover, prayer is the method of realization in the form of invocation (*dhikr*) or the "prayer of the heart" that becomes ultimately integrated into the very rhythm of the most elemental process of life, namely the beating of the heart. Invocation is to be able to remember God by invoking His Name at all times and in a more external sense to use the power of speech as prayer.

Of course there is no religion in which prayer does not exist in one form or another, any more than there is a religion in which will and intelligence do not play a role. But the emphasis in Islam, which marks its particular spiritual genius, is to make these three elements, that is intelligence, will and speech, the basis of the spiritual life by penetrating to the essence of these elements and revealing their essential nature.

Islam poses the ultimate question, "What is intelligence and what does it really mean to be intelligent?" Intelligence is not what it has become for the most part in modern time, a mental acumen and diabolical cleverness which goes on playing with ideas endlessly without ever penetrating or realizing them. This is not real intelligence, not contemplative intelligence which differs as much from mental virtuosity as the soaring flight of an eagle differs from the play of a monkey. What we call intelligence today is precisely this monkey play of the mind which plays with ideas, were they even to be sacred ones, without ever being able fully to understand and penetrate any one of them. Such a mind is like a lake which has become

frozen. Nothing ever penetrates into it; rather, everything glides from one side to the other leaving the deeper layers untouched. It is not this type of mental activity which Islam considers as intelligence, an activity which is at best no more than a reflection of true intelligence.

This is not the place to analyze fully the Arabic word *al-ᶜaql*, which means both reason and intellect and although used to mean reason is also what binds us to God. In fact one of the meanings of the root *ᶜaql* is to tie or to bind. The Quran calls those who have gone astray from religion, "*lā yaᶜqilūn*," those who cannot use their intelligence correctly. It is very significant that the loss of faith is equated in Quranic language not with the corruption of the will but with the improper functioning of intelligence.

Herein lies one of the major distinctions between the Islamic and Christian points of view, one that makes it difficult for many Westerners to understand the nature of the Islamic perspective. Christianity is essentially a mystery which veils the Divine from man. The beauty of Christianity lies in the acceptance of God as a mystery and in bowing before this mystery, in believing in the unknown as St. Augustine said. In Islam, however, it is man who is veiled from God. The Divine Being is not veiled from us; we are veiled from Him and it is for us to try to rend this veil asunder, to try to know God. Our intelligence is not a Luciferian faculty but a God-given instrument whose ultimate object is God Himself. Islam is thus essentially a way of knowledge; it is a way of gnosis (*maᶜrifah*). It is based on gnosis or direct knowledge that, however, cannot by any means be equated with rationalism, which is only an indirect and secondary form of knowledge. Islam leads to that essential knowledge which integrates our being, which makes us know what we are and be what we know or, in other words, integrates knowledge and being in the ultimate unitive vision of Reality.

It might now be asked why, then, does man have need of revelation if he is a theomorphic being endowed with an intelligence which can lead him to a knowledge of God and affirmation of Unity (*tawḥīd*)? This is a problem that needs much

explanation, especially since certain modern Muslim apologists, wanting to answer Christian charges against Islam and, at the same time, not being intellectually strong enough to state the case of Islam in its true perspective, have claimed that indeed Islam has no need of mysteries, miracles, original sin, and just about everything else which is "supernatural" from the Christian point of view. Islam is presented by such people as if its conception of man is the Cartesian rational man left to his own reason who, however, instead of becoming a deist or agnostic as in the West somehow becomes a Muslim. This view, however, is not at all true because although Islam is based on the primordial nature of man and his intelligence rather than will which has become warped after his fall on earth, it nevertheless believes that revelation is absolutely necessary. Without the aid of God man cannot discover by himself the way of salvation, the "Straight Path."

Man needs revelation because, although a theomorphic being, he is by nature negligent and forgetful; he is by nature imperfect. Therefore, he needs to be reminded. Adam, the first man, was also the first of prophets. Prophecy is thus necessary for mankind and begins with the first man himself. As Adam needed prophecy so do all men who are his progeny. Man cannot alone uplift himself spiritually. He must be awakened from the dream of negligence by one who is already awake. Man is thus in need of a message from Heaven and must follow a revelation in order to realize the full potentiality of his being and have the obstacles which bar the correct functioning of his intelligence removed. Intelligence does lead to God provided it is wholesome and healthy (*salīm*), and it is precisely revelation, this objective manifestation of the Intellect, that guarantees this wholesomeness and permits the intelligence to function correctly and not be impeded by the passions. Every man needs to follow a prophet and a revelation unless he is himself chosen as a prophet or in certain other very exceptional cases, which are only exceptions that prove the rule and demonstrate that "the Spirit bloweth where it listeth."

The most profound reason for the need of revelation is the

presence of obstacles before the intelligence which prevent its correct functioning, or more directly, the fact that although man is made in the "image of God" and has a theomorphic being, he is always in the process of forgetting it. He has in himself the possibility of being "God-like," but he is always in the state of neglecting this possibility. That is why the cardinal sin in Islam is forgetfulness. It is negligence (*ghaflah*) of who we really are. It is a going to sleep and creating a dream world around us which makes us forget what is our veritable identity and what we should be doing in this world. Revelation is there to awaken man from this dream and remind him what it really means to be man.

A man is not a man by the fact that he has two hands with which he manipulates or that he can make planes that fly or calculating machines that perform difficult mathematical operations in a short time. These and other abilities are no more than accidental to his real nature which makes of him a man for quite different reasons.

There is a story at the end of the epistle on animals in the *Rasa'il* (Epistles) of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (Brethren of Purity) in which a dialogue is carried out between man and the animals. The members of the animal kingdom complain before the king of the jinn about man's cruelty to them, about how he uses them as beasts of burden, drinks their milk, eats their flesh and takes advantage of them in many other ways to fulfill his own need without considering the rights of the animal kingdom.

Man is invited to answer the charges brought against him. He tries to prove his superiority by mentioning how he can build buildings and cities, calculate and manipulate numbers, create a complicated social structure, develop arts and sciences and many other skills of the kind. To each of these claims one of the members of the animal kingdom answers by pointing out to a corresponding skill possessed by one of the animal species, such as the bee who is a natural geometer and makes hexagons for his beehive. Every advantage which man enumerates for himself and thinks that thereby he has the right to dominate over nature and destroy it, as he has been doing with unprece-

dented ferocity during the past century, is thus overcome by the animals. It is only when man mentions that within human society there are saints who are God's representatives on earth, who are the channels of grace for the whole terrestrial environment, and who fulfill the very *raison d'être* of life on earth as such, that the animals bow before the claims of man to dominate over them. Man's central position in the world is not due to his cleverness or inventive genius but is the result of the possibility of attaining sanctity and becoming a channel of grace for the world about him.

This story demonstrates the Islamic conception of man according to which man participates fully in the human state, not through the many activities with which he usually identifies himself, but by remembering his theomorphic nature. And because he is always in the process of forgetting this nature, he is always in need of revelation. In Christianity man has sinned, having sinned his nature has become warped; it having become warped he needs a miracle to save him. Through baptism and the sacraments this wound in his soul is healed and by participation in the life and sacrifice of Christ he is saved. In Islam, however, there is no original sin. There is no single act which has warped and distorted human will. Rather, man as a result of being fallen man is imperfect, only God being perfection as such. Being imperfect, man has the tendency to forget and so is in constant need of being reminded, through revelation, of his real nature. Therefore, although the starting point of the conception of man in Christianity and Islam is different, the end result is in this sense the same, in the sense that both believe in the necessity of revelation to save man.

Man is in absolute need of religion without which he is only accidentally human. It is only through participation in a tradition, that is, a divinely revealed way of living, thinking and being, that man really becomes man and is able to find meaning in life. It is only tradition in this sense that gives meaning to human existence. Many thinkers of the Enlightenment and the age of rationalism who theoretized against religion did not realize the profound need of man for religion or for meaning in an ultimate sense, and could not foresee that once deprived of

a divinely revealed religion, man, rather than becoming content, would begin to create pseudo-religions and the spiritually dangerous eclecticisms which have been showering mankind for the past century or two.

The privilege of participating in the human state, in a state which contains the opportunity and possibility of becoming "God-like," of transcending the world of nature, and of possessing an immortal soul whose entelechy lies beyond the physical world, carries with it also a grave responsibility. This trust or responsibility of having the freedom to accept or reject faith is beautifully expressed in the Quranic verse: "Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it. Lo! He hath proven a tyrant and a fool" (33:72). The burden of responsibility of the human state was so great that neither the sky nor the mountains accepted to bear this heavy load. It was upon man's shoulders that this heavy responsibility was placed. As Ḥāfiẓ says, echoing the Quranic verse:

> For heaven's self was all too weak to bear
> The burden of His love God laid on it.
> He turned to seek a messenger elsewhere
> And in the Book of Fate my name was writ.
>
> (Gertrude Bell translation)

The very grandeur of the human condition is precisely in that he has both the possibility of reaching a state "higher than that of the angels" and at the same time of denying God. Being given the possibility of being "God-like" through the acceptance of the "trust of faith," man can also play the role of a little deity and deny God as such. Therein lies both the grandeur and seriousness of the human condition. Each being in the Universe is what it is. It is situated on a particular level of existence. Only man can stop being fully man. He can ascend above all degrees of universal existence and by the same token fall below the level of the basest of creatures. The alternatives of heaven and hell placed before man are themselves an indication of the seriousness of the human condition. Man is presented with a

unique opportunity by being born in the human state and it is a tragedy for him to fret away and waste his life in pursuits which distract him from the essential goal of his life, which is to save his immortal soul.

The supreme symbol of this trust, this precious burden which God has placed on the shoulders of man, a burden which if he bears safely grants him eternal felicity, is in Islam the black stone of the Kaʿbah. There is in Mecca in a corner of the House of God a black stone which is in fact a meteor. In the Islamic tradition, this stone which fell from heaven, symbolizes the original covenant (*al-mīthāq*) made between man and God. God taught man the names of all the creatures as we are told in the Quran as well as in the Old Testament. This means that God gave man the possibility of dominating over all things, for to possess the "name" of a thing means to exercise power over it. Man has the right to breathe the air about him, to eat and drink, to satiate his bodily desires, to walk upon the earth. None of these has man created himself. Man is, moreover, given life and a freedom to accept or deny the Creator Himself. This is in itself a miracle, a part of the realm of existence which can deny Being. We exist and yet there are men who deny Being, the source of all particular existence. Only men can become existentialists. Animals also exist but they are not existentialists.

It is itself a miracle that human existence is given the possibility of denying its own source. But man is given all this and much more in return for that submission (*taslīm*) based on his free will that God wants of him and the black stone is the symbol of this pre-eternal covenant made between man and God. The idea of covenant is an aspect of religion often forgotten in modern times but it is essential in Islam and is, of course, strongly emphasized in the Old Testament. There, however, the covenant is made between God and a chosen people, the people of Israel, whereas in Islam it is made between God and man as such, not a particular race or tribe.

By accepting the covenant, man has in turn certain duties to perform. He has, first of all, to make his intelligence conform to the Truth which comes from the Absolute and which *is*,

in fact, the Absolute, and then to make his will conform to the Will of the One and his speech to what God wants of man. In brief, in return for all the blessings and gifts that God has given man, man must, in turn, remember his real nature and always keep before him the real goal of his terrestrial journey. He must know who he is and where he is going. This he can do only by conforming his intelligence to the Truth and his will to the Divine Law. A person who does not fulfill his religious obligations falls short in Muslim eyes on the simplest moral plane. He is like a man who has rented a house and refuses to pay the rent. Such a man has accepted a covenant with God but simply refuses to live up to his side of the agreement.

To accept the Divine covenant brings up the question of living according to the Divine Will. The very name of Islam is intimately connected with this cardinal idea. The root *salama* in Arabic, from which *Islām* is derived, has two meanings, one peace and the other surrender. He who surrenders himself to the Divine Will gains peace. The central idea of Islam is that on the basis of the use of intelligence, which discerns between the Absolute and the relative, one should come to surrender to the Will of the Absolute. This is the meaning of the term *muslim*: one who has accepted through free choice to conform his will to the Divine Will.

In a particular sense Islam refers to the religion revealed through the Quran, but in a more general sense it refers to religion as such. Some Muslim sages, in fact, see three different levels of meaning in the word "Muslim." Islam is actually like a several storied mountain and everything in it has different degrees and levels of meaning, including the concept Muslim itself. Firstly, anyone who accepts a Divine revelation is a "Muslim" in its most universal sense, be he a Muslim, Christian, Jew or Zoroastrian. The Islamic point of view did not take into account the Indian religions until historic contact was made with them, but this definition would refer to them as well, as Hinduism came to be called by certain later Muslim sages the "religion of Adam." In its first meaning, therefore, "Muslim" refers to that human being who through the use of his intelligence and free will accepts a divinely revealed law.

Secondly, "*muslim*" refers to all creatures of the Universe,

who accept Divine Law in the sense that they conform to the unbreakable laws which the Western world calls "laws of nature." In modern times the very logical coherence of the natural world, its order and regularity, have turned many people away from a religious conception of nature, as if the presence of God in nature were manifested only through miracles. The fact that the sun rises regularly every morning and one observes no break in the regularity of the natural order was a major argument of eighteenth and nineteenth century and also more modern rationalists against the Christian conception of the Universe. But this regularity proves in Muslim eyes just the opposite, namely the presence of the Divine Wisdom and Will to which all creatures are subservient and, in fact, save for man, have no choice but to follow.

A stone has no choice but to fall. The force of gravitation is an expression of the Divine Will on the physical plane which the stone obeys absolutely so that in this sense it is "*muslim*." It is the Wisdom and Will of the Creator that express themselves in what is called "laws of nature" in Western thought, and everything in the Universe is in a profound sense Muslim, except for man who, because of this free choice given to him as a trust to bear, can refuse to submit to His Will. A tree grows and has no choice but to grow. Fire burns and cannot do otherwise. A pear tree must always bear pears. A tiger must always be a tiger and an eagle an eagle. A noble animal is always noble and a base metal always base. It is only man who can be as ferocious as a tiger, as majestic as an eagle or lion, or as lowly as an earth worm. It is only man who can stop being a Muslim in this second meaning of the term "*muslim*," whereas all other beings are "*muslim*" in this sense by virtue of their complete submission to the Divine Will, which manifests itself as "laws of nature."

Finally, there is the highest meaning of Muslim which applies to the saint. The saint is like nature in that every moment of his life is lived in conformity with the Divine Will, but his participation in the Divine Will is conscious and active whereas that of nature is passive. All beings in a sense know

that they exist; only man knows that he knows and has a conscious knowledge of his own existence. It would perhaps be more logical to consider the first meaning of Muslim as pertaining to nature, the second meaning to man who has accepted a revelation, and the third meaning to the saint who not only has accepted revelation but lives fully in conformity with the Divine Will. As such, the saint is the conscious, active and intellectual counterpart of the first kind of "*muslim*," that is, nature. Like nature he lives every moment of his life according to the Divine Norm but consciously and with free will. He is thus the preserver of nature and its spiritual counterpart.

Islam is then a universal reality that encompasses man and the Universe about him and lies in the nature of things. Also in a more particular sense, as a religion which was revealed some fourteen hundred years ago, it continues to base itself on what is in the nature of things, concentrating particularly on the Divine Nature itself. For this reason Islam is based, from beginning to end, on the idea of Unity (*tawḥīd*), for God is One. Unity is the alpha and omega of Islam. It is, in fact, emphasized so much that for a non-Muslim it seems as a pleonasm, a kind of excessive reiteration of something which is obvious. But to the Muslim the idea of Unity does not just mean the assertion that there is only one God sitting in Heaven instead of two or three. No religion could convert a quarter of the population of the globe and spread from Morocco to Indonesia with just such a simple idea. An abstract concept of unity alone would not be sufficient to attract men towards religion.

Unity is, in addition to a metaphysical assertion about the nature of the Absolute, a method of integration, a means of becoming whole and realizing the profound oneness of all existence. Every aspect of Islam rotates around the doctrine of Unity which Islam seeks to realize in its fullness in the human being in his inner and outer life. Every manifestation of human existence should be organically related to the *Shahādah, Lā ilāha illa'Llāh,* which is the most universal way of expressing Unity. This means that man should not be compartmentalized either in his thoughts or actions. Every action, even the manner

of walking and eating, should manifest a spiritual norm which exists in his mind and heart.

On the social plane Unity expresses itself in the integration of human society which Islam has achieved to a remarkable degree. Politically it manifests itself in Islam's refusal to accept as the ultimate unit of the body politic anything less than the totality of the Islamic community, or the *ummah*. There is, in principle, only one Muslim people, no matter how scattered and far removed its members may be. Only the complete *ummah* comprises that circle which is Islam and no segment of the Muslim community has a right to claim to be the *ummah* any more than a segment of a circle could claim circularity. The political ideal of a single Muslim government, with all the ups and downs it has experienced over the centuries, is based on the central metaphysical doctrine of Unity.

Unity also manifests itself in the realm of the arts and sciences, in which Islam cannot remain neutral vis-à-vis any form of knowledge. Islam has always sought to unify all domains of knowledge and, therefore, is faced today with the particularly difficult problem of coming to grips with the actual discoveries and also the presumptions of modern science, a task which is not by any means solved by simply calling Islam "scientific" as many modern Muslim apologists are prone to do. The problem is much more profound and delicate than that and Islam must face the same challenges that Christianity has faced since the seventeenth century in the face of modern science. Moreover, Islam, being essentially a way of knowledge, must either provide an answer like any other form of science which claims to provide a knowledge of things, or accept it. In any case its function is to integrate, and the history of Islam has demonstrated this aspect of it in both philosophy and science as well as in its art, in which forms were elucidated and elaborated to display Unity, and no distinction has ever been made between the sacred and the profane.

Islam, in fact, being the religion of Unity, has never distinguished between the spiritual and temporal or religious and profane in any domain. The very fact that there is not even a

suitable word in classical Arabic, Persian or other Islamic languages for temporal or secular is the best indication that the corresponding concepts have not existed in Islam. Such a division does not exist because the kingdom of Caesar was never given unto Caesar in Islam. Being based on Unity, Islam has envisaged a total way of life which excludes nothing. Its legislation is quite realistic in conformity with its perspective, which is based on the real nature of things. It, therefore, envisages not only the saint but also ordinary man with all his strengths and weaknesses. For this very reason it has been falsely accused by many Christians of being worldly or of being the religion of the sword.

This latter accusation is an important one which we must pause to answer. It is true that Islam has legislation for even war, whereas Christianity orders man to turn the other cheek and is mild and gentle in its original teachings. But what is forgotten is that either a religion is made for saints, as Christ said, "My Kingdom is not of this world," in which case it leaves aside political, social and economic questions and envisages all of its followers as potential saints and, in fact, can only function fully in a society of saints, or a religion tries to encompass the whole of man's life, in which case it must take into account the whole of man's nature with all the weaknesses and shortcomings it has, and legislate for the political and economic life of man as well as for the purely religious aspect of his existence. Christianity by addressing itself to the potential saint certainly did not eliminate the non-saintly aspect of its followers, nor banish war from Christendom.

In fact the moment Christianity became the religion of a civilization and an empire it had to take the sword and fight in order to survive as the religion of a whole society. It had to choose between remaining the religion of monks or of a civilization which brought with it the responsibility of having to rule and fight wars. Such Christian kings as Charlemagne and St. Louis certainly fought as hard as any Muslim rulers. And to say the least the Christian warriors were not more gentle or generous than Muslims on the field of battle. Spain and

Anatolia changed hands between Islam and Christianity about the same time. In Spain all the Muslims were killed, forcibly converted or driven off and no Muslims remain there today, whereas the seat of the Orthodox Church is still located in Turkey.

The criticism against Islam as a religion of the sword is thus not a valid one. Islam by legislating war limited it, whereas Christianity left it outside its consideration. It is not accidental that the most devastating total wars of this century have begun in the West where Christianity has been the dominating religious influence. It used to be said and still continues to be asserted by secularists that the wars fought between Christians and Muslims were due to religion and that religion is the cause of war. They did not know that the secular modern world would kill more people in wars than religions ever did. War, in a limited sense at least, is actually in the nature of things and Islam, rather than leaving it aside as if it did not exist, limited it by accepting it and providing religious legislation for it. One can at least say that the global wars of this century have not come out of the Muslim world, but out of what some people have called the "post-Christian" West. It is not to say that Christianity is to blame for them, for they came from a society which had in many ways rebelled against Christianity. But not having a Divine Law to govern the external life of man as well as the spiritual domain, Christianity facilitated this secularization of political and social life and its divorce from revealed principles which in turn brought about the major upheavals of modern times.

It is not our aim by any means to criticize Christianity, but to defend Islam from this insidious charge made against it by many Westerners, especially a certain type of people who want to preserve a mediocre and empty way of life at all costs and believe that the role of religion is only in keeping peace to enable them to continue their mode of life based on the forgetting of God and that any religion which also deals with strife and war must be false. Actually, a religion which seeks to encompass the whole of life must consider all of its realities.

Life, like nature, has many facets; like nature it has lakes, flowers and fields which are peaceful and thunder and lightning which carry awe and power with them.

The revelation of the religious message itself is actually the opening of Heaven to the human receptacle. Either the celestial message descends like lightning and leaves its effect rapidly or it flows like water and seeps into the earthly structure gradually. In both cases what exists before tumbles down and a new creation comes about. The Roman Empire fell down with as much of a crash as the Persian Empire. One was overcome spiritually by Christianity and the other by Islam. Christianity concentrating on man's spiritual life did not consider directly his political and social needs. Islam basing itself on Unity had to integrate all of human life and could not overlook any aspect of it. Only a false idealism could criticize the profound realism of Islam, which instead of envisaging all men as saints and then having difficulty with the many who are far from the saintly life, bases itself on the real nature of man in both his spiritual and worldly aspirations which it tries to channel towards a spiritual direction by comprehending all things in its total scheme based on Unity.

This character of Islam is directly connected with the fact that it is both the "primordial religion" and the last religion in the present life of humanity. Islam considers itself as the primordial religion (*al-dīn al-ḥanīf*) because it is based on the doctrine of Unity which has always existed and which lies in the nature of things. Every religion has been ultimately based on the doctrine of Unity so that in Islam it is said that "the doctrine of Unity is unique" (*al-tawḥīd wāḥid*). There is only one doctrine of Unity which every religion has asserted and Islam came only to reaffirm what has always existed and thus to return to the primordial religion which was at the beginning and will always be, the eternal *sophia*, the *religio perennis*. It sought to accomplish this by its uncompromising emphasis upon Divine Unity and by seeking to return man to his original nature (*fiṭrah*), which is veiled from him because of his dream of negligence. According to the Islamic perspective, God did not

send different truths through His many prophets but different expressions and forms of the same fundamental truth of Unity. Islam is thus the reassertion of this primordial truth asserted in the cadre of the Abrahamic Tradition in the climate of Semitic spirituality and using as a basis the three elements of intelligence, will and speech which make the realization of Unity possible.

In Islam there are three personalities who are similar, Adam, Abraham and the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). The primordial religion based on Unity began with Adam himself. He was a "monotheist" (*muwaḥḥid*) from the beginning. Mankind did not evolve gradually from polytheism to monotheism. On the contrary, from time to time man deviated through religious decadence from the original monotheism of the first man into polytheism. Man was originally a monotheist who fell gradually into polytheism and has to be reminded periodically of the original doctrine of Unity. History consists of a series of cycles of decay and rejuvenation. Decay comes from the corrupting influences of the terrestrial environment, from the earth which pulls all things downwards and makes every spiritual force decay as it moves away gradually from its original source. Rejuvenation comes from Heaven through the prophets who, by means of successive revelations, renew the religious and spiritual life of man. The Islamic conception of history is one of a series of cycles of prophecy, each cycle followed by a gradual decay leading to a new cycle or phase.

As Adam was the first man and prophet at the beginning of man's terrestrial history, so does Abraham represent the reassertion of this role for the Semitic people. He symbolizes the unity of that Tradition from which Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the members of the "Abrahamic community," issued forth. Being the "father of monotheism" and the "father of the Semites," he represents in Islam that primordial religion which Islam came to reassert. This universal message was later particularized for a "chosen people" by Moses in the first separate religion to issue forth from the Abrahamic Tradition. The revelation given to Moses was, in fact, the aspect of this Tradition

or, for that matter, the primordial religion as law, so that Judaism came to emphasize the importance of following Divine Law, the "Talmudic Law," as the basis of religion. The Divine Will was revealed in Judaism in the form of a concrete law according to which the daily life of man should be molded.

Christ and the Christian revelation, on the other hand, represent the esoteric aspect of the Abrahamic Tradition, the internal dimension of the primordial religion, which is a spiritual way rather than a law. Christ did not bring a new revealed law or *sharīᶜah* but a way (*ṭarīqah*) based on the love of God. Islam recognized the particular function of Christ, which thus differed from that of other prophets who usually brought a law or reformed a previous one, by acknowledging his particular nature as the "Spirit of God" (*rūḥ Allāh*) and his "supernatural birth" connected with the virginity of Mary. "And she who was chaste, therefore We breathed into her (something) of Our Spirit and made her and her son a token for (all) peoples" (Quran 21:91).

Also, "Verily the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, is but a Messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a Spirit from Him" (4:171).

Thus Christ has continued to be seen in Islam as a prophet rather than as an incarnation. What Islam does not accept in Christianity is first of all the idea of filial relationship and secondly the Trinity as usually understood, both of which are alien to the Islamic perspective, because the latter is based on the nature of the Absolute itself and not on its manifestations or "descents." Putting these two points aside, Islam has a high regard for Christ who plays a particularly significant role in certain phases of Sufism.

Islam believes itself to be the third great manifestation of the Abrahamic Tradition, after Judaism and Christianity. Now, as Christians know so well, trinity is a reflection of unity so that this third manifestation of the Abrahamic Tradition is in a sense a return to the original Unity, to the "religion of Abraham." As Judaism represents the law or the exoteric

aspect of this Tradition and Christianity the way or the esoteric aspect of it, so does Islam integrate the Tradition in its original unity by containing both a law and a way, a *sharīᶜah* and a *ṭarīqah*. Moreover, it can be said that in a sense Judaism is essentially based on the fear of God, Christianity on the love of Him and Islam on the knowledge of Him, although this is only a matter of emphasis, each integral religion containing of necessity all these three fundamental aspects of the relation between man and God and both an esoteric and an exoteric aspect.

If Islam is thus the "primordial religion," it is also the "last religion" and in fact it is through this particularity that it becomes not just religion as such, but a particular religion to be accepted and followed. By re-affirming what all the prophets have asserted over the ages, Islam emphasized its universal character as the primordial religion and by considering itself as the last religion, a claim by the way which in fact no other orthodox religion before Islam had ever made, Islam attained its particularity which distinguishes it and gives it its specific form as a religion. No specific religion can, in fact, be the universal religion as such. It is so inwardly, but outwardly it must be a particular religion which induces men to accept and follow it through specific forms and rites. Living in the realm of the particular, man must begin from the particular in order to reach the universal. The beauty of revealed religion is precisely that although externally a form, it is not a closed form, but one which opens inwardly towards the Infinite. It is a way from the particular to the universal, provided one is willing to accept its form and follow it and not reject the form in the name of a universality which can only be reached *through* the penetration of forms that are a part of the revelation itself. Islam also had to have a particular form and that came from its character as the last religion. With the Prophet the prophetic cycle came to an end. The Prophet who was the "Seal of Prophets" (*khātam al anbiyāᵓ*) announced that there would be no prophets after him and history has proceeded to prove his claim.

Of course such a conception of prophecy does not imply that

mankind will go on forever without any other message from Heaven. Islam does not envisage an indefinitely prolonged march of history for eons on end. It believes that the history of the present humanity has a beginning and an end marked by the eschatological events described in the Quran and *Ḥadīth*. It is until the occurrence of these events that no new prophet shall come. As for the end of the cycle, Islam believes, like Christianity, not in the coming of a new prophet, but in the second coming of Christ. For this historical cycle, therefore, Islam is the last religion and the Prophet the last prophet not to be followed by another revelation or prophet chosen by Heaven.

This particularity of Islam as the last religion in the present prophetic cycle gives it the power of synthesis so characteristic of this tradition. Being the final message of revelation, Islam was given providentially the power to synthesize, to integrate and absorb whatever was in conformity with its perspective from previous civilizations. But this power of integration into Unity never meant a levelling out into uniformity which is the antipode of essential unity. Islam has never been a force for reducing things to a substantial and material uniformity, but has been the propagating force of integration which preserves local features and characteristics while unifying them into its universal perspective. Islam integrated in its worldview what was ultimately in conformity with the *Shahādah, Lā ilāha illa'Llāh*, which is the final criterion of orthodoxy in Islam. Whatever did not negate the unity of the Divine Principle and the subsequent unicity of nature in either form or content was of interest to Islam and became often integrated into one or another of its intellectual perspectives.

Islam thus took no interest in the Greek pantheon described by Homer and Hesiod but was deeply interested in the sapiential doctrines of the Pythagorean-Platonic as well as Aristotelian schools which affirmed Divine Unity. Likewise, it showed no interest in Zoroastrian dualism but certain schools such as the Illuminationist school of Suhrawardī integrated the Zoroastrian doctrine of angels into Islamic philosophy precisely because it was in conformity with the Islamic perspective

and could be integrated into it.

Coming at the end of the prophetic cycle, Islam has considered all the wisdom of traditions before it as in a sense its own and has never been shy of borrowing from them and transforming them into elements of its own worldview. Such a characteristic of Islam does not, however, mean in any way that Islam is unoriginal or does not possess its own spiritual genius, which is displayed in every manifestation of Islamic civilization. Today originality has come to mean being simply different even if it means to be wrong; whereas in Islam, as in every orthodox tradition, originality means to express the universal truths that are perennial in a manner that is fresh and bears the fragrance of spirituality, indicating that the expression comes not from outward imitation but from the source of the Truth itself which *is* the Origin of all things.

Christianity accepted the decadent naturalistic Roman art which it found before itself and transformed it through its particular genius into a most powerful "otherworldly" art, as the transformation of sculpture on sarcophagi of the fourth century A. D. demonstrates so clearly. It took Graeco-Roman philosophy with all the naturalism and rationalism inherent in its later schools and transformed it into a language for the expression of the mysteries of Christianity as seen in the writings of the early Church Fathers. This is true, in fact, of every living spiritual tradition which, like a live organism, accepts material from its surroundings and transforms it into what conforms to its own organic needs. Spiritual vitality, like the organic, comes not in creation from nothing but in transformation and integration into a pattern which comes in essence from Heaven. It is, therefore, surprising that so many modern Christian writers have denied the originality of Islam, whereas every argument presented against Islam could be turned around and applied often with more force against Christianity itself. If one tries to deny the originality of a religious tradition by the fact that ideas and forms of previous traditions are present in it, then Christianity not only adopted the Jewish religious perspective as well as Graeco-Roman art and philosophy but took

over the institutions of law and government *in toto* from Roman civilization, whereas Islam at least has had its own distinct law and social institutions. If any claims are made against originality in Islam, it might come from those who deny revelation as such, but surely it should not come with any logic from Christian quarters.

To summarize then, Islam is based on the universal relation between God and man, God in His Absoluteness and man in his profound theomorphic nature. Islam bases the realization of this central relationship on intelligence, will and speech and consequently on equilibrium and certitude. It has sought to establish equilibrium in life by channeling all of man's natural needs and inclinations, all those natural desires and needs such as those for food, shelter, procreation, etc., given by God and necessary in human life, through the Divine Law or *Sharīᶜah*. And upon the firm foundations of this equilibrium, Islam has enabled man to build a spiritual castle based on contemplation and the certainty that there is no divinity other than the Absolute. In this sense its method is in contrast to Christianity in which love plays the central role and sacrifice is the outstanding virtue. For this very reason Christians have often criticized Islamic virtues as being mediocre and contributing simply to a social equilibrium, whereas the Christian love of sacrifice seems to a Muslim as a kind of individualism which breaks the universal relationship between what is natural in man and the Divine Being. Yet, both the Islamic virtues leading to equilibrium which prepares the ground for contemplation and the Christian stress on love and sacrifice are means whereby man is able to escape the limited prison of his carnal soul and come to realize the lofty end for which he was put on earth.

Islam is a Divine revelation which was placed as a seed in the heart of man who was the receptacle of this Divine message. Man is the container. He cannot break this container; he can only purify it and empty it of the pungent substance that fills it so that it can become worthy of receiving the Divine nectar. It is by emptying the vessel of his being that man becomes

worthy of receiving the message of Heaven. It is by becoming a worthy field that the Divine seed becomes sown in it. The seed of Islam was placed in the heart of man through the Quran and the instrument of its propagation among men, the Prophet. From this seed there grew that spiritual tree which has created one of the greatest civilizations in history, a tree under whose shade a sizeable segment of the human species live and die today and find meaning and fulfillment in life.

2

THE QURAN—THE WORD OF GOD, THE SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

The covenant made between man and God by virtue of which man accepted the trust (*amānah*) of being an intelligent and free being, with all the opportunities and dangers that such a responsibility implies, is symbolized physically by the stone of the Kaʿbah. Spiritually, the record of this covenant is contained in the Noble Quran (*al-qurʾān al-karīm*), that central theophany of Islam which is itself the eloquent expression of this eternal covenant between God and man. In the Quranic verse, "Am I not your Lord" (7:172), God proposes to man even before the beginning of historical time and the creation of the earth this covenant and in answering "Yeā, we testify," all the progeny of Adam take up the challenge of this invitation, and agree to bear this trust as the "servants of their Lord" (*ʿabd*). In this "yea" lies the secret and the particular significance of human existence, of the life of this theomorphic being who is God's vicegerent or *khalīfah* on earth.

The Quran contains the message with the aid of which this covenant can be kept and the entelechy of human existence fulfilled. It is thus the central reality in the life of Islam. It is the world in which a Muslim lives. He is born with it inasmuch as the first sentence chanted in the ears of a newly born Muslim child is the *Shahādah* contained in the Quran. He learns certain sections of it as a child and begins to repeat some of its for-

mulae from the moment he can speak. He reiterates some of its chapters in his daily prayers. He is married through sections read from the Sacred Book and when he dies the Quran is read for him. The Quran is the tissue out of which the life of a Muslim is woven; its sentences are like threads from which the substance of his soul is knit.

The Quran for the Muslim is the revelation of God and the book in which His message to man is contained. It is the Word of God revealed to the Prophet through the archangel Gabriel. The Prophet was therefore the instrument chosen by God for the revelation of His Word, of His Book of which both the spirit and the letter, the content and the form, are Divine. Not only the content and meaning comes from God but also the container and form which are thus an integral aspect of the revelation.

According to traditional sources, which alone matter in such questions, the Quran was revealed to the Prophet when he was spending some time, as he often did, in a cave in the mountain of Ḥirāʾ near Mecca. Suddenly the consciousness of the human receptacle was rent asunder by the archangel Gabriel, whose function in Islam is in many ways like that of the Holy Ghost in Christianity. He told the Prophet "Recite!" and with that word the descent of the Divine message began. It is of great significance that the first word of the Quran to be revealed was "recite," for the supreme symbol of revelation in Islam is a book. In other religions the "descent of the Absolute" has taken other forms, but in Islam as in other Semitic religions but with more emphasis, revelation is connected with a "book" and in fact Islam envisages the followers of all revealed religions as "people of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*).

To the command of Gabriel to "recite" the Prophet answered by announcing that he did not have the ability to do so, being unlettered. But the Divine Message had itself given him the power to "recite" the Book of God which was sonoral and therefore received through the ear rather than the eye and henceforth he became the human recipient of this message which he made known to mankind. This religious truth, like many similar ones occurring in other traditions, is difficult for human

reason to accept, not because it is itself illogical but because reason feeds upon daily sensible experience and is shocked by a phenomenon which transcends the bounds of that experience. One asks how could the Prophet be unlettered (*ummī*) and yet "recite." How could he be unlettered and yet announce the Quran which is the most beautiful of all works in the Arabic language, a book whose eloquence is itself the greatest miracle in Islam!

Many Western authors writing about this cardinal question, begin with the assumption—often hidden in veils of so-called "objectivity" and "scholarship"—that the Quran is not really the Word of God, a revelation from Heaven. Therefore, it must be explained away. Not being the Word of God, in their eyes it must naturally be the work of the Prophet who therefore must have been a very good poet and could not, in fact, have been unlettered. He must have learned bits here and there from the Jewish community in Medina or the Christian monks in Syria and put them together in a book that appears to these critics as a poor replica of other sacred books such as the Torah and the Gospels.

Such a view might be defended by one who rejects all revelation as such but it is strange to hear such views from authors who often accept Christianity and Judaism as revealed truth. It is enough to make a morphological comparison between Islam and let us say Christianity to realize why the Prophet must have been unlettered and why a man who understands religion metaphysically and intellectually must either accept religion as such, that is, all orthodox traditions which he is able to know and study seriously, or be in the danger of either intellectual inconsistency or spiritual hypocrisy.

One could, of course, make a comparison between Islam and Christianity by comparing the Prophet to Christ, the Quran to the New Testament, Gabriel to the Holy Ghost, the Arabic language to Aramaic, the language spoken by Christ, etc. In this way the sacred book in one religion would correspond to the sacred book in the other religion, the central figure in one religion to the central figure in the other religion and so on. This

type of comparison would be of course meaningful and reveal useful knowledge of the structure of the two religions. But in order to understand what the Quran means to Muslims and why the Prophet is believed to be unlettered according to Islamic belief, it is more significant to consider this comparison from another point of view.

The Word of God in Islam is the Quran; in Christianity it is Christ. The vehicle of the Divine Message in Christianity is the Virgin Mary; in Islam it is the soul of the Prophet. The Blessed Prophet must be unlettered for the same reason that the Virgin Mary must be virgin. The human vehicle of a Divine Message must be pure and untainted. The Divine Word can only be written on the pure and "untouched" tablet of human receptivity. If this Word be in the form of flesh, the purity is symbolized by the virginity of the mother who gives birth to the Word, and if it be in the form of a book, this purity is symbolized by the unlettered nature of the person who is chosen to announce this Word among men. One could not with any logic reject the unlettered nature of the Prophet and in the same breath defend the virginity of Mary. Both symbolize a profound aspect of this mystery of revelation and once understood, one cannot be accepted and the other rejected.

The unlettered nature of the Prophet demonstrates how the human recipient is completely passive before the Divine. Were this purity and virginity of the soul not to exist, the Divine Word would become, in a sense, tainted with purely human knowledge and not be presented to mankind in its pristine purity. The Prophet was purely passive in the face of the revelation he received from God. He added nothing to this revelation himself. He did not write a book but conveyed the Sacred Book to mankind.

To carry this analogy further one can point to the fact that the Quran, being the Word of God, therefore, corresponds to Christ in Christianity and the form of this book, which like the content is determined by the dictum of Heaven, corresponds in a sense to the body of Christ. The form of the Quran is the Arabic language which religiously speaking is as inseparable

from the Quran as the body of Christ is from Christ Himself. Arabic is the sacred language of Islam, but not its only cultural and scientific language, for in this domain Persian has played a vital role in the eastern lands of the Islamic world from Persia to China. Arabic is sacred in the sense that it is an integral part of the Quranic revelation whose very sounds and utterances play a role in the ritual acts of Islam.

Of course Islam was not meant only for the Arabs and it is not necessary to know Arabic well in order to be a good Muslim. There have been many great Muslim saints who could hardly speak or read Arabic. But the formulae of the Quran read in prayers and acts of worship must be in the sacred language of Arabic which alone enables one to penetrate into the content and be transformed by the Divine presence and grace (*barakah*) of the Divine Book. That is why, although it is not at all necessary to know Arabic well to be a Muslim, it is necessary as a minimum to know the necessary Quranic verses which play so important a role in acts of worship. That is also why the Quran cannot be translated into any language for ritual purposes and why non-Arab Muslims have always cultivated the study of Arabic, not the spoken Arabic with which one is able to speak about daily matters, but the Quranic Arabic which forms a part of religious education throughout the Islamic world and which aids in reading and understanding the Book of God.

It is difficult for Westerners to understand the meaning of a sacred language and the function it performs in certain religions because in Christianity there is no sacred language. And for this very reason many modernized Muslims cannot understand this important matter either, whether they be non-Arab Muslims who try to substitute other Islamic languages for Arabic in the acts of worship or Arabs themselves who try to secularize Arabic. The latter take advantage of the fact that God chose it as a language of revelation meant not for the Arabs alone but for a large segment of humanity as such, and mistake the sacred role of Arabic in Islam with its supposed role in prevalent forms of ethnic and linguistic nationalism.

In order to understand the role of Arabic in Islam we must

glance briefly at the other great religious traditions of the world. One sees immediately that there are two types of traditions: one which is based on the founder of the tradition who is thus considered as a "Divine descent," incarnation or in Hindu terms avatar, who is himself the "Word of God" and the message of Heaven. In such traditions there is no need for a sacred language because the body or external form of the founder itself is the external form of the Word. For example, in Christianity, Christ himself is the Word of God and it does not matter whether one celebrates mass in Greek, Latin or for that matter Arabic or Persian to be able to participate in the "blood and body" of Christ. Latin in the Catholic church was a liturgical language not a sacred one and it remains as the liturgical language for traditional Catholics after Vatican II.

Or to take a situation outside of the Abrahamic traditions, in Buddhism, the Buddha himself is the avatar or "incarnation." The early Buddhist texts first appeared in Sanskrit. Later they were translated into Pali, Tamil, Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese and many other languages. One can be a perfectly good Buddhist and not know Sanskrit and read the religious texts let us say in Japanese. Here again the form of the "Word" is not a language, since the "Word" is not a book but a person. Rather, the form is the external aspect of the Buddha himself and we know that in Buddhism the very beauty of the Buddha image saves.

In contrast to these traditions, which at least in this respect resemble each other, although Buddhism and Christianity differ profoundly in other ways, there are others in which the founder is not himself the message of Heaven, the Word of God, but he is the messenger of this Word. In fact this is the aspect under which Islam envisages all revelation, so that the founder of a religion is called *rasūl*, literally one who brings a *risālah* or message from God. In such religions, since the founder himself is not the Word and his external form is not directly the form of the Word, there must be a sacred language which is inextricably connected to the content of the message and providentially chosen as its vehicle of expression. The very sounds

and words of such a sacred language are parts of the revelation and play the same role in such religions as the body of Christ does in Christianity.

Again, to cite some examples, one could mention Judaism and Islam and in a different climate Hinduism. Moses was a prophet who brought a message from Heaven. This message has as its sacred language Hebrew. An orthodox Jew could write Jewish philosophy and theology in Arabic as Maimonides did, but he could not perform his rites or read the Torah ritually in anything but Hebrew. He could make a philological or philosophical analysis of the Torah in another language, let us say Greek as was done by Philo, but he could not participate in the "Divine Presence" of the Book of God except through the sacred language of Judaism. In Hinduism one could read the Vedas a hundred times in Bengali, but again, in the religious rites, a Brahmin must chant the Vedas in Sanskrit. Sanskrit is the sacred language of Hinduism, but Buddhism, which also used Sanskrit at the beginning, is not dependent upon it in the same way. The same applies *mutatis mutandis* to Christianity vis-à-vis Hebrew or Aramaic.

In light of this analysis it is perhaps easier to understand what the role of Arabic is in Islam. A Persian could become a great Muslim philosopher or scientist and write in Persian as has often been the case. Or in fact he could compose Sufi poetry in Persian, which has also been done to such an extent that Sufi poetry in Persian is richer than in Arabic. A Turk could rule over millions of Muslim men as sultan, and yet not be able to speak any Arabic as was the case for many centuries. A Muslim of the Indian subcontinent could write on Islamic jurisprudence in Persian, as has in fact been done often, more than in Persia itself. All these cases are legitimate and in fact quite natural since the Arabic speaking world is only a part of the Islamic world. But neither a Persian nor a Turk nor an Indian Muslim could participate in the *barakah* of the Holy Book and perform his rites as a Muslim if he were to use, let us say, Turkish or Persian in the daily prayers. The efficacy of canonical prayers, litanies, invocations, etc., is contained not

only in the content, but also in the very sounds and reverberations of the sacred language. Religion is not philosophy or theology meant only for the mental plane. It is a method of integrating our whole being, including the psychic and the corporeal. The sacred language serves precisely as a providential means whereby man can come not only to think about the truths of religion, which is only for people of a certain type of mentality, but to participate with his whole being in a Divine Norm. This truth is universally applicable, and especially it is clearly demonstrated in the case of the Quran whose formulae and verses are guide posts for the life of the Muslim and whose continuous repetition provides a heavenly shelter for man in the turmoil of his earthly existence.

Many people, especially non-Muslims who read the Quran for the first time, are struck by what appears as a kind of incoherence from the human point of view. It is neither like a highly mystical text nor a manual of Aristotelian logic, though it contains both mysticism and logic. It is not just poetry, although it contains the most powerful poetry. The text of the Quran reveals human language crushed by the power of the Divine Word. It is as if human language were scattered into a thousand fragments like a wave scattered into drops against the rocks at sea. One feels through the shattering effect left upon the language of the Quran the power of the Divine whence it originated. The Quran displays human language with all the weakness inherent in it becoming suddenly the recipient of the Divine Word and displaying its frailty before a power which is infinitely greater than man can imagine.

The Quran, like every sacred text, should not be compared with any form of human writing because precisely it is a Divine message in human language. This fact holds true for the Bible as well, which we must recall includes not only the Gospels but also the Old Testament and the Book of the Apocalypse. There one sees, as in the Quran, an element which appears incoherent. Yet, it is not the sacred text that is incoherent. It is man himself who is incoherent and it takes much effort for him to integrate himself into his Center so that the message of the

Divine book will become clarified for him and reveal to him its inner meaning.

The whole difficulty in reading the Quran and trying to reach its meaning is the incommensurability between the Divine message and the human recipient, between what God speaks and what man can hear in a language which, despite its being a sacred language, is nevertheless a language of men. But it is a sacred language because God has chosen it as His instrument of communication, and He always chooses to "speak" in a language which is primordial and which expresses the profoundest truths in the most concrete terms. It is only later that the sacred language develops an abstract and philosophical dimension. A sacred language is profound in depth and usually little developed on the surface, as can be seen in Quranic Arabic. Every word carries a world of meaning within itself and there is never a completely "horizontal" and didactic explanation of its content.

Yet, the Quran contains different types of chapters and verses within itself, some of which are didactic and explanatory, although not in an exhaustive sense, and others poetic, usually short and to the point. The Quran is composed of a profusion and intertwining of plant life as seen in a forest often combined suddenly with the geometry, symmetry and clarity of the mineral kingdom, with a crystal held before light. The key to Islamic art is in fact this combination of plant and mineral forms as inspired by the form of expression of the Quran which displays this character clearly. Some verses or chapters are extended like arabesques which became later formalized in the corporeal world as decoration of mosques combined with the actual verses of the Quran. Others are sudden bursts of a very clear and pointed idea expressed in a language which is much more geometric and symmetrical as seen particularly in the later chapters of the Sacred Book.

Now, the power of the Quran does not lie in that it expresses a historical fact or phenomenon. It lies in that it is a symbol whose meaning is valid always because it concerns not a particular fact in a particular time but truths which, being in the

very nature of things, are perennial. Of course the Quran does mention certain facts such as the rebellion of a certain people against God and His punishment of those people as we see also in the Old Testament. But even those "facts" retain their power because they concern us as symbols of a reality which is always present. The miracle of the Quran lies in its possessing a language which has the efficacy of moving the souls of men now, over fourteen hundred years since it was revealed, as much as it did at the beginning of its appearance on earth. A Muslim is moved by the very sound of the Quran and it is said that a test of a person's faith (*īmān*) is whether he is moved by the daily calls to prayer (*adhān*) and the chanting of the Quran or not. This power lies precisely in its nature as symbol and not fact, as the symbol of a truth which concerns man vitally here and now.

The Quran actually bears many names in traditional Islamic sources which cast light upon its nature and constitution. The understanding of three of the most basic names will clarify this point. The Sacred Book of Islam is first *al-Qurʾān*, then *al-Furqān*, and finally *Umm al-kitāb*. The Book is first of all *al-Qurʾān*, namely a recitation from which its common name is derived. It is also *al-Furqān*, that is a discernment, a discrimination; and finally it is *Umm al-kitāb*, literally "mother of the Book" but meaning in reality, the mother of all Books. In these three appellations one finds the profound significance of this Book for Islam. It is a recitation in the sense that it is a means of concentration upon the truth, for "recitation" is a concentration in which ideas and thoughts are directed towards the expression of a certain end. As such the Quran is an assemblage of "ideas" and "thoughts" leading towards a concentration upon the truth contained in them. It is also a *furqān* or discrimination in that it is the instrument by which man can come to discriminate between Truth and falsehood, to discern between the Real and the unreal, the Absolute and the relative, good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly,

Finally, as the "Mother of Books" the Quran is the prototype of all "books," that is, of all knowledge. From the Islamic point

of view all knowledge is contained in essence in the Quran, the knowledge of all orders of reality. But this knowledge lies within the Quran in essence, or as a seed and in principle, not in formal detail. The Quran contains the principles of all science but does not seek to tell us the number of plants found in a particular continent or the number of elements that exist in the chemical table. It is useless and in fact absurd to try to find detailed scientific information in the Quran as has been done by certain modern commentators of it, as futile as the attempt made in the West to correlate scientific discoveries with the text of the Bible. By the time one comes to correlate the findings of a particular science with the text of the Sacred Book, that science itself has changed and one is faced with the embarrassing situation of having correlated an eternal message with a transient form of knowledge which, in fact, is no longer held to be true. What the Quran does contain is the principle of all knowledge, including cosmology and the sciences of nature. But to understand these principles one needs to penetrate into the meaning of the "Mother of Books" and then discover what is the ground and foundation of the sciences, not their detailed content.

The Quran is then the source of knowledge in Islam, not only metaphysically and religiously, but even in the domain of particular fields of knowledge. Its role in the development of Islamic philosophy and science has been considerable, though often neglected by modern scholars, to say nothing of the metaphysical, moral and juridical sciences. It has been the guide as well as the *cadre* in which all Islamic intellectual effort has taken place.

The Quran contains essentially three types of message for man. Firstly, it contains a doctrinal message, a set of doctrines which expound knowledge of the structure of reality and man's position in it. As such it contains a set of moral and juridical injunctions which is the basis of the Islamic Sacred Law or *Sharīᶜah* and which concerns the life of man in every detail. It also contains metaphysics about the nature of the Godhead, a cosmology concerning the structure of the Universe, man and

the multiple states of being, and an eschatology about man's final end and the hereafter. It contains a doctrine about human life, about history, about existence as such and its meaning. It bears all the teachings necessary for man to know who he is, where he is and where he should be going. It is thus the foundation of both Divine Law and metaphysical knowledge.

Secondly, the Quran contains a message which on the surface at least is like that of a vast book of history. It recounts the story of peoples, tribes, kings, prophets and saints over the ages, of their trials and tribulations. This message is essentially one couched in historical terms but addressed to the human soul. It depicts in vivid terms the ups and downs, the trials and vicissitudes of the human soul in terms of accounts of bygone people which were not only true about such and such a people and time but concern the soul here and now.

Were the Quran to concern only a tribe that went astray in Arabia, centuries before the birth of Christ, it would not be able to attract us and appear to us as possessing pertinence and actuality. But every event recounted about every being, every tribe, every race bears an essential meaning which concerns us here and now. The hypocrite (*munāfiq*) who divides people and spreads falsehood in matters concerning religion also exists within the soul of every man, as does the person who has gone astray, or he who follows the "Straight Path," or he who is punished by God or rewarded by Him. All the actors on the stage of sacred history as accounted in the Quran are also symbols of forces existing within the soul of man. The Quran is, therefore, a vast commentary on man's terrestrial existence. It is a book whose reading reveals the significance of human life which begins with birth and ends with death, originates from God and returns to Him.

Thirdly, the Quran contains a quality which is difficult to express in modern language. One might call it a divine magic, if one understands this phrase metaphysically and not literally. The formulae of the Quran, because they come from God, have a power which is not identical with what we learn from them rationally by simply reading and reciting them. They are

rather like a talisman which protects and guides man. That is why even the physical presence of the Quran carries a great grace or *barakah* with it. When a Muslim is in difficulty he reads certain verses of the Quran which pacify and comfort him. And when he wants something or is in dire need again he turns to appropriate verses from the Quran. Or again when a Muslim greets another, whether it be in the Hindu Kush or the Atlas mountains, he uses the formula of *salām* drawn from the Quran. All these words, phrases and sentences possess a "Divine magic" which is connected with the presence of the Divine in the sacred language He has chosen to reveal His Word. In fact the power of the sacred formula or phrase exists also in other traditions having a sacred language, but not in religions where such a language is absent—at least not in the same way. Here the lack of such means of support is compensated for by the presence of icons, sacred iconographies and symbols which contain the "Divine magic" within them.

On the level of practice, the most difficult aspect of Christianity for a Muslim to understand is the significance of the cross. Generally, a Muslim cannot understand why a Christian bows before the cross, carries it and in moments of distress makes the sign of the cross. From the other side Christians face the same difficulty vis-à-vis this "magical" aspect of the Quran which Muslims carry with them and recite to gain support and protection.

The Quran possesses precisely a *barakah* for believers which is impossible to explain or analyze logically. But because of this Divine Presence and *barakah,* it endures from generation to generation. People read and memorize it by heart; they chant it and recite it from day to day and there have even been saints who have spent their whole life only in chanting the Quran. That is because the Divine Presence in the text provides food for the souls of men. It is in fact a sacred act to recite the Quran. Its reading is a ritual act which God wishes man to perform over and over again throughout his earthly journey.

To write the Quran in Islam is like drawing an icon in Christianity. The early Christian saints, especially those of the

Orthodox Church, painted icons after years of asceticism and spiritual practice and in fact it is always an icon of this kind, not the naturalistic representations of Christ and the Virgin Mary from the Renaissance and later periods, that is attributed with miraculous power to heal and to answer the calls of men. In Islam also the writing of the Quran is such a sacred act and many a devout believer and even saint has also been a calligrapher who has performed a religious function in writing the text of the Sacred Book.

Taken as a whole the Quran is like existence itself, like the Universe and the beings who move through it. It contains all the elements of universal existence and for this reason is in itself a universe in which a Muslim places his life from beginning to end. Being composed of words, the "composition" of the Quran leads naturally to the symbolism of the Pen and the Tablet that is so well known in Islam. Just as a written work is composed by writing with a pen on a tablet or paper, so did God "write" the eternal Quran by the Pen (*qalam*) which symbolizes the Universal Intellect upon the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), the symbol of the substantial, material and passive pole of cosmic manifestation.

According to many *ḥadīths*, God also "wrote" the inner reality of all things on the Guarded Tablet before the creation of the world, a symbolism which has played an important role in Islamic cosmology. The Pen symbolizes the Word, the Logos, the Intellect, and the Tablet Universal Substance, so that it can also be asserted from this point of view that "It is by the Word that all things are made." In a metaphysical sense, then, the Quran contains the prototype of all creation. It is the pattern upon which things were made. That is why in Islam one distinguishes between a Quran that is "written" and "composed" (*tadwīnī*), and a Quran which is "ontological" and pertains to cosmic existence (*takwīnī*). This is not to say that there are two Qurans but that, metaphysically, the Quran has an aspect of knowledge connected with its text as a book and an aspect of being connected with its inner nature as the archetypical reality of the Universe.

In a less metaphysical and more practical sense, the Quran corresponds to the world we live in from day to day. Man lives in a world of multiplicity and before he becomes spiritually transformed, he is profoundly attached to this multiplicity. The roots of his soul are deeply sunk into the soil of this world. That is why he loves this world and finds it so difficult to detach himself from it and attach himself to God. There are only a few contemplatives in each society. For the vast majority of men and women there is need of things, of multiplicity, because their souls are divided in a thousand and one ways and nourished by this multiplicity. It is multiplicity in which man lives and which he loves to such an extent that were he to be deprived of this world of multiplicity it would be like death for him. And in fact what is death spiritually but being removed from this multiplicity and brought back to Unity.

The Quran, being like the world, is also a multiplicity in its chapters and verses, words and letters. It is made of a world of ideas and formulae. But there is a great difference between this world of the Quran and the world as such. And herein lies the particular genius of the Quran. It tries to catch the soul in its own game. It begins by playing the game of the soul, the game of presenting a facade of multiplicity and diversity to which the soul is accustomed. The soul in first encountering it discovers the same differentiation and multiplicity to which it is accustomed through its experience with the world. But within the Quran is contained a peace, harmony and unity which is the very opposite of the effect of the world as such on the souls of men. The external multiplicity of the world is such that in it man runs from one thing to another without ever finding peace and contentment. His soul runs from one object of desire to another thinking that he will find contentment just around the corner. Yet, it is a corner which he somehow never reaches.

The Quran begins by also presenting to the soul the possibility of running from one "thing" to another, of running around corners, of living in multiplicity, but within lies a peace and contentment which leaves the very opposite effect on the soul. Some of the Muslim sages have compared the Quran to a

net with which God catches fish, that is, human souls. He plays the game of the fish, who like to swim about from one place to another and who cannot be still, but He places a net before them into which they run and in which they are caught through this very process of moving from one place to another. The Divine net is placed before them for their own benefit and well-being which they, however, may not realize at the time. The Quran does present itself as the world but a world in which there is not differentiation and dissipation but essentially integration and unification.

From another point of view, complementary to the above one, the Quran is the cosmos, the vast world of creation in which man lives and breathes. It is not accidental that the verses of the Quran, as well as phenomena in nature and events within the soul of man, are called signs or portents (*āyāt*). According to the well-known Quranic verse: "We shall show them our signs on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth" (41:53).

God displays His "signs," the *vestigia Dei*, on the horizons, that is, the cosmos and more specifically the world of nature and within the souls of man until man comes to realize that "it is the Truth."

It is precisely these signs which are displayed in the Quran. This correspondence between the verses of the Quran and the phenomena of nature is essential in determining the Muslim conception of nature and charting the course of Islamic science. The Quran corresponds in a sense to nature, to God's creation. That is why when a Muslim looks at a natural phenomenon he should be reminded of God and His Power and Wisdom. Man should be reminded of the "wonders of creation" and constantly see the "signs" of God upon the horizons. This attitude which is one of the essential traits of Islam is inextricably tied to the correspondence between the Quran and the Universe.

Moreover, human experience is based on a world and a subject that lives in this world and travels through it. Man's existence can be analyzed in terms of two realities, a world, a background, an environment, and a being, a traveller, who journeys

through this background and lives in this environment. However one wishes to depict this reality—and nowhere is it better depicted visually than in Chinese landscape paintings, which show a vast world of nature through which a physically minute traveller is passing—this fundamental distinction between the traveller and the world through which he passes remains. It is the basis of every human experience, whether it be physical, psychological or religious.

The Quran again reflects this reality. The chapters of the Book are like worlds and we who read them like the traveller journeying through them. Or from another point of view the chapters are like the worlds, or realms of existence, and the verses like the subject passing through them. In this aspect, as in so many other essential ones, the Quran corresponds to the very structure of reality; it corresponds in its external and inward aspects to all degrees of reality and knowledge, of being and intellection, whether it be practical or theoretical, concerned with social and active life or with metaphysical knowledge and the contemplative life.

In fact, besides containing the basis of the Divine Law, the Quran expounds also a metaphysics, a cosmology and an eschatology whose expression and formulation is what it should be. Westerners have sometimes criticized the Quranic formulation in these matters, especially what pertains to the description of Paradise and Hell as being too "sensual." They perhaps labor too much under the classical prejudice of considering only the mental aspect of man and cannot understand the profound symbolism of the description involved. The Quranic description of Paradise which includes not only houris but quite significantly elements of nature, especially birds, trees, flowers, and minerals, is all that it need be. Either one is among simple believers who in this life also live in the world of the senses and are not concerned with the joys of contemplation, in which case the description of Paradise and also Hell present to them, although in a summary fashion characteristic of all monotheistic religions, in definitive terms, the possibilities which lie before man, or he is a contemplative and prone to metaphysical

speculation, in which case the Quranic description presents the profoundest possible expression of the after life in the concretest of languages which is that of symbolism.

In this case the sapiential traditional commentaries which have explained the symbolism involved and have also expanded the compressed formulation of the Quran to explain the intermediate states and the posthumous becoming of the soul provide enough intellectual substance for the greatest of theologians and metaphysicians. In this, as in other cases, the Quran is meant for both the simple peasant and the metaphysician and seer and of necessity contains levels of meaning for all types of believers. It is meaningless to criticize it because one cannot either accept its literal description or understand the profound symbolism involved.

Some may object at this point that the reading of the Quran reveals none of what has been mentioned, and that it is simply an account of wars, commands and restraints, and the description of reward and punishment in the after life. Many people in fact who read the Sacred Book receive no more from it than the literal message. This is because no sacred text opens itself to human scrutiny and reveals its secrets so easily. The Quran is like the Universe with many planes of existence and levels of meaning. One has to be prepared to be able to penetrate its levels of meaning. It is, moreover, particularly in the inspired commentaries, based on the clarification afforded by the *Ḥadīth* and written by those who have lived in the tradition and are qualified in the true sense to write commentaries, that man comes to understand explicitly and in more extended form what is contained often implicitly and in a contracted form in the Quran.

The same holds true in fact in other traditions. The Torah, for example does not explicitly contain Talmudic Law which is based on the sacred commentaries written upon the Torah. In Hinduism also most of the traditional sciences are based on the commentaries of the later sages upon the Vedas. Likewise, the inner meaning of the Quran can be understood, but for certain exceptional cases, only through the inspired commentaries each

of which seeks to elucidate and elaborate certain aspects of the Book. These commentaries, however, have nothing to do with the so-called higher criticism which during the twentieth century became an almost diabolical distortion of Sacred Scripture, making it a kind of second rate handbook of archaeology which one tries to understand through sheer historical methods rather than trying to penetrate inwardly into the meaning of the symbolism involved.

The Quranic commentary under discussion here is not at all an attempt to reduce the text to history. It is hermeneutic exegesis in the real sense of the term as it existed in early and medieval Christianity, in Judaism and in fact in every orthodox tradition possessing a sacred scripture. This type of commentary which is a penetration into the inner meaning of a sacred text is written by a traditional authority who has himself penetrated into the inner dimensions of his own being. Man sees in the sacred scriptures what he is himself, and the type of knowledge he can derive from the text depends precisely on who he is.

It is apt to quote here a passage concerning the inner meaning of the Quran by Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, whose *Mathnawī* is itself a commentary in Persian verse upon the Quran. He writes in his *Fīhi mā fīhi* or *Discourses* (Arberry translation, London, 1961, pp. 236-237):

> The Koran is as a bride who does not disclose her face to you, for all that you draw aside the veil. That you should examine it, and yet not attain happiness and unveiling, is due to the fact that the act of drawing aside the veil has itself repulsed and tricked you, so that the bride has shown herself to you as ugly, as if to say, "I am not that beauty." The Koran is able to show itself in whatever form it pleases. But if you do not draw aside the veil and seek only its good pleasure, watering its sown field and attending on it from afar, toiling upon that which pleases it best, it will show its face to you without your drawing aside the veil.

It is essential to realize that we cannot reach the inner

meaning of the Quran until we ourselves have penetrated into the deeper dimensions of our being and also by the grace of Heaven. If we approach the Quran superficially and are ourselves superficial beings floating on the surface of our existence and unaware of our profound roots, then the Quran appears to us also as having only a surface meaning. It hides its mysteries from us and we are not able to penetrate it. It is by spiritual travail that man is able to penetrate into the inner meaning of the sacred text, by that process which is called *taʾwīl* or symbolic and hermeneutic interpretation, just as *tafsīr* is the explanation of the external aspect of the Book.

The Arabic term *taʾwīl* contains etymologically the meaning of the process involved. It means literally to take something back to its beginning or origin. To penetrate into the inner mysteries of the Quran is precisely to reach back to its Origin because the Origin is the most inward, and the revelation or manifestation of the sacred text is at once a descent and an exteriorization of it. Everything actually comes from within to the outside, from the interior to the exterior, and we who live "in the exterior" must return to the interior if we are to reach the Origin. Everything has an interior (*bāṭin*) and an exterior (*ẓāhir*), and *taʾwīl* is precisely to go from the *ẓāhir* to the *bāṭīn*, from the external form to the inner meaning. The word phenomenon itself brings up the question "of what," which implies the existence of a noumenon. Even Kant conceded the necessity of noumena but because he limited the intellect to reason, he denied the possibility of our coming to know them. But when intellectual intuition is present and under the guidance of revelation one can penetrate the appearance; to that reality of which the appearance is an appearance, one can journey from the exterior to the interior by this process of *taʾwīl*, which in the case of the Quran means coming to understand its inner message.

The idea of penetrating into the inner meaning of things is to be seen everywhere in Islam, in religion, philosophy, science and art. But it is particularly in the case of the Quran that *taʾwīl* is applied, especially by the Sufis and the Shiʿah. To

demonstrate the traditional basis of this important doctrine, we quote two traditions, one from a Sunni and the other from a Shi^{c}ite source. There is a famous tradition of the sixth Shi^{c}ite Imam Ja^{c}far al-Ṣādiq as follows: "The Book of God contains four things: the announced expression (*^{c}ibārah*) the allusion (*ishārah*), the hidden meaning related to the suprasensible worlds (*laṭā$^{\supset}$if*), and the spiritual truths (*ḥaqā$^{\supset}$iq*). The literary expression is for the common people (*awāmm*); the allusion is for the elite (*khawāṣṣ*); the hidden meaning is for the friends of God (or saints) (*awliyā$^{\supset}$*); and the spiritual truths are for the prophets (*anbiyā$^{\supset}$*).

There is also a tradition from the Prophet transmitted by Ibn ^{c}Abbās, one of the most respected transmitters of *Ḥadīth* in Sunni sources, as follows: One day while standing on Mt. ^{c}Arafāt, Ibn ^{c}Abbās made an allusion to the verse, "Allah it is who hath created seven heavens, and of the earth the like thereof" (65:12), and turned to the people saying, "O men! if I were to comment before you upon this verse as I heard it commented upon by the Prophet himself you would stone me." What does this statement mean but that there is an inner meaning to the Quran not meant for anyone except those who are qualified to hear and understand it.

The story of Moses and Khiḍr itself, elaborated in many later traditional sources, such as the *Mathnawī*, refers to the presence of an inner meaning in the Quran. Khiḍr, who is equivalent to Elias in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, symbolizes esoterism in Islam and Moses, the exoteric Law. Khiḍr accepts to take Moses on a journey with him, provided he does not question what he does. Yet, his actions which appear on the surface to be meaningless and harmful and which include boring a hole in a ship and building up a wall are finally opposed outright by Moses. Hearing his opposition Khiḍr decides to discontinue the journey with Moses but explains before departing how each act performed was for a hidden purpose of which Moses was ignorant. Seeing the surface of events he judged them to be wrong but once their inner nature was revealed their validity became clear. Esoterism cannot be judged by exo-

teric standards; it has its own logic which no external approach can ever hope to master.

This is exactly the case of the Quran itself. It possesses an inner dimension which no amount of literal and philological analysis can reveal. And it is precisely this aspect of the Quran that is least known to the outside world. In the Islamic world itself, however, a long tradition of hermeneutic commentary upon the Quran exists, among the Sufis and in Shi^{c}ism. Sufi commentaries upon the Sacred Book which are best known include that of Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī, Shams al-Dīn Mībudī, and the celebrated *Ta$^{\prime}$wil al-qur$^{\prime}$ān* attributed to Ibn ^{c}Arabī but actually by his Persian commentator, ^{c}Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī. The *Mathnawī* of Rūmī is also in every sense a commentary upon the Quran in Persian poetry. As for well-known Shi^{c}ite commentaries which possess a theosophic and esoteric nature, they include: the commentaries of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and Sayyid Aḥmad ^{c}Alawī on different chapters of the Quran, the *Mir$^{\prime}$āt al-anwār* of Abu$^{\prime}$l-Ḥasan Iṣfahānī which summarizes the whole Shi^{c}ite approach to Quranic commentary and the monumental *al-Mīzān* by the contemporary master Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā$^{\prime}$ī.

Besides these works in which the inner *sapientia* of the Sacred Book is revealed and made the basis and fountain of all knowledge, there are a number of Quranic commentaries written by theologians and philologists such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Zamakhsharī and also by many of the Muslim philosophers which have hitherto been little studied. The significance of this latter category of works lies in that precisely here the conjunction between faith and reason, the harmony between religion and philosophy, was sought. Quranic commentary was the meeting ground for the knowledge derived from science and from the tenets of revelation. With the numerous works written on Ibn Sīnā in European languages as yet no thorough study has been made of his many commentaries upon various verses of the Quran where more than anywhere else he sought to harmonize faith and reason.

The whole process of penetrating the inner meaning of the

Quran, of discovering that wisdom which alone is the common ground between religion and science, is based on this process of *ta'wīl*, which does not mean seeking after a metaphorical meaning or reading into the text. *Ta'wīl* for Sufism, or Shi'ism, does not possess the same meaning as it does in Mu'tazilite theology and in jurisprudence. It has nothing to do with the debate between the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites over the literal meaning of the Quran versus rational interpretation of it. *Ta'wīl* in the sense used by the Sufis and Shi'ite sages is the penetration into the symbolic—and not allegorical—meaning of the text which is not a human interpretation but reaches a divinely predisposed sense placed within the Sacred Text through which man himself becomes transformed. The symbol has an ontological reality that lies above any mental constructions. Man cannot create symbols. Rather, he is transformed by them. And it is as such that the Quran with the worlds of meaning that lie hidden in its every phrase transforms and remakes the soul of man.

In fact, as pointed out already, not only do the teachings of the Quran direct the life of a Muslim, but what is more the soul of a Muslim is like a mosaic made up of formulae of the Quran in which he breathes and lives. Some of these formulae are so common and yet profound that their meaning must be analyzed in depth in order to understand the most elemental attitude of the Muslim towards life as determined by the Quran. The most fundamental formula of the Quran is the first *Shāhadah*, that is, witness or testimony, *Lā ilāha illa'Llāh*, which is the fountain head of all Islamic doctrine, the alpha and omega of the Islamic message. In it is contained all of metaphysics. He who knows it knows everything in principle. It is both the doctrine and the method, the doctrine because it negates all relativity and multiplicity from the Absolute and returns all positive qualities back to God; the method because it is the means whereby the soul can combat against the enemies within. The very *lā* at the beginning is a sword—and in Arabic calligraphy the letter *lām* in fact resembles a sword—by which the soul is able to kill all the evil tendencies within itself which prevent it

from becoming unified and which lead it towards polytheism, or *shirk*, by making it see the relative as Absolute. A Muslim repeats the *Shahādah*, not only because it reaffirms over and over again Divine Unity but also because, through its repetition, this Unity comes to leave its permanent imprint upon the human soul and integrates it into its Center. It is a sword with which the "deities" that keep springing up in the soul are destroyed and all multiplicity and otherness is negated.

After the *Shahādah* the most cardinal and often used formula is *Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*, which is usually translated as in the Name of God, the Most Merciful and Compassionate but which could also be rendered as in the Name of God, the Infinitely Good, and the ever Merciful. The formula begins with the name Allah followed by the two Divine names, *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm,* both of which are derived from the same root *raḥama*. Yet, these two names denote two different aspects of the Divine Mercy. *Al-Raḥmān* is the transcendent aspect of Divine Mercy. It is a Mercy which like the sky envelopes and contains all things. Were God to be without this all-encompassing Mercy He would have never created the world. And it is through His Mercy, through the "Breath of the Compassionate" (*nafas al-Raḥmān*), that He brought the world into being. That is why creation is good as also asserted in the Bible. The world of creation itself is not evil as was held by certain schools such as the Manichaeans. As for *al-Raḥīm* it is the immanent Mercy of God. It is like a ray of light which shines in our heart and touches individual lives and particular events. The two qualities combined express the totality of Divine Mercy which envelopes us from without and shines forth from within our being.

The *basmalah* opens every chapter of the Quran except one which is really the continuation of the previous chapter. It also opens the *Sūrat al-fātiḥah*, the opening chapter of the Quran, which is recited over and over again in the daily canonical prayers, and which contains the essence of the Quranic message. This chapter expresses the primordial relation between God and man. It consists of seven verses, three concerning God,

three man, and one the relation between the two. In reciting its verses man stands in his primordial state before God, and prays in the name of all creatures and for all creatures. That is why its verbs are all in the first person plural and not the singular. It is the prayer of man as the conscious center of all creation before the Creator and as such it contains symbolically the total message of the Quran.

The *basmalah* begins the *Sūrat al-fātiḥah* and therefore the whole of the Quran. It thus comes at the beginning of the prophetic message which is itself revealed because of God's Mercy towards men. It is in reference to the inner meaning of this formula that ᶜAlī, the representative par excellence of esoterism in Islam, said that "all the Quran is contained in the *Sūrat al-fātiḥah*, all of this *sūrah* is contained in the *basmalah*, all of the *basmalah* in the letter *bāʾ* with which it begins, all of the letter *bāʾ* in the diacritical point under it and I am that diacritical point."

The beautiful symbolism indicated in this saying refers to ᶜAlī's "supreme identity" as the perfect saint who is inwardly in "union" with God. This point with which the *basmalah* begins is according to another *ḥadīth* the first drop from the Divine Pen. It thus marks the beginning of things as it is also the beginning of the Quran. Like the point which generates all geometric space, this point is the symbol of the Origin of all creation, as the *basmalah* itself marks the beginning of things. Its recitation at the beginning of an act relates that act to God and sanctifies it. Even if every Muslim be not aware of all the metaphysical implications of the formula, yet its sanctifying power is known and felt by all and for that reason every act which is necessary and legitimate in life should begin with the *basmalah*, such as eating a meal or beginning a journey. In fact that act is illicit at whose commencement a devout Muslim cannot pronounce the formula. Otherwise all that is acceptable before the eyes of God can be sanctified by it. Through the *basmalah* the Divine joy and bliss enters into human life to bless and sanctify it.

Closely connected with the *basmalah* in meaning is the sec-

ond *Shahādah, Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh*, Muḥammad (ﷺ) is the Messenger of God, which again expresses the Divine Mercy for the world, for the Prophet is mercy for this world and the next (*raḥmat Allāh li'l-ʿālamīn*). He is the mercy of God for all worlds and through his aid man is able to lead a life of happiness here below and of felicity in the world to come. The second *Shahādah* is the complement of the first. The first negates all otherness from God, the second asserts that all that is positive in creation, of which Muḥammad (ﷺ) is the symbol, comes from God.

The *al-ḥamdu li'-Llāh*, praise be to God, which is so commonly used in everyday speech throughout the Muslim world, is the complement of the *basmalah*. It ends an act as the *basmalah* begins it. The *al-ḥamd* integrates the positive content of every act into its Divine Origin and makes man conscious of the fact that whatever he has done that is good comes from God and returns to Him. This formula again cannot be iterated except after an act that is pleasing to God and that leaves a positive imprint upon the soul and again it is the criterion of the spiritual value of an act.

The formula *Allāhu akbar,* which is repeated during the call to prayer and also punctuates the different phases of the daily canonical prayers, is similar to the first *Shāhadah* and is in a sense a commentary upon it. It means not only that "God is great"; but being in the comparative and at the same time superlative form, which are not normally distinguished in Arabic, it implies that He is greater and also greatest. It means fundamentally that whatever one says of God He transcends it and is greater than it. It is thus a way of asserting the Infinite Nature of God that transcends all limited descriptions and formulations of Him. In daily life the formula *Allāhu akbar* demonstrates also the insignificance of the human before the Divine, the weakness of the mightiest human power before the Divine Omnipotence and the awe which comes into being in the heart of a Muslim at the sight of wonders of creation and of human life that reveal this Omnipotence.

Finally, among the most common formulae used are the two

inshā' Allāh and *māshā' Allāh*, "if God Wills" and "what God has willed," which are heard so often in daily Islamic speech. The first refers to the future and expresses man's confidence in God's Will and the realization that nothing can be achieved without His Will. This formula and the attitude that accompanies it, of course, apply to that aspect of reality which is connected with our free will, not that which follows from necessity. One does not say *inshā' Allāh*, three follows two or Monday comes after Sunday. One repeats this phrase about events in the future which despite all human effort cannot be realized with certainty except with Divine succor and consent. No matter how much we plan, we do not know whether tomorrow we shall be here or elsewhere, or whether we shall be in the same state as now, and so we plan and act but fully conscious of the dependence of this action on the Divine Will, that Will which infinitely transcends ours. As for the *māshā' Allāh,* it comes at the end of an act and again reminds us that, ultimately, whatever occurs comes from God, and that whatever is realized is not by human effort alone but through His Will.

There are of course other formulae, drawn mostly from the Quran and occasionally from the *Ḥadīth*, which is in reality a commentary upon the Sacred Text, from which the texture of the life of a Muslim is woven. These phrases are means by which God is remembered in daily life, in regular conversation and speech. Through these Quranic phrases the life of man, which is scattered in multiplicity, becomes integrated by a thread of "remembrance" which runs through it. The very existence of these formulae in every day life is a reminder of the continual presence of the Quran and its message in Muslim life.

In summary, then, it can be said that the Quran is both a source of law to guide the practical life of man and of knowledge which inspires his intellectual endeavors. It is a universe into whose contours both the natural and social environment of man are cast, a universe which determines the life of the soul of man, its becoming, fruition, death and final destiny beyond this world. As such it is the central theophany of Islam, but one

which would never have come to men and never been understood save for him who was chosen as its messenger and commentator to men. Once it was asked of the Prophet how he could be remembered and the nature of his soul known to the generations after him. He answered, "By reading the Quran." And it is in studying the life, teachings and significance of the Prophet that the full meaning of the message of Islam as contained in the Quran can be understood.

3

THE PROPHET AND PROPHETIC TRADITION— THE LAST PROPHET AND UNIVERSAL MAN

The Prophet as the founder of Islam and the messenger of God's revelation to mankind is the interpreter *par excellence* of the Book of God; and his *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah*, his sayings and actions, are, after the Quran, the most important sources of the Islamic tradition. In order to understand the significance of the Prophet it is not sufficient to study, from the outside, historical texts pertaining to his life. One must view him also from within the Islamic point of view and try to discover the position he occupies in the religious consciousness of Muslims. When in any Islamic language one says *the* Prophet, it means Muḥammad (ﷺ) whose name as such is never iterated except that as a courtesy it be followed by the formula "*ṣallᵃ Allāhu ᶜalayhī wa sallim*," that is, "may God's blessing and salutation be upon him."

It is even legitimate to say that, in general, when one says *the* Prophet it means the prophet of Islam, for although in every religion the founder, who is an aspect of the Universal Intellect, becomes *the* Aspect, *the* Word, *the* Incarnation, nevertheless, each founder emphasizes a certain aspect of the Truth and even typifies that aspect universally. Although there is belief in incarnation in many religions, when one says *the*

Incarnation (in the Abrahamic context) it refers to Christ who personifies this aspect. And although every prophet and saint has experienced "enlightenment," *the* Enlightenment refers to the experience of the Buddha which is the most outstanding and universal embodiment of this experience. In the same manner the prophet of Islam is the prototype and perfect embodiment of prophecy and so in a profound sense is *the* Prophet. In fact in Islam every form of revelation is envisaged as a prophecy whose complete and total realization is to be seen in Muḥammad (ﷺ). As the Sufi poet Maḥmūd Shabistarī writes in his incomparable *Gulshan-i rāz* ("The Secret Rose Garden"):

> The first appearance of prophethood was in Adam,
> And its perfection was in the "Seal of the Prophets."
> (Whinfield translation)

It is difficult for a non-Muslim to understand the spiritual significance of the Prophet and his role as the prototype of the religious and spiritual life, especially if one comes from a Christian background. Compared to Christ, or to the Buddha for that matter, the earthly career of the Prophet seems often too human and too engrossed in the vicissitudes of social, economic and political activity to serve as a model for the spiritual life. That is why so many people who write today of the great spiritual guides of humanity are not able to understand and interpret him sympathetically. It is in a sense easier for a non-Muslim to see the spiritual radiance of Christ or even medieval saints, Christian or Muslim, than that of the Prophet, although the Prophet is the supreme saint in Islam without whom there would have been no sanctity in Islam whatsoever.

The reason for this difficulty is that the spiritual nature of the Prophet is veiled in his human one and his purely spiritual function is hidden in his duties as the guide of men and the leader of a community. It was the function of the Prophet to be not only a spiritual guide but also the organizer of a new social order with all that such a function implies. And it is precisely this aspect of his being that veils his purely spiritual dimension

from foreign eyes. Outsiders have understood his political genius, his power of oratory, his great statesmanship, but few have understood how he could be the religious and spiritual guide of men and how his life could be emulated by those who aspire to sanctity. This is particularly true in the modern world in which religion is separated from other domains of life and where most modern men can hardly imagine how a spiritual being could also be immersed in the most intense political and social activity.

Actually, if the contour of the personality of the Prophet is to be understood, he should not be compared to Christ or the Buddha whose messages were meant primarily for saintly men and who founded communities based on monastic life which later became the norm of entire societies. Rather, because of his dual function as "king" and "prophet," as the guide of men in this world and the hereafter, the Prophet should be compared to the prophet-kings of the Old Testament, to David and Solomon, and especially to Abraham himself. Or to cite once again an example outside the Abrahamic Tradition, the spiritual type of the Prophet should be compared in Hinduism to Rama and Krishna, who, although in a completely different traditional climate, were avatars and at the same time kings and householders who participated in social life with all that such activity implies as recorded in the *Mahabhāratā* and the *Rāmāyana*.

This type of figure who is at once a spiritual being and "a leader of men" has always been, relatively speaking, rare in the Christian West, especially in modern times. Political life has become so divorced from spiritual principles that to many people such a function itself appears as an impossibility in proof of which Westerners often point to the purely spiritual life of Christ who said, "My Kingdom is not of this world." And even historically the Occident has not witnessed many figures of this type unless one considers the Templars and in another context such devout kings as Charlemagne and St. Louis. The figure of the Prophet is thus difficult for many Occidentals to understand and this misconception to which often bad intention has

been added is responsible for the nearly total ignorance of his spiritual nature in most works written about him in Western languages, of which the number is legion. One could in fact say that of the major elements of Islam the real significance of the Prophet is the least understood by non-Muslims and especially by Occidentals.

The Prophet did participate in social life in its fullest sense. He married, had a household, was a father and moreover he was ruler and judge and had also to fight many wars in which he underwent painful ordeals. He had to undergo many hardships and experience all the difficulties which human life, especially that of the founder of a new state and society, implies. But within all these activities his heart rested in contentment with the Divine, and he continued inwardly to repose in the Divine Peace. In fact his participation in social and political life was precisely to integrate this domain into a spiritual center. The Prophet entertained no political or worldly ambition whatsoever. He was by nature a contemplative. Before being chosen as prophet he did not like to frequent social gatherings and activities. He led a caravan from Mecca to Syria passing through the majestic silence of the desert whose very "infinity" induces man towards contemplation. He often spent long periods in the cave of Ḥirāʾ in solitude and meditation. He did not believe himself to be by nature a man of the world or one who was naturally inclined to seek political power among the Quraysh or social eminence in Meccan society, although he came from the noblest family. It was in fact very painful and difficult for him to accept the burden of prophecy which implied the founding of not only a new religion but also a new social and political order. All the traditional sources, which alone matter in this case, testify to the great hardship the Prophet underwent by being chosen to participate in the active life in its most acute form. Modern studies on the life of the Prophet which depict him as a man who enjoyed fighting wars are totally untrue and in fact a reversal of the real personality of the Prophet. Immediately after the reception of the first revelation the Prophet confessed to his wife, Khadījah, how diffi-

cult it was for him to accept the burden of prophecy and how fearful he was of all that such a mission implied.

Likewise, with the marriages of the Prophet, they are not at all signs of his lenience vis-à-vis the flesh. During the period of youth, when the passions are strongest, the Prophet lived with only one wife who was much older than he and also underwent long periods of sexual abstinence. And as a prophet many of his marriages were political ones which, in the prevalent social structure of Arabia, guaranteed the consolidation of the newly founded Muslim community. Multiple marriages, for him, as is true of Islam in general, was not so much enjoyment as responsibility and a means of integration of the newly founded society. Besides, in Islam the whole problem of sexuality appears in a different light from that in Christianity. Sexuality is sacred in Islam and it should not be judged by Christian standards. The multiple marriages of the Prophet, far from pointing to his weakness towards "the flesh," symbolize his patriarchal nature and his function, not as a saint who withdraws from the world, but as one who sanctifies the very life of the world by living in it and accepting it with the aim of integrating it into a higher order of reality.

The Prophet has also often been criticized by modern Western authors for being cruel and for having treated men harshly. Such a charge is again absurd because critics of this kind have forgotten that either a religion leaves the world aside, as Christ did, or integrates the world, in which case it must deal with such questions as war, retribution, justice, etc. When Charlemagne or some other Christian king thrust a sword into the breast of a heathen soldier, he was, from the individual point of view, being cruel to that soldier. But on the universal plane this was a necessity for the preservation of a Christian civilization which had to defend its borders or perish. The same holds true for a Buddhist king or ruler, or for that matter any religious authority which seeks to integrate human society.

The Prophet exercised the utmost kindness possible and was harsh only with traitors. Now, a traitor against a newly

founded religious community, which God has willed and whose existence is a mercy from Heaven for mankind, is a traitor against the Truth itself. The harshness of the Prophet in such cases is an expression of Divine justice. One cannot accuse God of being cruel because men die, or because there is illness and ugliness in the world. Every construction implies a previous destruction, a clearing of grounds for the appearance of a new form. This holds true not only in case of a physical structure, but also in case of a new revelation which must clear the ground if it is to be a new social and political order as well as a purely religious one. What appears to some as the cruelty of the Prophet towards men is precisely this aspect of his function as the instrument of God for the establishment of a new world order whose homeland in Arabia was to be purified from any paganism and polytheism which, if present, would pollute the very source of this new fountain of life. As to what concerned his own person, the Prophet was always the epitome of kindness and generosity.

Nowhere is the nobility and generosity of the Prophet better exemplified than in his triumphant entry into Mecca, which in a sense highlights his earthly career. There, at a moment when the very people who had caused untold hardships and trials for the Prophet were completely subdued by him, instead of thinking of vengeance, which was certainly his due, he forgave them. One must study closely the almost unimaginable obstacles placed before the Prophet by these same people, of the immense suffering he had undergone because of them, to realize what degree of generosity this act of the Prophet implies. It is not actually necessary to give an apologetic account of the life of the Prophet, but these matters need to be answered because the false and often malicious accusations of cruelty made against the founder of Islam in so many modern studies make the understanding of him by those who rely upon such studies well nigh impossible.

Also the Prophet was not certainly without love and compassion to say the least. Many incidents in his life and sayings recorded in *Ḥadīth* literature point to his depth of love for God

which, in conformity with the general perspective of Islam, was never divorced from knowledge of Him and perfect surrender to His Will. For example, in a well known *ḥadīth*, he said, "O Lord, grant to me the love of Thee. Grant that I love those who love Thee. Grant that I may do the deed that wins Thy love. Make Thy love dear to me more than self, family and wealth." Such sayings clearly demonstrate the fact that although the Prophet was in a sense a king or ruler of a community and a judge and had to deal according to justice in both capacities, he was at the same time one whose being was anchored in the love for God. Otherwise, he could not have been a prophet.

From the Muslim point of view, the Prophet is the symbol of perfection of both the human person and leader of human society. He is the prototype of the human individual and the *summa* of the human collectivity. As such he bears certain characteristics in the eye of traditional Muslims which can only be discovered by studying the traditional accounts of him. The many Western works on the Prophet, with very few exceptions, are useless from this point of view, no matter how much historical data they provide for the reader. The same holds true in fact for the new type of biographies of the Prophet written by modernized Muslims who would like at all cost to make the Prophet an ordinary man and neglect systematically any aspect of his being that does not conform to a humanistic and rationalistic framework they have adopted *a priori*, mostly as a result of either influence from or reaction to the modern Western point of view. The profound characteristics of the Prophet which have guided the Islamic community over the centuries and have left an indelible mark on the consciousness of the Muslim cannot be discerned save through the traditional sources and the *Ḥadīth*, and, of course, the Quran itself which bears the perfume of the soul of the person through whom it was revealed.

The universal characteristics of the Prophet are not the same as his daily actions and day to day life, which can be read about in standard biographies of the Prophet, and with which we cannot deal here. They are, rather, characteristics which

issue forth from his personality as a particular spiritual prototype. Seen in this light, there are essentially three qualities that characterize the Prophet. First of all, the Prophet possessed the quality of piety in its most universal sense, that quality which attaches man to God. The Prophet was in that sense pious. He had the most profound piety which inwardly attached him to God, that made him place the interest of God before everything else including himself. Secondly, he had a quality of combativeness, of always being actively engaged in combat against all that negated the Truth and disrupted harmony. Externally it meant fighting wars, either military, political or social ones, the war which the Prophet named the "smaller holy struggle" (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*). Inwardly this combativeness meant a continuous war against the carnal soul (*nafs*), against all that in man tends towards the negation of God and His Will, the great inner struggle which he called "greater holy struggle" (*al-jihād al-akbar*).

It is difficult for modern men to understand the positive symbolism of war thanks to modern technology which has made war total and its instruments the very embodiment of what is ugly and evil. Men therefore think that the role of religion is only in preserving some kind of precarious peace. This, of course, is true, but not in the superficial sense that is usually meant. If religion is to be an integral part of life, it must try to establish peace in the most profound sense, namely to establish equilibrium between all the existing forces that surround man and to overcome all the forces that tend to destroy this equilibrium. No religion has sought to establish peace in this sense more than Islam. It is precisely in such a context that war can have a positive meaning as the activity to establish harmony both inwardly and outwardly and it is in this sense that Islam has stressed the positive aspect of combativeness.

The Prophet embodies to an eminent degree this perfection of combative virtue. If one thinks of the Buddha as sitting in a state of contemplation under the Bo-tree, the Prophet can be imagined as a rider sitting on a steed with the sword of justice and discrimination drawn in his hand and galloping at full speed, yet ready to come to an immediate halt before the moun-

tain of Truth. The Prophet was faced from the beginning of his prophetic mission with the task of wielding the sword of Truth, of establishing equilibrium and in this arduous task he had no rest. His rest and repose was in the heart of the holy struggle (*jihād*) itself and he represents this aspect of spirituality in which peace comes not in passivity but in true activity. Peace belongs to one who is inwardly at peace with the Will of Heaven and outwardly at war with the forces of disruption and disequilibrium.

Finally, the Prophet possessed the quality of magnanimity in its fullness. His soul displayed a grandeur which every devout Muslim feels. He is for the Muslim nobility and magnanimity personified. This aspect of the Prophet is fully displayed in his treatment of his companions which, in fact, has been the model for later ages and which all generations of Muslims have sought to emulate.

To put it another way, which focuses more sharply the personality of the Prophet, the qualities can be enumerated as strength, nobility and serenity or inner calm. Strength is outwardly manifested in the smaller holy struggle and inwardly in the greater holy struggle according to the saying of the Prophet who, returning from one of the early wars, said, "We have returned from the smaller *jihād* to the greater *jihād*." It is this greater *jihād* which is of particular spiritual significance as the struggle against all those tendencies which pull the soul of man away from the Center and Origin and bar him from the grace of Heaven.

The nobility or generosity of the Prophet shows itself most of all in charity towards all men and more generally towards all beings. Of course this virtue is not central as in Christianity which can be called the religion of charity. But it is important on the human level and as it concerns the person of the Prophet. It points to the fact that there was no narrowness or pettiness in the soul of the Prophet, no limitation in giving of himself to others. A spiritual man is one who always gives to those around him and does not receive, according to the saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It was characteristic of the Prophet to have always given till the last moment of

his life. He never asked anything for himself and never sought to receive.

The aspect of serenity, which also characterizes all true expressions of Islam, is essentially the love of truth. It is to put the Truth before everything else. It is to be impartial, to be logical on the level of discourse, not to let one's subjective emotions color and prejudice one's objective intellectual judgment. It is not to be a rationalist, but to see the truth of things and to love the Truth above all else. To love the Truth is to love God who is the Truth, one of His Names being the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*).

If one were to compare these qualities of the Prophet, namely, strength, nobility and serenity, with those of the founders of the other great religions, one would see that they are not necessarily the same because firstly, the Prophet was not himself the Divine Incarnation and secondly, because each religion emphasizes a certain aspect of the Truth. One cannot follow and emulate Christ in the same manner as the Prophet because in Christianity Christ is the God-man, the Divine Incarnation. One can be absorbed into his nature but he cannot be copied as the perfection of the human state. One can neither walk on water nor raise the dead to life. Still, when one thinks of Christianity and Christ another set of characteristics come to mind, such as divinity, incarnation, and on another level love, charity and sacrifice. Or when one thinks of the Buddha and Buddhism it is most of all the ideas of pity for the whole of creation, enlightenment and illumination and extinction in Nirvana that stand out.

In Islam, when one thinks of the Prophet who is to be emulated, it is the image of a strong personality that comes to mind, who is severe with himself and with the false and the unjust, and charitable towards the world that surrounds him. On the basis of these two virtues of strength and sobriety on the one hand and charity and generosity on the other, he is serene, extinguished in the Truth. He is that warrior on horseback who halts before the mountain of Truth, passive towards the Divine Will, active towards the world, hard and sober towards himself and kind and generous towards the creatures about him.

These qualities characteristic of the Prophet are contained

virtually in the very sound of the second *Shahādah, Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh*, that is, Muḥammad is the Prophet of God, in its Arabic pronunciation, not in its translation into another language. Here again, the symbolism is inextricably connected to the sounds and forms of the sacred language and cannot be translated. The very sound of the name Muḥammad implies force, a sudden breaking forth of a power which is from God and is not just human. The word *rasūl* with its elongated second syllable symbolizes this "expansion of the chest" (*inshirāḥ al-ṣadr*) and a generosity that flows from the being of the Prophet and which ultimately comes from God. As for Allah it is, of course, the Truth itself which terminates the formula. The second *Shahādah* thus implies by its sound the power, generosity and serenity of reposing in the Truth characteristic of the Prophet. This repose in the Truth is not, however, based on a flight from the world, but on a penetration into it in order to integrate and organize it. The spiritual castle in Islam is based on the firm foundations of harmony within human society and in individual human life.

In the traditional prayers on the Prophet which all Muslims recite on numerous occasions, God's blessing and salutation are asked for the Prophet who is God's servant (*ʿabd*), His messenger (*rasūl*), and the unlettered Prophet (*al-nabī al-ummī*). For example, one well-known version of the formula of benediction upon the Prophet is as follows:

"Oh, God, bless our Lord Muḥammad, Thy servant and Thy Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, and his family and his companions, and salute them."

Here again the three epithets with which his name is qualified symbolize his three basic characteristics which stand out most in the eyes of devout Muslims. He is first of all an *ʿabd*; but who is an *ʿabd* except one whose will is surrendered to the will of his master, who is himself poor (*faqīr*) but rich on account of what his master bestows upon him. As the *ʿabd* of God the Prophet exemplified in its fullness this spiritual poverty and sobriety which is so characteristic of Islam. He loved fasting, vigilance, prayer, all of which have become essential elements in Islamic religious life. As an *ʿabd* the Prophet put

everything in the hands of God and realized a poverty which is, in reality, the most perfect and enduring wealth.

The *rasūl* in this formula again symbolizes his aspect of charity and generosity and metaphysically the *rasūl* himself is sent because of God's charity for the world and men whom He loves so that He sends His prophets to guide them. That is why the Prophet is "God's mercy to the worlds." For the Muslim the Prophet himself displays mercy and generosity, a generosity which flows from the nobility of character. Islam has always emphasized this quality and sought to inculcate nobility in the souls of men. A good Muslim must have some nobility and generosity which always reflect this aspect of the personality of the Prophet.

As for the *nabī al-ummī*, it symbolizes extinction before the Truth. The unlettered nature of the Prophet means most of all the extinction of all that is human before the Divine. The soul of the Prophet was a *tabula rasa* before the Divine Pen and on the human level his quality of "unletteredness" marks that supreme virtue of realizing the Truth through the contemplation of It, which marks an "extinction" in the metaphysical sense before the Truth. Only through this extinction (*fanā'*) can one hope to enter into life with God and subsistence in Him (*baqā'*)

To summarize the qualities of the Prophet, it can be said that he is human equilibrium which has become extinct in the Divine Truth. He marks the establishment of harmony and equilibrium between all the tendencies present in man, his sensual, social, economic, political tendencies, which cannot be overcome unless the human state itself is transcended. He displays the integration of these tendencies and forces with the aim of establishing a basis which naturally leads towards contemplation and extinction in the Truth. His spiritual way means to accept the human condition which is normalized and sanctified as the foundation for the most lofty spiritual castle. The spirituality of Islam, of which the Prophet is the prototype, is not the rejection of the world but the transcending of it through its integration into a Center and the establishment of

a harmony upon which the quest for the Absolute is based. In these qualities that he displayed so eminently, the Prophet is at once the prototype of human and spiritual perfection and a guide towards its realization, for as the Quran states: "Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example" (33:21).

The *Sunnah* and *Ḥadīth*

Since the Prophet is the prototype of all human perfection to the extent that one of his titles is the "most noble of all creation" (*ashraf al-makhlūqāt*), it may be asked in what way can men emulate him. How can the Prophet become a guide for human life, and his life, deeds and thoughts serve as a guide for the Muslim in this terrestrial journey? The answer to this fundamental question, which concerns all of the individual and collective life of Muslims of later generations, lies in the sayings which he left behind and which are known as *Ḥadīth* and his daily life and practice known as *Sunnah* or wonts. The family and companions of the Prophet who had been with him during his life time bore the impressions of his *Sunnah* within their souls with a depth that results from contact with a prophet. When man meets an extraordinary person he carries the impression of this meeting always. Then how permanent must have been the impression made on men by the Prophet, whose encounter is so much outside of ordinary experience today that human beings can hardly imagine it! The first generation of Muslims practiced this *Sunnah* with all the ardor and faith that resulted from their proximity to the source of the revelation and the presence of the *barakah* or grace of the Prophet among them. They in turn were emulated by the next generation and so on to modern times when the faithful still seek to base their lives upon that of the Prophet. This end is achieved through emulation of his actions, by means of the fresh interpretations that each generation makes of his life (*siyar*), through the litanies and chants repeated in his praise (*madā'iḥ*) and through the celebrations marking his birth *mawlid* or other joyous occasions.

As for the *Ḥadīth*, these, too, were memorized by those who

heard them and were in turn transmitted to those who followed during succeeding generations. Here again it was not a question of memorizing just anything but of remembering the sayings of one whom God had chosen as His messenger. And those who memorized the prophetic sayings were not like modern men whose memory has been dulled by formalized classroom learning and over-reliance on written sources, but nomads or men of nomadic background for whom speech and literature were connected with what was known by heart. These were men who possessed remarkable powers of memory, which still survive among certain so-called "illiterate" people and which have often startled "literate" observers from sedentary civilizations.

The sayings of the Prophet were eventually collected as the spread of Islam and the gradual moving away from the homogeneity of the early community endangered their integral existence. The devoutest of men set about to collect prophetic sayings or *aḥādīth*, examining the chain of transmitters for each saying. As a result, in the Sunni world six major collections of *Ḥadīth* became assembled such as those of Bukhārī and Muslim and soon gained complete authority in the orthodox community. In Shi'ism a similar process took place except that in addition to the sayings of the Prophet those of the Imams, whose teachings expound the meaning of the prophetic message, form a part of the *Ḥadīth* collection. There, too, four collections of these sayings were assembled of which the most important is the *Uṣūl al-kāfī* of Kulaynī.

The *Ḥadīth* literature, in both Sunni and Shi'ite sources, is a monumental treasury of wisdom which is at once a commentary upon the Quran and a complement to its teachings. The prophetic sayings concern every domain from pure metaphysics to table manners. In them one finds what the Prophet said at times of distress, in receiving an ambassador, in treating a prisoner, in dealing with his family, and in nearly every other situation which touches upon the domestic, economic, social and political life of man. In addition, in this literature many questions pertaining to metaphysics, cosmology, eschatology and the spiritual life are discussed. Altogether, after the Quran, the

Ḥadīth and the prophetic *Sunnah* of which it is a part are the most precious source of guidance which Islamic society possesses, and along with the Quran they are the fountain head of all Islamic life and thought.

It is against this basic aspect of the whole structure of Islam that a severe attack has been made in recent decades by an influential school of Western orientalists. No more of a vicious and insidious attack could be made against Islam than this one, which undercuts its very foundations and whose effect is more dangerous than if a physical attack were made against Islam.

Purporting to be scientific and applying the famous—or rather should one say the infamous—historical method which reduces all religious truths to historical facts, the critics of *Ḥadīth* have come to the conclusion that this literature is not from the Prophet but was "forged" by later generations. What lies behind the scientific facade presented in most of these attacks is the a priori assumption that Islam is not a Divine revelation. If it is not a Divine revelation, then it must be explained away in terms of factors present in seventh century Arabian society. Now, it is assumed that a Bedouin society could not have had any metaphysical knowledge, could not have possibly known about the Divine Word or Logos, about the higher states of being, about the structure of the Universe. Therefore, everything in *Ḥadīth* literature that speaks of these matters must have been a later accretion. Were the critics of *Ḥadīth* simply to admit that the Prophet was a prophet, there would be no scientifically valid argument whatsoever against the main body of *Ḥadīth*. But this is precisely what they do not admit and, therefore, they have to consider as a later forgery anything in *Ḥadīth* literature which resembles the doctrines of other religions or speaks of esoteric questions.

There is of course no doubt that there are many *ḥadīths* which are spurious. Traditional Islamic scholars themselves developed an elaborate science to examine the text of the *Ḥadīth* (*ʿilm al-jarḥ*) and the validity of the chains of prophetic transmission (*ʿilm al-dirāyah*) as well as the circumstances

under which it was spoken. They examined the chains of transmission and sifted the sayings and compared them with detailed knowledge of the factors involved in a manner which no modern scholar can hope to match. In this manner certain sayings were accepted and other rejected as being either of dubious origin or completely unauthentic. Those who collected *Ḥadīth* were in fact the most pious and devout of men who often travelled from Central Asia to Medina or Iraq or Syria in search of *Ḥadīth*. Throughout Islamic history the most devout and ascetic of the religious scholars have been the scholars of *Ḥadīth*, (the *muḥaddithūn*) and because of the degree of piety and trust of the community that is necessary before a person is recognized as an authority in this field, they have always constituted the smallest number among all the different classes of religious scholars.

In fact, what the modern critics of *Ḥadīth* do not realize in applying their so-called historical method is that they are projecting the kind of agnostic mentality prevalent in many academic circles today onto the mentality of a traditional Muslim scholar of *Ḥadīth*. They think that for him also the questions of religion could be treated in such a "detached" manner as to enable them even to "forge" sayings of the Prophet or to accept them into the traditional corpus without the greatest care. They do not realize that for men of the early centuries and especially the religious scholars the fire of hell was not an abstract thought but a concrete reality. They feared God in a way which most modern men can hardly imagine and it is psychologically absurd that, with a mentality to which the alternative of Heaven or Hell is the most real thing of all, they should commit the unpardonable sin of forging prophetic sayings. Nothing is less scientific than to project the modern mentality, which is an anomaly in history, onto a period when man lived and thought in a traditional world in which the verities of religion determined life itself, and in which men sought first and foremost to perform the most important duty placed upon their shoulders, namely, to save their souls.

As to the statement made by critics of *Ḥadīth* that the

forged sayings came into being in the second century and were honestly believed to be prophetic sayings by the collectors of the third century, the same answer can be given. The *Sunnah* of the Prophet and his sayings had left such a profound imprint upon the first generation and those that came immediately afterwards that a forging of new sayings, and, therefore, also new ways of action and procedure in religious questions that already possessed precedence would have been immediately opposed by the community. It would have meant a break in the continuity of the whole religious life and pattern of Islam which, in fact, is not discernible. Moreover, the Imams, whose sayings are included in the *Ḥadīth* corpus in Shi'ism and who themselves are the most reliable chain of transmission of prophetic sayings, survived into the third Islamic century, that is, after the very period of the collection of the well-known books of *Ḥadīth*, so that they bridge the period to which the modern critics point as the time of "forgery" of *Ḥadīth*. Their very presence in fact is one more proof of the falsity of the arguments presented against the authenticity of *Ḥadīth* literature, arguments which attack not only the dubious and spurious sayings, but the main body of *Ḥadīth*, according to which Islamic society has lived and modeled itself since its inception.

The danger inherent in this criticism of the *Ḥadīth* lies in decreasing its value in the eyes of those Muslims who, having come under the sway of its arguments, accept the fatally dangerous conclusion that the body of *Ḥadīth* is not the sayings of the Prophet and therefore does not carry his authority. In this way one of the foundations of Divine Law and a vital source of guidance for the spiritual life is destroyed. It is as if the whole foundation were pulled from underneath the structure of Islam. What would be left in such a case would be the Quran, which, being the Word of God, is too sublime to interpret and decipher without the aid of the Prophet. Left by themselves, men would in most cases read their own limitations into the Holy Book and the whole homogeneity of Muslim society and the harmony existing between the Quran and the religious life of Islam would be disrupted. There are few problems that call

for as immediate action on the part of the Muslim community as a response by qualified, traditional Muslim authorities in scientific—but not necessarily "scientistic"—terms to the charges brought against *Ḥadīth* literature by modern Western critics, who have now also found a few disciples among Muslims. They have found a few followers of Muslim background who have left the traditional point of view and have become enamored by the apparently scientific method of the critics which only hides an *a priori* presumption no Muslim can accept, namely the negation of the heavenly origin of the Quranic revelation and the actual prophetic power and function of the Prophet.

Be that as it may, as far as traditional Islam is concerned, which alone concerns us here, the *Ḥadīth* is, after the Quran, the most important source of both the Law, the *Sharīᶜah*, and the Spiritual way, the *Ṭarīqah*. And it is the vital integrating factor in Muslim society, for the daily lives of millions of Muslims the world over have been modeled upon the prophetic *Sunnah* and *Ḥadīth*. For over fourteen hundred years Muslims have tried to awaken in the morning as the Prophet awakened, to eat as he ate, to wash as he washed himself, even to cut their nails as he did. There has been no greater force for the unification of the Muslim peoples than the presence of this common model for the minutest acts of daily life. A Chinese Muslim, although racially a Chinese, has a countenance, behavior, manner of walking and acting that resembles in certain ways those of a Muslim on the coast of the Atlantic. That is because both have for centuries copied the same model. Something of the soul of the Prophet is to be seen in both places. It is this essential unifying factor, a common *Sunnah* or way of acting and living as a model, that makes a bazaar in Morocco have a "feeling" or ambiance of a bazaar in Persia, although the people in the two places speak a different language and dress differently. There is something in the air which an intelligent foreign observer will immediately detect as belonging to the same religious and spiritual climate. And this sameness is brought about firstly through the presence of the Quran and secondly, and in

a more immediate and tangible way, through the "presence" of the Prophet in his community by virtue of his *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah*.

Through the *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah* Muslims come to know both the Prophet and the message of the Quran. Without *Ḥadīth* much of the Quran would be a closed book. We are told in the Quran to pray but were it not for the prophetic *Sunnah*, we would not know how to pray. Something as fundamental as the daily prayers which are the central rite of Islam would be impossible to perform without the guidance of the prophetic practice. This applies to a thousand and one other situations so that it is almost unnecessary to emphasize the vital connection between the Quran and the practice and sayings of the Prophet whom God chose as its revealer and interpreter to mankind. Before his death it was asked of the Prophet how he should be remembered later. He answered, "Read the Quran."

Before terminating this discussion about the *Ḥadīth*, it should be pointed out that within the vast corpus of prophetic sayings there are a number which are called "sacred sayings" (*aḥadīth qudsīyyah*) which are not a part of the Quran but in which God speaks in the first person through the Prophet. These sayings, although small in number, are of extreme importance in that they are, along with certain verses of the Quran, the basis of the spiritual life in Islam. Sufism is based to a large extent on these sayings and many a Sufi knows them by heart and lives in constant remembrance of their message. These sayings all concern the spiritual life rather than social or political matters. They deal with man's direct relation with God as in the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* so often repeated by Sufi masters over the ages: "My slave ceaseth not to draw nigh unto Me through devotions of free will until I love him, and when I love him, I am the hearing with which he heareth and the sight with which he seeth and the hand with which he fighteth and the foot with which he walketh."

The presence of these sayings indicate how deeply the roots of Islamic spirituality are sunk in the sources of the revelation itself. Far from being just a legal and social system devoid of a

spiritual dimension, or one upon which a spiritual dimension was artificially grafted later on, Islam was, from the beginning, both a Law and a Way. The two dimensions of Islam, the exoteric and esoteric, are best demonstrated in the case of the Prophet himself who was both the perfection of human action on the social and political plane and the prototype of the spiritual life in his inner intimacy with God and in his total realization in which he saw nothing except in God and through God.

The particularity of the Prophet, which distinguishes him from those that came before him, is that he is the last of the prophets (*khātam al-anbiyā'*), the seal of prophecy who, coming at the end of the prophetic cycle, integrates in himself the function of prophecy as such. This aspect of the Prophet immediately brings up the question of what prophecy itself means. There have been numerous volumes written by traditional Muslim authorities on this subject in which the elaborate metaphysical dimension of this central reality of religion is outlined. Although it is not possible to discuss this question in detail here, one can summarize by saying that prophethood is, according to the Islamic view, a state bestowed upon men whom God has chosen because of certain perfections in them by virtue of which they become the instrument through whom God reveals His message to the world. Their inspiration is directly from Heaven. A prophet owes nothing to anyone. He is not a scholar who discerns through books certain truths, nor one who learns from other human beings and in turn transmits this learning. His knowledge marks a direct intervention of the Divine in the human order, an intervention which is not, from the Islamic point of view, an incarnation but a theophany (*tajallī*).

This definition of prophethood holds true for every prophet, not just in the case of the founder of Islam. From the Islamic point of view Christ did not gain his knowledge of the Old Testament and the message of the Hebrew prophets by reading books or learning from rabbis but directly from Heaven. Nor did Moses learn the laws and the message that he brought from older prophets, be it even Abraham. He received a new message directly from God. And if he reiterated some of the truths of the

messages brought by the Semitic prophets before him or if Christ affirmed the Jewish tradition whose inner meaning he revealed—according to the well-known saying "Christ revealed what Moses veiled"—or if the Quran mentions some of the stories of the Old and New Testaments, none of these instances implies an historical borrowing. They indicate only a new revelation in the *cadre* of the same spiritual climate which can be called the Abrahamic Tradition. The same applies to the avatars of Hinduism who each came with a new message from Heaven but spoken in the language of the same spiritual ambiance.

Although all prophecy implies a meeting of the Divine and human planes, there are degrees of prophecy dependent upon the type of message revealed and the function of the messenger in propagating that message. In fact whereas in English the single word prophet is usually used, in Arabic, Persian and other languages of the Islamic people there are a series of words connected with levels of prophethood. There is first of all the *nabī*, a man who brings news of God's message, a man whom God has chosen to address. But God does not just speak to any man. He who is worthy of hearing a Divine message must be qualified. He must be pure by nature. That is why according to traditional Islamic sources the body of the Prophet was made from the choicest earth. He must possess the perfection of human virtues such as goodness and nobility, although in reality he has nothing of his own, everything having been given by God to him. He must have the perfection of both the practical and theoretical faculties, a perfect imagination, an intellect that is perfectly attuned to the Divine Intellect, a psychological and corporeal structure which enables him to lead men in action and to guide them through all trials and circumstances if and when necessary. But the message which the *nabī* receives is not necessarily universal. He may receive a message which is to remain within him and not be divulged openly or is meant to be imparted to only a few in the *cadre* of an already existing religion.

Of the prophets in this sense (*anbiyā'*), there are, according

to tradition, one-hundred and twenty-four thousand whom God has sent to every nation and people, for the Quran asserts that there is no people unto whom a prophet has not been sent: "And for every nation there is a messenger" (10:48). Although it also states that to each people God speaks in its own language, hence the diversity of religions: "And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk" (14:4). The universality of prophecy so clearly enunciated in the Quran means the universality of tradition, of religion. It means that all orthodox religions come from Heaven and are not man made. It also implies by its comprehensive formulation the presence of Divine revelation not only in the Abrahamic Tradition but among all nations, although in previous times this question was rarely explored explicitly. The Quran asserts the principle of universality leaving the possibility of its application outside the Semitic world as the case has arisen, for example, when Islam encountered Zoroastrianism in Persia or Hinduism in India. In the same manner it could be applied in modern times to the encounter with any previously unknown genuine tradition, such as that of the American Indians.

Among the *anbiyāʾ* there are those who belong to another category of prophets, or a new level of prophecy, namely those who not only receive a message from Heaven but are also chosen to propagate that message for the segment of humanity providentially destined for it. The prophet with such a function is called *rasūl*. He is also a *nabī* but in addition he has this function of making God's message known to men and inviting them to accept it, as is seen in the case of many prophets of the Old Testament. Above the *rasūl* stand the prophets who are to bring major new religions to the world, the "possessors of firmness and determination" (*ūluʾl-ʿazm*). Of this latter category Islam, again limiting itself to the Abrahamic Tradition, believes that there have been seven, each of whom was the founder of a new religion and who brought a new Divine Law into the world. There are then altogether three grades of objective prophecy, that of the *nabī*, the *rasūl* and the *ūluʾl-ʿazm*, although in certain Islamic sources this gradation is further refined to include in further detail the degrees of *anbiyāʾ* who

are distinguished by the manner in which they perceive the angel of revelation.

The Prophet was at once a *nabī*, a *rasūl* and an *ūlu'l-ᶜazm* and brought the cycle of prophecy to a close. After him there will be no new *Sharīᶜah* or Divine Law brought into the world until the end of time. There are to be no revelations (*waḥy*) after him, for he marks the termination of the prophetic cycle (*dā'irat al-nubuwwah*). It may on the surface appear as a great tragedy that man seems to be thus left without any possibility of renewal of the truths of the revelation through new contact with the source of the Truth. But in reality the termination of the prophetic cycle does not mean that all possibility of contact with the Divine order has ceased. Whereas revelation (*waḥy*) is no longer possible, inspiration (*ilhām*) remains always as a latent possibility. Whereas the cycle of prophecy (*dā'irat al-nubuwwah*) has come to an end, the cycle of *walāyah/ wilāyah* (*dā'irat al-walāyah*), which for want of a better term may be translated as the "cycle of initiation" and also sanctity, continues.

Actually, *walāyah* in this context, which should not in the technical language of Islamic gnosis be considered identical to *walāyah* in the ordinary sense having to do with the state of *walī* or saint, means the presence of this inner dimension within Islam which the Prophet inaugurated along with a new *Sharīᶜah* and which will continue to the end of time. Thanks to its presence, man is able to renew himself spiritually and gain contact with the Divine although a new revelation is no longer possible. It is due to this esoteric dimension of Islam and the grace or *barakah* contained in the organizations which are its preservers and propagators that the spiritual force of the original revelation has been renewed over the ages and the possibility of a spiritual life leading to the state of sainthood, that purifies human society and rejuvenates religious forces, has been preserved.

The Prophet, in terminating the prophetic cycle and in bringing the last *Sharīᶜah* into the world, also inaugurated the cycle of "Muḥammadan sanctity" (*walāyah/ wilāyah muḥam-*

madiyyah), which is ever present and which is the means whereby the spiritual energy of the Tradition is continuously renewed. Therefore, far from there being a need for any new religion, which at this moment of time can only mean a pseudo-religion, the revelation brought by the Prophet contains in itself all that is needed to fulfill in every way the religious and spiritual needs of Muslims, from the common believer to the potential saint.

The Prophet, besides being the leader of men and the founder of a new civilization, is also the perfection of the human norm and the model for the spiritual life of Islam. He said "I am a human being like you" (*anā basharun mithlukum*), to which Muslim sages over the ages have added, yes, but like a precious gem among stones (*ka'l-yāqūt bayn al-ḥajar*). The profound symbolism contained in this saying is connected with the inner nature of the Prophet. All men in their purely human nature are like stones, opaque and heavy and a veil to the light that shines upon them. The Prophet also in a sense possesses this human nature outwardly but in its proper perfection. Yet inwardly he has become alchemically transmuted into a precious stone which, although still a stone, is transparent before the light and has lost its opacity. The Prophet is outwardly only a human being (*bashar*), but inwardly he is the full realization of manhood in its most universal sense. He is the Universal Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), the prototype of all of creation, the norm of all perfection, the first of all beings, the mirror in which God contemplates universal existence. He is inwardly identified with the Logos and the Divine Intellect.

In every religion the founder is identified with the Logos, as we read in the beginning of the Gospel according to John, "*In principio erat verbum*," that is, that which was in the beginning was the Word or Logos identified with Christ. Islam considers all prophets as an aspect of the Universal Logos, which in its perspective is identified with the "Muḥammadan Reality" (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyyah*), which was the first of God's creations and through whom God sees all things. As the Muḥammadan Reality the Prophet came before all the other

prophets at the beginning of the prophetic cycle, and it is to this inner aspect of him as the Logos to which reference is made in the *ḥadīth,* "I [Muḥammad] was prophet [the Logos] when Adam was still between water and clay."

The Sufi Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī in his *Mirṣād al-ʿibād* writes that just as in the case of a tree one first plants a seed which then grows into a plant that gives branches, then leaves, then blossoms, then fruit which in turn contains the seed, so did the cycle of prophecy begin with the Muḥammadan Reality, with the inner reality of Muḥammad, while it ended with the human manifestation of him. He thus is inwardly the beginning and outwardly the end of the prophetic cycle which he synthesizes and unifies in his being. Outwardly he is a human being and inwardly the Universal Man, the norm of all spiritual perfection. The Prophet himself referred to this inner aspect of his nature as in the *ḥadīth*, "I am Aḥmad without the *mīm* [that is, *aḥad* meaning Unity]; I am an Arab without the (*ʿayn*) [that is *rabb* meaning Lord]. Who hath seen me, the same hath seen the Truth."

What do such sayings mean but the inward "union" of the Prophet with God. This truth has been re-iterated over and over again throughout the ages by masters of Sufism as in the beautiful Persian poem from the *Gulshan-i rāz*:

> A single *mīm* separates *aḥad* from Aḥmad
> The world is immersed in that one *mīm.*

This "*mīm*" which separates the esoteric name of the Prophet, Aḥmad, from God, is the symbol of return to the Origin, of death and reawakening to the eternal realities. Its numerical equivalence according to the science of *jafr* is forty which itself symbolizes the age of prophecy in Islam. The Prophet is outwardly the messenger of God to men; inwardly he is in permanent "union" with the Lord.

The doctrine of Universal Man, which is inextricably connected with what one may call prophetology in Islam, is far from having originated as a result of later influences upon

Islam. It is based rather on what the Prophet was inwardly and as he was seen by those among his companions who, besides being his followers religiously, were the inheritors of his esoteric message. Those who wish to deprive Islam of a spiritual and intellectual dimension seek to make of this basic doctrine a later borrowing, as if the Prophet could have become in an effective and operative way the Universal Man by just having such a state attributed to him if he were not so already in his real nature. It would be as if one expected a body to shine simply by calling it the sun. The Prophet possessed in himself that reality which later gained the technical name of Universal Man. But the "named" was there long before this name was given to it, and before the theory of it was elaborated for later generations who, because of separation from the source of the revelation, were in need of further explanation.

In conclusion, it may be said that the Prophet is the perfection of both the norm of the human collectivity and the human individual, the norm for the perfect social life and the prototype and guide for the individual's spiritual life. He is both the Universal Man and the Primordial Man (*al-insān al-qadīm*). As the Universal Man he is the totality of which we are a part and in which we participate; as the Primordial Man he is that original perfection with respect to which we are a decadence and a falling away. He is thus both the "spatial" and "temporal" norms of perfection, "spatial" in the sense of the totality of which we are a part and "temporal" in the sense of the perfection which was at the beginning and which we must seek to regain by moving upstream against the downward flow of the march of time.

The Prophet possessed eminently and in perfection both human (*nāsūt*) and spiritual (*lāhūt*) natures. Yet, there was never an incarnation of the *lāhūt* into the *nāsūt*, a perspective which Islam does not accept. The Prophet did possess these two natures and for this very reason his example makes possible the presence of a spiritual way in Islam. He was the perfect ruler, judge and leader of men. He was the creator of the most perfect Muslim society in comparison with which every later

society is a falling away. But he was in addition the prototype of the spiritual life. That is why it is absolutely necessary to follow in his footsteps if one aspires towards spiritual realization in Islam.

The love of the Prophet is incumbent upon all Muslims and especially upon those who aspire towards the saintly life. This love must not be understood only in a sentimental, individualistic sense. Rather, the Prophet is loved because he symbolizes that harmony and beauty that pervade all things, and displays in their fullness those virtues, the attainment of which allow man to realize his theomorphic nature.

"Lo! Allah and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet. O ye who believe! Ask blessings on him and salute him with a worthy salutation" (33:56).

4

THE *SHARĪ'AH*—DIVINE LAW: SOCIAL AND HUMAN NORM

The *Sharī'ah* is the Divine Law by virtue of whose acceptance a person becomes a Muslim. Only he who accepts the injunctions of the *Sharī'ah* as binding upon him is a Muslim, although he may not be able to realize all of its teachings or follow all of its commands in life. The *Sharī'ah* is the ideal pattern for the individual's life and the Law which binds the Muslim people into a single community. It is the embodiment of the Divine Will in terms of specific teachings whose acceptance and application guarantees man a harmonious life in this world and felicity in the hereafter.

The word *Sharī'ah* itself is derived etymologically from a root meaning road. It is the road which leads to God. It is of great symbolic significance that both the Divine Law and the Spiritual Way or *Ṭarīqah*, which is the esoteric dimension of Islam, are based on the symbolism of the way or journey. All life is a sojourn, a journey through this transient world to the Divine Presence. The *Sharī'ah* is the wider road which is meant for all men by virtue of which they are able to attain the total possibilities of the individual human state. The *Ṭarīqah* is the narrower path for the few who have the capability and profound urge to attain sanctity here and now and seek a path whose end is the full realization of the reality of Universal Man transcending the individual domain.

The *Sharī'ah* is Divine Law, in the sense that it is the con-

crete embodiment of the Divine Will according to which man should live in both his private and social life. In every religion the Divine Will manifests itself in one way or another and the moral and spiritual injunctions of each religion are of Divine origin. But in Islam the embodiment of the Divine Will is not only a set of general teachings but of concrete ones. Not only is man told to be charitable, humble or just, but how also to be so in particular instances of life. The *Sharīᶜah* contains the injunctions of the Divine Will as applied to every situation in life. It is the Law according to which God wants a Muslim to live. It is therefore the guide of human action and encompasses every facet of human life. By living according to the *Sharīᶜah*, man places his whole existence in God's "hand." The *Sharīᶜah*, by considering every aspect of human action, thus sanctifies the whole of life and gives a religious significance to what may appear as the most mundane of activities.

The lack of understanding of the significance of the *Sharīᶜah* in the Western world is due to its concrete and all-embracing nature. A Jew who believes in Talmudic Law can understand what it means to have a Divine Law, whereas for most Christians, and, therefore, for secularists with a Christian background, such an understanding comes with difficulty, precisely because in Christianity there is no clear distinction between the law and the way. In Christianity the Divine Will is expressed in terms of universal teachings such as being charitable, but not in concrete laws which would be stated in the New Testament.

The difference between the conception of Divine Law in Islam and in Christianity can be seen in the way the word canon (*qānūn*) is used in the two traditions. This word was borrowed in both cases from the Greek. In Islam it has come to denote a man-made law in contrast to the *Sharīᶜah* or divinely inspired Law. In the West the opposing meaning is given to this word in the sense that canonical law refers to laws governing the ecclesiastical organization of the Catholic and Episcopal churches, and has a definitely religious color.

The Christian view concerning the law which governs man

socially and politically is indicated in the well-known saying of Christ, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." This phrase has actually two meanings of which only one is usually considered. It is commonly interpreted as leaving all things that are worldly and have to do with political and social regulations to secular authorities of whom Caesar is the outstanding example. But more than that it also means that because Christianity, being a spiritual way, had no Divine legislation of its own, it had to absorb Roman Law in order to become the religion of a civilization. The law of Caesar, or Roman Law, became providentially absorbed into the Christian perspective once this religion became dominant in the West, and it is to this fact that the saying of Christ alludes indirectly. The dichotomy, however, always remained. In Christian civilization law governing human society did not enjoy the same Divine sanction as the teachings of Christ. In fact this lack of a Divine Law in Christianity had no small role to play in the secularization that took place in the West during the Renaissance. It is also the most important cause for the lack of understanding of the meaning and role of the *Sharī'ah* on the part of Westerners as well as so many modernized Muslims.

With regard to the Divine Law, therefore, the situation of Islam and Christianity differ completely. Islam never gave unto Caesar what was Caesar's. Rather, it tried to integrate the domain of Caesar itself, namely, political, social and economic life, into an encompassing religious worldview. Law is therefore in Islam an integral aspect of the revelation and not an alien element. Of course Roman Law also possessed a religious colour in the Roman religion itself, and the function of "The Divine Caesar" was to establish order on earth, through this law. But from the point of view of Christianity it was a foreign component without the direct sanctifying authority of revelation. In the Christian West law was thus from the beginning something human to be made and revised according to the needs and circumstances of the times. The Western attitude towards law is determined totally by the character of Christianity as a spiritual way which did not bring a revealed

law of its own.

The Semitic notion of law which is to be seen in revealed form in both Judaism and Islam is the opposite of the prevalent Western conception of law. It is a religious notion of law, one in which law is an integral aspect of religion. In fact religion to a Muslim is essentially the Divine Law which includes not only universal moral principles but also details of how man should conduct his life and deal with his neighbor and with God; how he should eat, procreate and sleep; how he should buy and sell at the market place; and of course above all else how he should pray and perform other acts of worship. It includes all aspects of human life and contains in its tenets the guide for a Muslim to conduct his life in harmony with the Divine Will. It guides man towards an understanding of the Divine Will by indicating which acts and objects are from the religious point of view obligatory (*wājib*), which are meritorious or recommended (*mandūb*), which are forbidden (*ḥarām*), which reprehensible (*makrūh*), and which indifferent (*mubāḥ*). Through this balance, the value of human acts in the sight of the Divine are made known to man so that he can distinguish between the "Straight Path" and that which will lead him astray. The *Sharīᶜah* provides for him the knowledge of right and wrong. It is, however, by his free will that man must choose which path to follow.

Such a Law contains the norm of the ideal human life. It is a transcendent Law which is at the same time applied to human society, but never fully realized because of the imperfections of all that is human. The *Sharīᶜah* corresponds to a reality that transcends time and history and yet can be applied to new conditions and circumstances. Each generation in Muslim society should seek to conform to its teachings and apply it anew to the conditions in which it finds itself. The creative process in each generation is not to remake the Law but to reform men and human society to conform to the Law. According to the Islamic view religion should not be reformed to conform to the ever changing and imperfect nature of men but men should reform themselves so as to live according to the tenets of revelation. In accordance with the real nature of

things it is the human that must conform to the Divine and not the Divine to the human.

The movement of reform throughout Islamic history has been to seek to recreate and reshape human attitudes and social institutions so as to make them harmonious with the *Sharī'ah*. It has been to revivify and revitalize human society by continuously infusing its structure with the principles of the revelation which are providentially sent as its guide and which alone provide a criterion for its own worth and value. Those modern movements which seek to reform the Divine Law rather than human society are, from the Islamic point of view, in every way an anomaly. Such movements are brought about to a great extent not only through the weakening of religious faith among certain men but also because the modern mentality, which originated in the West with its Christian background, cannot conceive of an immutable Law which is the guide of human society and upon which man should seek to model his individual and social life. There is no better proof of how deeply rooted man's religious heritage is than the modern Western attitude towards law which is the same as that of Christianity, although so many who have created and who uphold the modern view do not consider themselves as Christians and some even are opposed to Christianity.

The *Sharī'ah* is for Islam the means of integrating human society. It is the way by which man is able to give religious significance to his daily life and be able to integrate this life into a spiritual center. Man lives in multiplicity; he lives and acts according to multiple tendencies within himself, some of which issue from animal desires, others from sentimental or rational or yet spiritual aspects of his being. Man faces this multiplicity within himself and at the same time lives in a society of which he is a part and with whose members he has an indefinite number of contacts and relations. All of these activities, these norms of doing and existing in the human condition, cannot be integrated and cannot find meaning save in the *Sharī'ah*. The Divine Law is like a network of injunctions and attitudes which govern all of human life and in their totality

and all-embracing nature are able to integrate man and society according to the dominating principle of Islam itself, namely unity or *tawḥīd*. The *Sharīᶜah* is the means by which unity is realized in human life.

Seen from the outside, this role of the *Sharīᶜah* may be difficult to understand. On the surface it seems to contain laws about how to marry, trade, divide inheritance or conduct the affairs of state. These are all acts performed in the world of time and multiplicity. How can they then be integrated so as to reflect unity? The answer is that these actions are still actions whether they are performed according to the *Sharīᶜah* or not. But the effect that such actions leave on the souls of men is completely different depending on whether the act is performed simply according to man-made laws or whether it follows the teachings of the *Sharīᶜah*. In the latter case the religious context in which the act is placed and the inner connection that the teachings of the *Sharīᶜah* have to the spiritual life of man transform an otherwise secular act into a religious one. Instead of the soul scattering itself over countless forms of action, the action itself leaves a positive imprint upon the soul and aids towards its integration.

There is a *ḥadīth* according to which when a man works to feed his family he is performing as much an act of worship as if he were praying. This statement may be difficult to understand by one not acquainted with the traditional way of life. In modern society it is not possible to find religious significance in most actions and, except for a few offices directly connected with the administration of religious needs, most professions through which men gain their livelihood are devoid of a direct religious significance. The breaking up of traditional Christian society, in which every act was endowed with a religious significance, long ago secularized a large domain of human life in the West. A contemporary who wishes to integrate all of his life finds great difficulty in giving religious significance to the daily work which he must of necessity perform.

The *Sharīᶜah* makes the act of earning one's daily bread a religious act, one which a Muslim should perform with the

awareness that he is performing an act that is pleasing in the sight of God and is as obligatory as specifically religious duties. The *Sharī'ah,* in fact, gives a religious connotation to all the acts that are necessary for human life, and of course not those which are simple luxuries. In this way the whole of man's life and activities become religiously meaningful. Were it to be otherwise man would be a house divided unto itself, in a condition of inner division and separation which Islam tries to avoid. By placing his life in the channels ordained by the *Sharī'ah,* man avoids many unseen catastrophes and assures himself a life of wholeness and meaning.

Some may object that accepting the *Sharī'ah* totally destroys human initiative. Such a criticism, however, fails to understand the inner workings of the Divine Law. The Law places before men many paths according to his nature and needs within a universal pattern which pertains to everyone. Human initiative comes in selecting what is in conformity with one's veritable needs and at the same time living according to the Divine norm as indicated by the *Sharī'ah.* Initiative does not come only in rebelling against the Truth which is an easy task since stones fall by nature; initiative and creativity come most of all in seeking to live in conformity with the Truth and in applying its principles to the conditions which destiny has placed before man. To integrate all of one's tendencies and activities within a divinely ordained pattern requires all the initiative and creative energy which man is capable of giving.

To the Muslim the *Sharī'ah* is an eternal and transcendent Law and the question of how it became codified and systematized in detail historically has not been of central interest until modern times. The studies of orientalists, which are usually historical, have directed attention to the gradual process by which the *Sharī'ah* became codified into the form in which the Islamic world has known it for the past millennium. It is therefore not without interest for us to consider how this process took place, although it must be made clear that the fact that the Divine Law was explicitly formulated and codified in its final form after several stages does not in any way diminish

from its Divine nature and the immutability of its injunctions.

In essence all of the *Sharīᶜah* is contained in the Quran. The Holy Book, however, contains the principle of all the Law and not all of its details. It contains the Law potentially but not actually and explicitly, at least not all the different aspects of the *Sharīᶜah*. There was, therefore, a gradual process by which this Law became promulgated in its external form and made applicable to all domains of human life. This process was completed in about three centuries during which the canonical books of Law in both Sunni and Shiᶜite Islam were written, although the exact process is somewhat different in the two cases.

The principles of the Law contained in the Quran were explained and amplified in the prophetic *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah*, which together constitute the second basic source of Law. These in turn were understood with the aid of the consensus of the Islamic community (*ijmāᶜ*). Furthermore, according to some schools, these sources of Law were complemented by analogical human reasoning (*qiyās*) where necessary. According to the traditional Islamic view (as codified by Imam Shāfiᶜī), therefore, the main sources of the *Sharīᶜah* are, in order of importance and according to a hierarchy, the Quran, *Ḥadīth, ijmāᶜ* and *qiyās*. The first two of these sources are the most important and are accepted by all schools of Law while the other two are either considered of lesser importance or rejected by some of the schools, while some jurists have added certain other principles such as that of the common good.

The meaning of the Quran and *Ḥadīth* is clear enough, but a few words must be said about the other two above mentioned sources. As far as *ijmāᶜ* is concerned, it means the consensus of the Islamic community on some point of the Law and is considered to be important on the authority of the *ḥadīth*: "My community shall never agree in error." Some modernized Muslims, who instead of wanting to substitute for the kingdom of God for the kingdom of man, especially twentieth century man, have tried simply to equate *ijmāᶜ* with parliamentary "democracy." This, however, is not exactly the case because first of all *ijmāᶜ*

can operate only where the Quran and *Ḥadīth* have not clarified a certain aspect of the Law, so that its function is in this sense limited, and secondly, it is a gradual process through which the community over a period of time comes to give its consensus over a question of Law. Finally, the view of Muslims over the centuries has been that giving direct opinion on problems of Law should be the function of the ^{c}*ulamā*$^{\supset}$ who alone are well-versed in the science of Law. The sciences connected with the *Sharī*^{c}*ah* are complex and require study before one can claim to be an authority on them. One could do no more than ask the consensus of a body of laymen on the diagnosis of a certain disease than on the legitimacy of a certain Law. The concept of *ijmā*$^{\supset}$ has always implied the consensus of those qualified in matters of Law combined with an inner interaction with the whole of the community whose results are felt only gradually.

As for *qiyās* it means essentially to use human reason to compare an existing situation with one for which legislation already exists. If the Quran has banned wine, it means that by analogy it has also banned any form of alcoholic drink whose effect is like wine, namely one which causes intoxication. The use of *qiyās* again is not a license for rationalism but an exercising of reason within the context of the revealed truths which are the basis of the *Sharī*^{c}*ah* and the prophetic utterances and practices which have made these truths known and have clarified them for the Muslim community.

Both *ijmā*$^{\supset}$ and *qiyās* are closely connected to the function of the ^{c}*ulamā*$^{\supset}$ as authorities on Law, of those who, having spent their lives studying this particular subject, are in a position to pass judgment upon it. There is no priesthood in Islam and every Muslim can perform the functions which in other religions are placed in the hands of the priesthood. But to pass judgement upon the Law is not the right of every Muslim, for no other reason than that not everyone is qualified from the scholarly point of view to do so. Not everyone can pass judgments on the *Sharī*^{c}*ah* for the same reason that not everyone can give an opinion on astronomy or medicine unless he be

qualified in these fields by having studied them. The *ᶜulamāᵓ* are the custodians of the Law only because they have undertaken the necessary studies and mastered the required disciplines to make them acquainted with its teachings.

Historically, the four above-mentioned principles brought about the formation of the Law in a complex process all of whose details are not well known. As far as the meaning of the *Sharīᶜah* for Muslims is concerned, this history, as already pointed out, is not of major importance. Yet, since so much attention is paid today to the history of a subject rather than the subject itself, it is necessary to outline briefly the process through which the *Sharīᶜah* became codified.

Many of the verses of the Quran are concerned with questions of Law but not all the injunctions of the *Sharīᶜah* are explicitly stated in it. About eighty verses are directly connected with specific aspects of the Law. For example, regulations about marriage, divorce and inheritance are very clearly formulated while many other questions are only implicitly stated. There are many universal statements which needed further explanation before they could become specific guides for human action. This explanation and clarification was provided for the most part by the Prophet, whose lifetime marks the first and most important period in the process of the codification of the *Sharīᶜah*.

The Prophet, as we have already pointed out, was the interpreter *par excellence* of the teachings of the Quran and participated himself in the formation of the *Sharīᶜah*. His manner of applying the tenets of Islam to particular instances marked the first phase in the life of the *Sharīᶜah* in human society and inaugurated the life of a new society which was molded by its teachings. This is particularly true of the Medinan community, where the Prophet broke the pre-existing tribal bonds and established the new Islamic order setting up precedents which have served as a model for all later Muslim jurists.

This unique period in Islamic history was followed by the rule of the first four caliphs, usually called the "orthodox caliphs" (*al-khulafāᵓ al-rāshidūn*) as far as Sunni Islam is con-

cerned, and the rule of ᶜAlī, the fourth of these caliphs and the first Imam, according to the perspective of Shiᶜism. During this period the teachings of the Quran and the precedent of the Prophet were applied not only to conditions that had existed before but to new situations brought about by the rapid spread of Islam outside the homogeneous atmosphere of Arabia. The conquest of parts of the Byzantine Empire and the overthrow of the Sassanid Empire provided many new problems to whose solutions the earlier established principles were applied by men all of whom had been companions of the Prophet, by men whose interest was more in serving Islam than in serving any worldly power. During this period, therefore, many procedures were established which also became incorporated into the body of the Law.

With the establishment of the Umayyads a new situation arose, one in which a powerful state ruling from Central Asia to Spain and faced with unprecedented administrative and financial problems was interested first and foremost in preserving its political dominion over a vast territory. From the point of view of statesmanship the Umayyads performed a remarkable task of keeping the empire together, but from the religious point of view their rule marks a definite failing away from the earlier period. They were not concerned, like the early caliphs, with preserving the Divine Law and applying it. They were interested first and foremost with ruling and administrating the new empire. They dealt with most questions of Law from the point of view of expediency.

During the nearly hundred years of Umayyad rule the responsibility of preserving and administering the *Sharīᶜah* lay upon the shoulders of individual judges (*qāḍīs*) who were the real interpreters of the Law at this time. There are records of them, especially those of Egypt, contained in the chronicles of al-Kindī. These sources reveal how these judges dealt with questions of Law on a day-to-day basis, trying to apply the precedents of earlier Muslim generations, and especially the Quran and *Ḥadīth*, to whatever new situation confronted them.

But there was a reaction on the part of the religious com-

munity—Sunni and Shi^{c}ah alike—against the practices of the Umayyads which, of course, contributed greatly to their downfall. Towards the end of Umayyad period everyone realized that the Muslim community and especially the state were moving away from Islamic ideals. The religious conscience of the whole community, and especially the Shi^{c}ah, who had never accepted Umayyad rule, reacted against the practices of the state and with the coming of the Abbasids there was a sudden burst of activity for the purification of political and social practices and the codification of the Divine Law as established in the Quran and *Ḥadīth*.

It was at this crucial stage that several men of great legal genius and religious integrity came upon the scene to codify the Law. Because of the vastness of the Islamic community a judge in Khurasan was not faced with the same daily problems as one in the Maghrib, nor one in Kufa with the same situation as that confronted in Medina. These last two cities were particularly important in the development of the Law. Medina was an Arab city where some of the old tribal and family bonds still survived, whereas Kufa had come into being during the Islamic period. There, Arabs, Persians and local Aramaic people had come together to form a new society which was held together by the common ideals of Islam. Yet, both cities had been sites of early Muslim rule and provided the required background for anyone who wanted to study the practices of the early Muslim community. From these two cities in fact arose the first two founders of Sunni law, Imam Ibn Mālik from Medina and Imam Abū Ḥanīfah from Kufa. These men established schools of law by making a careful study of the Quran and *Ḥadīth* and the practices of the earlier generations. Basing themselves on meticulous study, they composed compendia of Law in which the teachings of the *Sharī^{c}ah* as they pertain to all aspects of life were delineated and systematized.

There was at this point still a need to have the principles and methods of jurisprudence systematized and a final form given to the process of promulgating the Law. Such a need was fulfilled by Imam al-Shāfi^{c}ī whose particular genius in this

domain gave to Sunni Islam the most satisfying and one might say beautiful method of jurisprudence. Al-Shāfiᶜī made it clear that the *Ḥadīth* was not only an aid to understanding the Quran but also a source of the *Sharīᶜah* itself. The clarification of the role of *Ḥadīth* in the *Sharīᶜah* is due to him more than to anyone else, as are the respective positions of *ijmāᵓ* and *qiyās*. With al-Shāfiᶜī Islamic jurisprudence found its most complete and lasting systematization.

In the tradition of Imam al-Shāfiᶜī, who founded the third school of Sunni Law, there grew students each of whom emphasized a certain aspect of the sources of the *Sharīᶜah* such as Imam Ibn Ḥanbal, who relied essentially on prophetic *Ḥadīth* after the Quran and discounted *ijmāᵓ* and *qiyās*, and Dāᵓūd ibn Khalaf who believed that the external (*ẓāhirī*) meaning of the Quran alone should be followed and founded the Ẓāhirī school. The school of Ibn Ḥanbal became the fourth accepted school of Sunni Law with its characteristic disdain of rationalist methods and complete reliance upon *Ḥadīth* literature while the Ẓāhirī school gradually disappeared.

The four important schools of Sunni Law, the Mālikī, Ḥanafī, Shāfiᶜī and Ḥanbalī, that constitute the accepted schools of *Sharīᶜah* to the present day in the Sunni world, thus came into being in the third Islamic century. Of these, the one with the least number of followers is the Ḥanbalī school which for long had its center in Egypt and Syria and from whose background the Wahhābī movement began. The Shāfiᶜī school has always been strong in Egypt and among the Malay people and to a certain extent in Syria. The Malikī school is completely dominant in North Africa and its followers constitute the most homogeneous body in the realm of Sunni Law. As for the Ḥanafī school, it was the official school of the Ottomans and is widespread in Turkey, the eastern part of the Arab world and the Indo-Pakistani Sub-continent.

As far as Law in the Shiᶜite world is concerned, its formation goes back to the fifth and sixth Imams, especially the sixth Imam Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq, so that Twelve-Imam Shiᶜite Law is often called Jaᶜfarī Law. There is here one difference with

Sunni Law in that in both Twelve-Imam Shi^{c}ism and Ismā^{c}īlism the Imams are the interpreters of the Law and their words and sayings form a part of the *Ḥadīth* literature in addition to the utterances of the Prophet, although the distinction between the two is preserved. The Law is, therefore, in principle, continuously being made in as much as the Imam is always alive. The Imam of Ismā^{c}īlism continues to live on earth from generation to generation while in Twelve-Imam Shi^{c}ism the Imam is in occultation (*ghaybah*), although he is alive and rules the world, being in inner contact with the *mujtahids* or those who provide fresh codifications and views of the Law.

In Twelve-Imam Shi^{c}ism those who have attained a high stage of proficiency in the science of the Law and possess the other traditional requirements become *mujtahids*, that is, those who can practice *ijtihād* or exercise their opinion in questions of Law. They are living interpreters of the Law who interpret it in the absence of the Imam and in his name. Every Shi^{c}ite believer must follow a living *mujtahid,* whose duty it is to apply and interpret the Law from generation to generation. The gate of *ijtihād* has been closed in the Sunni world since the formation of the four schools of Law, whereas in Shi^{c}ism, the gate must of necessity be always open. But of course this does not by any means detract from the immutable and transcendent nature of the *Sharī^{c}ah*. It only means that in each generation the Law should be applied to the new circumstances that are faced on the basis of the immutable principles of the Law. The practice of *ijtihād* in the spirit of Islam does not mean to change the Law to suit the convenience of men but to face and solve every new situation and problem in conformity with the teachings of the *Sharī^{c}ah* by applying those teachings to newly arisen problems. Shi^{c}ism is there to prove that *ijtihād* in the true sense does not by any means imply the abandonment of the Divine Law to human whims and fancies as some would like to make it today.

As far as the specific teachings of the *Sharī^{c}ah* are concerned, the Sunni and Shi^{c}ite schools are nearly the same, except in the question of certain religious taxes and inheritance

where, according to Shiᶜite Law, in certain cases the female line inherits more than in Sunni Law. Otherwise, there is little disagreement between them. As for the different Sunni schools, each emphasizes certain aspects of jurisprudence. For example, the Ḥanafīs rely more on *qiyās* and the Ḥanbalīs on *Ḥadīth,* but the differences are relatively slight and one can go from one school to another without any difficulty. It is also of interest to cite in this context the attempt of the Persian king Nādir Shah who some two centuries ago tried to make Jaᶜfarī Law a fifth school of Law in Islam and thereby bring about a concordance between Sunnism and Shiᶜism. Mainly for political reasons, however, his plan was not accepted by the Ottoman caliph and did not bear any fruit. A similar attempt is being made in certain quarters today as seen by the teaching of Jaᶜfarī Law at al-Azhar and different movements for the rapprochement between Sunnism and Shiᶜism.

More essential than the process of codification of the *Sharīᶜah* is its actual content and substance. The *Sharīᶜah* possesses the quality of totality and comprehensiveness. It encompasses the whole of man's life so that from the Islamic point of view there is no domain that lies outside of it, even if such an ideal be not easy to realize completely in human society. The lack of words in Arabic, Persian and other languages of the Islamic people for temporal or secular matters is due to this total nature of the *Sharīᶜah* and of course of Islam as a whole.

Nevertheless, the Divine Law is comprised of branches depending on the particular aspect of life with which it is concerned. Most of the traditional scholars have divided it into two branches, one dealing with acts of worship (*ᶜibādāt*) and the other treating of transactions (*muᶜāmalāt*). This classical division has led certain modernists to the conclusion that the first part of the *Sharīᶜah* can be preserved while the second can be secularized or at least changed as one sees fit. From the point of view of the *Sharīᶜah*, however, these two branches cannot be completely divorced from each other. Such acts of worship as the congregational prayer or fasting have a definite social aspect and involve the whole of the community, whereas how

one deals in the market-place directly affects the quality and intensity of one's worship. There is no way to separate completely what concerns the relation between man and God from man's relation to other men. The two are inextricably intertwined and the spirit of the *Sharīᶜah* is precisely to preserve the unity of human life, albeit it has branches which apply to different domains, individual as well as social. To understand the content of the *Sharīᶜah,* it is therefore best to analyze its injunctions as they pertain to each particular domain of human life.

Politically, the *Sharīᶜah* contains definitive teachings which form the basis of Islamic political theory. In the Islamic view God is ultimately the only legislator. Man has no power to make laws outside the *Sharīᶜah*; he must obey the laws God has sent for him. Therefore, any ideal government from the point of view of the *Sharīᶜah* is devoid of legislative power in the Islamic sense. The function of the government is not to legislate laws but to execute God's laws. The cardinal reality is the presence of the Divine Law which should be administered in society.

As to the question of who the ruler in Islamic society should be, classical Sunni and Shiᶜite theories differ. For classical Twelve-Imam Shiᶜism there is no perfect government in the absence of the Mahdī or Twelfth Imam. In such a situation a monarchy or sultanate that rules with the consent of the *ᶜulamāᵓ* was considered the best possible or more exactly the least imperfect form of government in circumstances which by definition cannot be perfect. In Sunnism it was the caliphate that is considered as the legitimate form of rule. The caliph was the *khalīfah* or vice-gerent not of God but of His Prophet and then only of that aspect of the function of the Prophet which was concerned with administering the Divine Law. The function of the caliph was to guard and administer the *Sharīᶜah*, and he stood as the symbol of the rule of the *Sharīᶜah* over human society. Islam is not technically speaking a theocracy but a nomocracy, that is a society ruled by Divine Law.

Since there is only one Islamic people or "Muḥammadan Community" (*ummah muḥammadiyyah*), naturally there should be only one caliph who should rule, over the whole *ummah*. But what is essential to the preservation of the unity of the Islamic community is not so much the number of caliphs as the *Sharīᶜah* itself. When one glances over pages of Islamic history, it becomes clear that after the first four caliphs, the Umayyads were mostly like ordinary rulers. Some like Yazīd even broke the tenets of the *Sharīᶜah* in their personal lives and many of them were tyrants. But the difference between them and a modern tyrant is that in the Umayyad period the *Sharīᶜah* was nevertheless applied while in modern times in many a land the attempt is being made to destroy the *Sharīᶜah* itself.

After the Umayyad period the Western lands of Islam refused to pay allegiance to the Abbasids and soon there were several rulers and even caliphs in the Muslim world. Moreover, with the destruction of the Abbasid caliphate by Hülagü even the symbolic political unity of Islam was destroyed. But throughout these changes the *ᶜulamāᵓ*, and also the Sufi orders in most lands of Islam, succeeded in guarding the *Sharīᶜah* even before the Mongol onslaught. Therefore, in all these instances the unity of Islam was preserved by virtue of the preservation of the *Sharīᶜah*. Although there was no longer a single political power ruling over the whole Muslim world, the same laws were being administered in the courts of Morocco as in Northern India. The rule of Divine Law continued to preserve the unity of the community and to guarantee its Islamic nature.

Of course during the course of Islamic history Sunni political theory itself was revised in the light of events. With the appearance of powerful kings or sultans who soon became the real rulers of the land and possessed more power than the caliphs, a new situation arose. During the Seljūq period the Sunni political theoreticians recognized instead of the dual structure of *Sharīᶜah* and caliph, a tripartite political pattern in which there was the *Sharīᶜah*, the caliph who symbolized its

rule, and the sultan who actually ran the affairs of state. Some of the Muslims in India even continued to recite the name of the Abbasid caliph in the Friday sermons, as a symbol of the rule of the *Sharī*ᶜ*ah*, after the Abbasid caliphate itself had been destroyed. The essential element that survived throughout the centuries was the *Sharī*ᶜ*ah,* so that the essential nomocratic nature of Islamic society was maintained and political turmoil, even on as colossal a scale as the Mongol invasion, were not able to destroy the unity of the Islamic community which the *Sharī*ᶜ*ah* both inculcated and preserved.

In the domain of economics, also, the *Sharī*ᶜ*ah* contains both specific instructions and general principles. It legislates certain forms of taxation such as *zakāh*—and for the Shiᶜah also *khums*—which have been paid over the ages by devout Muslims. But in general the *Sharī*ᶜ*ite* laws of taxation have not been the only ones to have been applied. Look at land tax for example. In Syria, from Umayyad times, taxes were collected according to Byzantine precedents and in Persia in accordance with Sassanid laws. After the Mongol invasion in certain villages land tax was collected even according to Mongol regulations.

In a more general sense the economic teachings of the *Sharī*ᶜ*ah* are based on the respect for private property and, at the same time, opposition to extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a single person or group. Usury is specifically forbidden and the paying of *zakāh* itself has the function of "purifying" one's wealth (*zakāh* itself being derived from the root *zky* meaning "purify") and also distributing some of it among the rest of the members of society through the "Muslim public treasury" (*bayt māl al-muslimīn*). The emphasis on the sacrosanct nature of private property is also clearly stated in the Quran. In fact the economic legislation of the Quran could not be applied were there to be no private property. According to the *Sharī*ᶜ*ah* man is given the right to own property by God and the possession of property is necessary for the fulfillment of his soul in this world provided he keeps within the teachings of the *Sharī*ᶜ*ah*. Those who interpret the teachings of Islam in a pure-

ly socialistic sense oppose the very text of the Quran which instructs man as to what he should do with his possessions. The Quran could not legislate about property if it did not accept the legitimacy of private property.

Altogether, of all the aspects of the *Sharīᶜah* its political and economic teachings are perhaps those that have been least perfectly realized throughout Islamic history. But they have always stood as the ideal to be reached although they cannot be fully achieved considering the imperfections of human nature. The general spirit of *Sharīᶜite* teachings, however, is deeply ingrained in the political aspirations and economic life of Muslims. For example, although specific forms of taxation may not have been followed and non-*Sharīᶜite* taxes may have been levied, the general economic principles of the *Sharīᶜah* have been realized to a great extent throughout history among traditional merchants and in craft guilds.

As far as the social teachings of the *Sharīᶜah* are concerned, they comprise a vast subject which one cannot treat fully here. Altogether the *Sharīᶜah* envisages a "dynamic" society, not in the modern proletarian sense, but in a traditional one. Before the rise of Islam there was an Arab aristocracy as well as a Persian one. Islam, by remolding society, did not destroy quality but made faith itself the criterion of man's worth according to the well-known Quranic verse, "Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct" (49:13).

By upholding the primary value of religion Islam made it possible for man to climb the scale of social "classes" through mastery in the religious sciences. A person who was gifted could become one of the *ᶜulamāᵓ* and enjoy a respect greater than that afforded to a prince. Likewise, the Sufi orders have preserved a spiritual hierarchy in which the rank of a person depends upon his spiritual qualifications and not upon his social standing. The Sufi masters and saints have been the most venerated of men, respected by king and beggar alike.

In fact, up to modern times not only has the religious path of climbing the social scale been well preserved but learning itself has been a way to advance one's social position. Even if

learning and education be secular today, they continue to bear the prestige of religious education in the eyes of Muslim society at large. There are numerous men who hold positions of power in various Muslim lands whose father or grandfather may have been simple store keepers who sent their children to school and the children through their own capabilities were able to take maximum advantage of the education offered to them and have become leading figures in society. This fact is as true of Islamic society throughout its history as it is now. How many wazirs and even kings has the Islamic world seen who became the most powerful figures in the land through their own capabilities and not as a result of family background alone? The *Sharīᶜah* by stressing the quality of religious faith as the criterion of human value created a "dynamic" society, one which, however, was not quantitative and did not suppress quality in terms of a supposed egalitarianism as we find in so many contemporary societies.

One could in fact say, quoting a contemporary sage, that Islam "is a democracy of married monks," that is, a society in which equality exists in the religious sense in that all men are priests and stand equally before God as his vice-gerents on earth. But he who is more able to realize his real nature and function is qualitatively superior to one for whom being in the human state is only accidental. The equality of men is not in their qualities, which obviously are different from one person to the next, but in that for all men the possibility of realizing their theomorphic nature and fulfilling the purpose of human existence is ever present.

From the point of view of social structure, the teachings of the *Sharīᶜah* emphasize the role of the family as the unit of society, family in the extended sense not in its atomized modern form. The greatest social achievement of the Prophet in Medina was precisely in breaking the existing tribal bonds and substituting religious ones which were connected on the one hand with the totality of the Muslim community and on the other with the family. The Muslim family is the miniature of the whole of Muslim society and its firm basis. In it the man or

father functions as the imam in accordance with the patriarchal nature of Islam. The religious responsibility of the family rests upon his shoulders. He is in a sense the priest in that he can perform the rites which in other religions are reserved for the priestly class. In the family the father upholds the tenets of the religion and his authority symbolizes that of God in the world. The man is in fact respected in the family precisely because of the sacerdotal function that he fulfills. The rebellion of Muslim women in certain quarters of Islamic society came when men themselves ceased to fulfill their religious function and lost their priestly and patriarchal character. By becoming themselves denatured they caused the ensuing reaction of revolt among certain women who no longer felt the authority of religion upon themselves.

The traditional family is also the unit of stability in society, and the four wives that a Muslim can marry, like the four-sided Kaᶜbah, symbolize this stability. Many have not understood why such a family structure is permitted in Islam and attack Islam for it, as if polygamy has been practiced with Islam alone. Here again modernism carries with it the prejudice of Christianity against polygamy to the extent that some have even gone so far as to call it immoral and prefer prostitution to a social pattern which minimizes all promiscuous relations to the extent possible. The problem of the attitude of Western observers is not as important as that segment of modernized Muslim society which itself cannot understand the teachings of the *Sharīᶜah* on this point, simply because it uses as criteria categories borrowed from the modern West.

There is no doubt that in a small but significant segment of Muslim society today there is a revolt of women against traditional Islamic society. In every civilization a reaction comes always against an existing force or action. The Renaissance adoration of nature is a direct reaction to the dominant medieval Christian conception of nature as a domain of darkness and evil to be shunned. In Islam also the patriarchal and masculine elements in the tradition make the revolt of those women who have become aggressively modernized more violent

and virulent than let us say in Hinduism, where the maternal element has always been especially emphasized. What many modernized Muslim women are doing in rebelling against the traditional Muslim family structure is to rebel against fourteen centuries of Islam itself, although many may not be aware of the inner forces that drive them on. It is the patriarchal aspect of Islam that makes the reaction of some modernized women today so vehement. Although very limited in number, they are in fact, more than many Muslim men, thirsting for all things Western. They seek to become modernized in their dress and habits with an impetuosity which would be difficult to understand unless one considers the deep psychological factors involved. Such women must, moreover, be clearly distinguished from pious women in the Islamic world who are seeking to regain their rights according to the *Sharīᶜah* in situations where, because of local social customs, such rights have been denied or partially compromised.

From the Islamic point of view the question of the equality of men and women is meaningless. It is like discussing the equality of a rose and jasmine. Each has its own perfume, color, shape and beauty. Man and woman are not the same; each has particular features and characteristics. Women are not equal to men. But then neither are men equal to women. Islam envisages their roles in society not as competing but as complementary. Each has certain duties and functions in accordance with his or her nature and constitution.

Man possesses certain privileges such as social authority and mobility against which he has to perform many heavy duties. First of all he bears most of the economic responsibility. It is his duty to support his family completely even if his wife be rich and despite the fact that she might be economically completely independent. A woman in traditional Islamic society does not have to worry about earning a living. There is always the larger family structure in which she can find a place and take refuge from social and economic pressures even if she has no husband or father. In the extended family system a man often supports not only his wife, but also his mother, sis-

ters, aunts, in-laws and sometimes even cousins and more distant relatives. Therefore, in city life the necessity of having to find a job at all costs and having to bear the economic pressure of life is lifted from the shoulders of women. As for the countryside, the family is itself the economic unit and the work is achieved by the larger family or tribal unit together.

Secondly, a woman does not have to find a husband for herself. She does not have to display her charms and make the thousand and one plans through which she hopes to attract a future mate. The terrible anxiety of having to find a husband and of missing the opportunity if one does not try hard enough at the right moment is spared the traditional Muslim woman. Being able to remain more true to her own nature, she can afford to sit at home and await the suitable match. This usually leads to a marriage which, being based on the sense of religious duty and enduring family and social correspondence between the two sides, is more lasting and ends much more rarely in divorce than the marriages which are based on the sentiments of the moment that often do not develop into more permanent relationships.

Thirdly, the Muslim woman is spared direct military and political responsibility, although in rare cases there have been women warriors and rulers. This point may appear as a deprivation to some but in the light of the real needs of feminine nature it is easy to see that for most women such duties weigh heavily upon them, although there are exceptions. Even in modern societies which through the egalitarian process have tried to equate men and women, as if there were no difference in the two natures, women are usually spared the military draft except in extreme circumstances.

In return for these privileges which the woman receives, she has also certain responsibilities of which the most important is to provide a home for her family and to bring up her children properly. In the home the woman rules as queen and a Muslim man is in a sense the guest of his wife at home. The home and the larger family structure in which she lives are for the Muslim woman her world. To be cut off from it would be

like being cut off from the world or like dying. She finds the meaning of her existence in this extended family structure which is constructed so as to give her the maximum possibility of realizing her basic needs and fulfilling herself.

The *Sharīᶜah* therefore envisages the role of men and women according to their natures which are complementary. It gives the man the privilege of social and political authority and movement for which he has to pay by bearing heavy responsibilities, by protecting his family from all the forces and pressures of society, economic and otherwise. Although a master in the world at large and the priest of his own family, man acts in his home as one who recognizes the rule of his wife in this domain and respects it. Through mutual understanding and the realization of the responsibilities that God has placed on each other's shoulders, traditional Muslim men and women have been able to fulfill their personal lives and create a firm family unit which is the basic structure of Muslim society.

Besides its political, economic and social teachings, the *Sharīᶜah* concerns itself with what is most essential to every religion, namely the relation between man and God. The most central aspect of the *Sharīᶜah* is in fact concerned with the rites or acts of worship which every Muslim must perform and which constitute the ritual and devotional practices of Islam. Of these rites the most important are the daily prayers (*ṣalāh*) which, as we have seen, are the prop of religion. No act in the *Sharīᶜah* is as essential as the performance of these prayers. They are preceded by a call (*adhān*) and ablutions which mean not only a physical purification of the body but also the purification of the soul. Through them the dross of separative existence is washed away and man becomes ready to stand before God. He suddenly feels as if his body is infused with light and is re-instated in its Edenic purity.

The ablutions are followed by the prayers which take place, as is well known, at sunrise, noon, afternoon, sunset and night (all the times of prayer being determined astronomically and according to the rhythms of nature). The continuous repetition of the prayers at particular moments of the day and night

serves to break in a systematic fashion this dream of negligence in which man lives. Man lives in a dream; he is immersed in the world and forgetful of God. The canonical prayers interrupt this dream at least a few times each day. For a few moments they pull man out of that stream of thoughts and sensual impressions that is the world and make him stand face to face before God. Thus man realizes through these prayers his theomorphic nature, at least as long as he is performing the prayers. They become for him a precious shelter in the storm of life. Only the saint is able to live in prayer continuously and be awake at all times.

The canonical prayers should not be identified with individual prayers which are often added afterwards. In the canonical prayers man stands before God as the representative of all creatures. He prays for and in the name of all beings. That is why, as we have said, the verbs in the verses of the chapter "the Opening" (*al-Fātiḥah*) which constitute the heart of the canonical prayers are all in the first person plural, not singular. Man recites, "Thee (alone) we worship" not "Thee I worship." In these prayers man fulfills his function as the vice-gerent of God on earth and prays for all beings.

The canonical prayers are the heart of the *Sharīᶜah* and they are obligatory. Such is not the case of the Friday congregational prayers which are highly recommended especially in Sunni Islam but are not obligatory in most schools. The Friday prayers serve the function of creating social cohesion among believers and also of providing an opportunity for religious teachers to deliver moral and religious lessons. They have also always been connected with political authority and the name of the ruler mentioned in the Friday sermon has traditionally carried much prestige. Despite their great importance, however, the Friday prayers are not on the same level as the daily canonical prayers that can be performed at home or in a mosque or in nature for that matter, nature which is the primordial mosque created by God and which provides the perfect background for worship. The Friday prayers must be in a congregation and are usually held in a mosque; the canonical prayers can be per-

formed anywhere and are absolutely obligatory upon every Muslim.

After the *ṣalāh* or canonical prayers, the second basic act of worship that is obligatory for every Muslim—except the sick and the traveller—is fasting (*ṣawm*) during the holy month of Ramaḍān. Fasting is a recommended act in Islam but during this particular month it becomes an obligatory religious duty. The fasting from the first sign of dawn to sunset is not only abstention from food, drink and sexual pleasures but also from all evil thoughts and deeds. It is a rigorous means of self-purification. It is as if one were to wear the armor of God against the world and introduce the purity of death within one's body, that purity and incorruptibility which are like a crystal, hard and immutable yet transparent before light.

The ordeal of fasting has its spiritual significance first and foremost in that man consciously obeys a Divine command. But in addition it is the means by which man pulls the reins of his animal desires and realizes that he is more than an animal. As long as man follows his passions and inclinations completely he differs little from the animals, except that they are innocent and true to their nature while man is not. It is only when man exerts his spiritual will through asceticism against his animal inclinations that he realizes his higher nature. Even the sensual enjoyments become heightened through denial. The full satisfaction of the senses dulls them. Therefore, the experience of this month of fasting makes man more appreciative of the gifts that God has bestowed upon him and which he usually takes for granted. It is also a period of exercising charity in which man shares what he has with those who have less material blessings than he. But most of all it is a month of purification, a month rich in its graces, one during which the Quran itself was revealed, the "Night of Power" (*laylat al-qadr*) or descent of the Quran falling on one of the last odd nights of Ramaḍān. During this month the gates of heaven are more open and the Muslim individual as well as the community are able to purify themselves with the aid of Divine grace and renew the spiritual energy of society.

The pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*) is another obligatory act which may, however, be undertaken only when certain conditions are fulfilled. A man, if he has the sufficient means, should once in his lifetime make the pilgrimage to Mecca, which for Islam is the center of the world. The *ḥajj* with all the difficulties that it entailed and still entails, despite modern conveniences, is also a means of purification. Man journeys to the Center, to the house of God, there asking pardon for his sins and being purified through his repentance and the performance of the rites. Henceforth, he should try to live a devout life and when he returns to his homeland he brings the purity and grace (*barakah*) of the house of God with him. Something of the Center is thus disseminated in the periphery and through this yearly act the whole of the Islamic community is purified.

The *ḥajj* is also a remarkable way of achieving social integration. Every year over the centuries Muslims from all parts of the world have met and exchanged both ideas and goods during the *ḥajj*. They have realized the vastness of the Islamic world and have come to know the other parts of it better. The *ḥajj* has also played a role of great importance in the dissemination of knowledge from one part of the Islamic world to another, to the extent that a modern Western scholar has called it the first international scientific congress in history. But its importance is most of all to unify the Islamic community and spread the purity which lies at its heart to its limbs and organs.

As for the other major rites prescribed by the *Sharīᶜah*, *zakāh* and *jihād* or "holy war" as it is known in the West are the most important. The first is a way of paying "God's due" for whatever we receive. It is thus a form of sacrifice (*sacer-facere*—to make sacred), which purifies and makes lawful what one spends, giving to man's economic life a religious sanction. The *jihād*, which means literally exertion in the path of God and not war, is an occasional activity when carried out in the external sense, not like other rites which are always practiced. Its ever present significance lies in the "greater holy struggle" which, as we have had occasion to point out before, is a constant

struggle which every Muslim must wage against the evil and disruptive tendencies within himself.

Not only the *jihād*, but every injunction of the *Sharīᶜah*, has also an inner and spiritual meaning. The *ṣalāh* means to awaken from one's dream of forgetfulness and remember God always; the fast means to die to one's passionate self and be born in purity; the pilgrimage means to journey from the surface to the Center of one's being, for, as so many Sufis have said, the heart is the spiritual Kaᶜbah. The *zakāh* also implies spiritual generosity and nobility. These inner meanings do not negate the external teachings of the *Sharīᶜah* but complement and fulfill its spiritual aim. That is why the *Sharīᶜah* is the necessary and sufficient basis for the spiritual life. Every man must accept the *Sharīᶜah* in order to be a Muslim. And the highest spiritual castle in Islam, that of the greatest sages and saints, is based on the firm foundation provided by the *Sharīᶜah*. Man cannot aspire to the spiritual life, to walking upon the path to God (*Ṭarīqah*), without participating in the *Sharīᶜah*.

Certain modernists over the past century have tried to change the *Sharīᶜah*, to reopen the gate of *ijtihād*, with the aim of incorporating modern practices into the Law and limiting the functioning of the *Sharīᶜah* to personal life. All of these activities emanate from a particular attitude of spiritual weakness vis-à-vis the world and a surrender to the world. Those who are conquered by such a mentality want to make the *Sharīᶜah* "conform to the times," which means to the whims and fancies of men and the ever changing human nature which has made "the times." They do not realize that it is the *Sharīᶜah* according to which society should be modeled not vice versa. They do not realize that those who practiced *ijtihād* before were devout Muslims who put the interest of Islam before the world and never surrendered its principles to expediency.

In the Islamic perspective God has revealed the *Sharīᶜah* to man so that through it he can reform himself and his society. It is man who is in need of reform not divinely revealed religion. The presence of the *Sharīᶜah* in the world is due to the compassion of God for his creatures so that he has sent an all

encompassing Law for them to follow and thereby to gain felicity in both this world and the next. The *Sharīʿah* is thus the ideal Law for human society and the individual. It provides meaning for all human activities and integrates human life. It is the norm for the perfect social and human life and the necessary basis for all flights of the spirit from the periphery to the Center. To live according to the *Sharīʿah* is to live according to the Divine Will, according to a norm which God has willed for man.

5

THE *ṬARĪQAH*— THE SPIRITUAL PATH AND ITS QURANIC ROOTS

The *Ṭarīqah* or Spiritual Path which is usually known as *Taṣawwuf* or Sufism is the inner and esoteric dimension of Islam and like the *Sharīᶜah* has its roots in the Quran and prophetic practice. Being the heart of the Islamic message it, like the physical heart, is hidden from external view, although again like the heart it is the inner source of life and the center which coordinates inwardly the whole religious organism of Islam. The *Ṭarīqah* is the most subtle and difficult aspect of Islam to understand in depth from the outside, at the same time that its external effect is to be seen in many manifestations of Islamic society and civilization. Our task in this chapter is not to discuss the manifestations of Sufism in Islamic history but to delineate the essential principles of the *Ṭarīqah* and its Quranic roots. It is to outline the features that characterize Islamic spirituality of which the *Ṭarīqah* is for the most part the custodian and for which it provides the means of realization.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the *Sharīᶜah* is the Divine Law by virtue of whose acceptance man becomes a Muslim. Only by living according to it can man gain that equilibrium which is the necessary basis for entering upon the Path

or *Ṭarīqah*. Only a man who can walk on flat ground can hope to climb a mountain. Without participation in the *Sharīᶜah* the life of the *Ṭarīqah* would be impossible and in fact the latter is interwoven in its practices and attitudes with the practices prescribed by the *Sharīᶜah*.

Some of the traditional Sufi masters, especially those of the *Shādhiliyyah* order, have used the geometric symbol of a circle to depict the relation between these fundamental dimensions of Islam. From any point in space there can be generated a circle and an indefinite number of radii which connect every point of the circumference of the circle of the Center. The circumference symbolizes the *Sharīᶜah* whose totality comprises the whole of the Islamic community. Every Muslim by virtue of accepting the Divine Law is as a point standing on this circle. The radii symbolize the *Ṭuruq* (plural of *Ṭarīqah*). Each radius is a path from the circumference to the Center. As the Sufis say, basing themselves on a *ḥadīth*, there are as many paths to God as there are children of Adam. The *Ṭarīqah*, which exists in many different forms corresponding to different spiritual temperaments and needs of men, is the radius which connects each point to the Center. It is only by virtue of standing on the circumference, that is, accepting the *Sharīᶜah*, that man can discover before him a radius that leads to the Center. Only in following the *Sharīᶜah* does the possibility of having the door of the spiritual life opened become realized.

Finally, at the Center there is the *Ḥaqīqah* or Truth which is the source of both the *Ṭarīqah* and the *Sharīᶜah*. Just as geometrically the point generates both the radii and the circumference, so does metaphysically the *Ḥaqīqah* create both the *Ṭarīqah* and the *Sharīᶜah*, that *Ḥaqīqah* or Center which is everywhere and nowhere. The Law and the Way have both been brought into being distinct from each other by God who is the Truth and both reflect the Center in different ways. To participate in the *Sharīᶜah* is to live in the reflection of the Center or Unity, for the circumference is the reflection of the Center. It is thus the necessary and sufficient cause for living a wholesome life and being "saved." But there are always those whose inner constitution is such that they cannot only live in the

reflection of the Center but must seek to reach the Center. Their Islam is to walk upon the Path towards the Center. For them the *Ṭarīqah* is providentially the means whereby they can attain that final End or Goal, that *Ḥaqīqah* which is the Origin of all things, from which the integral tradition comprising the Law and the Way or the circumference and radii originate.

Although Islam in its totality has been able to preserve throughout its history a balance between the two dimensions of the Law and the Way, there have been occasionally those who have emphasized one at the expense of the other. There have been those who have denied the radii in favor of the circumference, who have negated the validity of the *Ṭarīqah* in the light of the *Sharīᶜah*. Some of them have had the function, as custodians of the *Sharīᶜah*, to defend it and its absolute necessity, while on another level they may have accepted or even participated in the *Ṭarīqah* themselves. Such men are called the *ᶜulamāᵓ al-ẓāhir*, the doctors of the Law, whose duty it is to guard and preserve the teachings of the Sacred Law. Others have gone to the point of negating the Way completely, being satisfied solely with an external interpretation of the religion. They are the superficial (*qishrī*) *ᶜulamāᵓ* who would break the balance and equilibrium between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions were they to dominate the whole of the Islamic community. But, although as a reaction against the modern West, a certain trend closely connected with such a view has gained ascendency in certain quarters, such a point of view has never prevailed over the total orthodoxy and has remained a peripheral position. For the vast majority of orthodox Muslims, the Sufi remains a devout Muslim who is respected for the depth of his religious life even if all that he does and practices is not known or understood by the rest of the community at large.

From the other side, there have been also those who have tried occasionally to break the balance in favor of the *Ṭarīqah* as if it were possible for the Way to exist in the world without the Law which serves as its outward shield and protects it from the withering influences of the world. In fact so many of the

movements which have ended in the creation of a sect or even deviation from and break with the total orthodoxy of Islam have come about as the attempt to exteriorize esoterism without the support of the *Sharīᶜah*. In general many a pseudo-religious and devious sect has begun from an esoteric background which, by breaking the protecting mould of the *Sharīᶜah* itself, has deviated from its original nature, resulting in either relatively harmless small sects or positively harmful pseudo-religions depending on the climate in which such movements have grown.

Islam in its totality, however, has been able to preserve this balance between the exoteric and the esoteric or *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl* as far as the Quranic interpretation is concerned. The larger orthodoxy of the Islamic community has always been able to prevail and prevent either the Law from stifling the Way or the Way from breaking the mould of the Law and thereby destroying the equilibrium of Islamic society. The religious and spiritual vitality of Islam has come from the presence of both these dimensions over the ages, which together have constituted an integral religious tradition capable of creating a religious society and the norms of the inner spiritual life. According to the well-known Sufi symbol, Islam is like a walnut of which the shell is like the *Sharīᶜah*, the kernel like the *Ṭarīqah* and the oil which is invisible yet everywhere present, the *Ḥaqīqah*. A walnut without a shell could not grow in the world of nature and without a kernel would have no end and purpose. The *Sharīᶜah* without the *Ṭarīqah* would be like a body without a soul, and the *Ṭarīqah* without the *Sharīᶜah* would be devoid of an external support and simply could not subsist and manifest itself in this world. For the totality of the Tradition the one like the other is absolutely necessary.

Many of the sayings of Sufi masters which on the surface seem to break or negate the *Sharīᶜah* must be understood in the background of the conditions that prevailed and the audience to whom they were addressed. If a Ḥāfiẓ wrote that one should throw away his prayer mat or an Ibn ᶜArabī wrote that his heart was the temple of idol-worshippers, it does not mean that

these masters were negating the Divine Law. Actually they were addressing an audience for whom the practice of the *Sharīᶜah* was taken for granted and they were inviting men to transcend the world of forms by penetrating into the inner meaning of the *Sharīᶜah*. There is a world of difference between a community where everyone practices the Divine Law and one where no one does so.

Today many want to transcend the world of forms without possessing the forms. They want to burn the scrolls, to use a Buddhist term, without having the scrolls. But man cannot throw away that which he does not possess. The Sufis who were inviting men to throw away the external forms were addressing persons who already possessed these forms. There was no danger of men falling below forms; the *Sharīᶜah* was always present to prevent such a danger. Today they are many who live without a religious form and mistake the transcending of forms from above with a falling below forms. The *Ṭarīqah* cannot be reached save through the *Sharīᶜah* and the apparent negation of the Path is not the *Sharīᶜah* itself but the limiting of the Truth to external forms alone. Nothing is further from the intention of the Sufis than to break the *Sharīᶜah* and to introduce a kind of individualism and revolt against religious forms which some modernists would like to carry out in the name of Sufism. The freedom which the *Ṭarīqah* provides through the acceptance and subsequent transcending of the forms of the Divine Law is the antipode of the quantitative "freedom" of rejecting the Divine Law altogether. One resembles the other only in the sense that Satan is the ape of God. Only a simple soul or one who does not want to understand can mistake one freedom for the other. One cannot reject an exoterism in the name of an esoterism which one does not possess. The tree is judged by its fruit and no better proof is needed of the futility of such an attempt than the bitter fruit that it has borne.

No better proof is needed of the inner connection between the *Ṭarīqah* and the *Sharīᶜah* than the fact that in many regions of the world Islam spread through Sufism. In most regions of India, in Southeast Asia, in China and in much of

Africa, Islam first spread through the personal example of Sufi masters and the establishment of a Sufi order. Only afterwards did the *Sharīᶜah* spread and Islam become widely accepted. Had Sufism been an alien intrusion into Islam, as many orientalists would like us to believe, how could it serve as a spearhead for the spread of the *Sharīᶜah*? It is the inner link between the Law and the Way that has made possible the spread of Islam in many areas through the Sufi masters and saints who have provided a living example of Islamic spirituality.

The role of the *Ṭarīqah* as the inner dimension of the *Sharīᶜah* has been even confirmed by some of the authorities and founders of the schools of Law who have emphasized its importance in purifying Islamic ethics. For example, it is recorded of Imam Mālik to have said, "He who learns jurisprudence and neglects Sufism becomes a reprobate; he who learns Sufism and neglects jurisprudence becomes an apostate; and he who combines both attains the realization of the Truth."

Also Imam al-Shāfiᶜī has said, "Three things are dear to me from your world; giving up of pretense; tempering of the personality with kindness; and following the path of the Sufis."

Not only an al-Ghazzālī who was a doctor of law, theologian and Sufi calls the Path followed by the Sufi the best of all paths, but even an Ashᶜarite theologian such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who was not himself a Sufi, calls the followers of the *Ṭarīqah* "those who are occupied with meditation and purification of their souls by bringing about its catharsis from material entanglements." He calls them the best group among men.

The same could be said of Shiᶜite sources with even greater emphasis because the sayings of the Imams, especially ᶜAlī, which are one of the foundations of Shiᶜite Law are also a basis of the Spiritual Path. As the representative of esoterism in Islam, ᶜAlī is, after the Prophet, the direct source of the *Ṭarīqah* in both Shiᶜite and Sunni Islam.

As far as the situation of the *Ṭarīqah* vis-à-vis Shiᶜism and Sunnism is concerned, it is a complex relationship which cannot be fully explained in just a few words. As a first step in

clarifying this relationship, it can be said that there are Sunnis who follow *taṣawwuf*, that is, belong to a *Ṭarīqah*, and there are those who follow only the *Sharīᶜah*. Likewise, there are Shiᶜites who follow only the Law and those who belong to a *Ṭarīqah*. Therefore, it can be said that the unity of Sufism or the *Ṭarīqah* transcends the division between Sunnism and Shiᶜism, which can be said to constitute together the circumference of the circle whose radii symbolize the Path. The *Ṭarīqah* exists in both the Shiᶜite and Sunni worlds and is adapted in each case to the environment in which it flourishes.

But the relation is made more complex by the fact that the first Shiᶜite Imam, ᶜAlī, is the esoteric authority *par excellence* himself and Shiᶜite doctrine and theology incorporate, even in the formal sphere, definitely esoteric elements. Shiᶜism itself contains esoteric teachings although it cannot be identified with Islamic esoterism or gnosis as such because it has its own form of the *Sharīᶜah* and exoteric aspect. Therefore, regarding this very delicate and complex situation it can be said that on the one hand the *Ṭarīqah* or Sufism exists within both Sunnism and Shiᶜism, while on the other hand Shiᶜism as a whole is a more esoteric interpretation of the Islamic revelation than exoteric Sunnism and contains in its teaching elements akin to those of Sufism.

As far as the final result is concerned the total structure of Islam remains unchanged; in both segments of the community, the Sunni and the Shiᶜite, the Law and the Way, or the *Sharīᶜah* and the *Ṭarīqah*, are present. It can even be said that if Shiᶜism is the "Islam of ᶜAlī," the grace or *barakah* of ᶜAlī is present in the Sunni world in the Sufi orders as well as the craft guilds which have been traditionally linked to the orders. The teachings of ᶜAlī and the other Imams which form, after the Quran and prophetic *Ḥadīth*, the foundation of Shiᶜism are also present in Sufism as it exists in the Sunni world. But these teachings are present in Sufism in the Sunni world, not as those of the Shiᶜite Imams but as teachings of representatives of Islamic esoterism as such. It cannot be said that Shiᶜism is the origin of Sufism. But it can be said that because there is but

one source of Islamic esoterism issuing from the revelation and the soul of the Prophet and in as much as ᶜAlī stands at the origin of Shiᶜism, and is at the same time the outstanding representative of Islamic esoterism, the sources of Shiᶜism and Sufism are nearly the same and they have many elements in common. It must not, however, be forgotten that Shiᶜism is not to be identified solely with Islamic gnosis but that it is a total orthodox interpretation of Islam which is meant for a human collectivity, and possesses, like Sunnism, both the *Sharīᶜah* and the *Ṭarīqah*.

Few Western scholars of Islam have realized that the roots of the *Ṭarīqah* lie in the Quran. Many years ago Massignon wrote that it is enough to read the Quran several times to realize that Sufism or the *Ṭarīqah* issues forth from it. Margoliouth also admitted to the Quranic origin of Sufism and of course Corbin, who had another point of view from that of most orientalists and who performed his research on Islam with a sense of personal participation, had confirmed this essential point many times. A later generation of scholars, such men as Michel Chodkiewicz, William Chittick, Carl Ernst and Vincent Cornell, have written about Sufism with full awareness of its Quranic origin as has the well known author on Sufi literature A. M. Schimmel. Nevertheless, numerous Western authors, perhaps because they do not want to admit to the presence of a real spiritual dimension in Islam, have come up with all kinds of theories to explain the origin of Sufism, theories which actually deal with the outward expressions of Sufism and not with the thing itself.

There are a number of Western theories about the origin of Sufism. which seem to become fashionable in a cyclic manner, each coming to the fore for a while only to be discredited, fall into disrespect and then be resuscitated anew. Sufism has been said to have originated as a result of the influence of Neoplatonism, Christian monasticism, "the Aryan reaction to a Semitic religion," Zoroastrianism and Manichaeaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and practically every other conceivable source. In each case some formal resemblance or perhaps even histori-

cal borrowing of a particular method or expression has been paraded around as new proof for the non-Islamic origin of Sufism. But almost always what has existed behind all these arguments has been the *a priori* assumption that Islam is not a Divine revelation and therefore cannot possibly have a genuine spiritual dimension of its own. There is also the age old belief in the West that Islam is just a simple and crude "religion of the sword" which has molded a social order by force, so that everything of a contemplative or metaphysical nature in it must have been borrowed externally.

What is overlooked by all proponents of the external origin of the *Ṭarīqah* is the actual nature of a spiritual path. A spiritual path is one through which man is able to transcend his own human limitations and approach the Divine. Therefore, the path itself cannot be man-made. For man to try to transcend human nature by something devised by man himself is logically absurd. Anyone who accepts the reality of the spiritual life must accept the fact that the spiritual way must contain within itself a grace which is not man-made, that it must ultimately be a path which God has ordained and placed before man to follow.

This basic truth can be applied to Sufism as well. Either the *Ṭarīqah* in Islam is a spiritual path which can produce sanctity, whose fruit bears testimony to its Divine origin through the spiritual fragrance that it carries; or it is borrowed from outside of Islam, that is, it is borrowed and devised by men and is therefore actually man-made in which case it is not a spiritual path at all and there is no use talking about it as such. If, however, it can produce saints and does possess spiritual efficacy, then that grace or *barakah* which makes spiritual transformation possible must be of Divine origin and, moreover, must come from the source of the Islamic revelation itself. It must possess the "Muḥammadan grace" (*al-barakat al-muḥammadiyyah*), for surely a Christian or Buddhist grace could not produce a Muslim saint who is the epitome of the religious genius of Islam any more than the "Muḥammadan grace" could produce a Buddhist or Christian saint. In both cases, however, the

grace of another traditional form would be, in exceptional circumstances, an aid towards the realization of the spiritual goal.

For those who deny the authenticity of all spiritual life such arguments may not be pertinent, but surely one cannot affirm the authenticity of, let us say, Christian spirituality and negate that of Islam by appealing to purely historical arguments. In each tradition the spiritual tree must have its roots in the origins of that tradition. Every Christian would consider as absurd the assertion that the spirituality of St. Augustine is Greek on account of his knowledge of Platonism and Neoplatonism since he knows that St. Augustine became a saint not through reading books of the ancient philosophers but through the grace of Christ. The Greek sages such as Plato and Plotinus provided for him a suitable language to express a truth which was Christian.

Some, however, do not realize that it is just as absurd to consider the spirituality of a Ḥallāj or Ibn ᶜArabī or Rūmī non-Islamic because they may have spoken of a love that resembles the teachings of Christianity or used a certain doctrinal formulation borrowed from Neoplatonism or Hermeticism. What made these men saints was not this or that idea which such and such a Greek or Christian sage may have expressed but the "Muḥammadan *barakah*," that real "Divine presence" which the methods and techniques of Sufism provide. They are fruits of the spiritual tree of Islam and no tree can give fruit unless its roots are sunk in the soil that nourishes it. In the case of the spiritual tree the "soil" must be the Divine revelation and the roots must be that direct bond which links each spiritual manifestation in a religious tradition to its origin.

To consider a somewhat different case, everyone knows that Sufism was influential in certain medieval Bhakti movements in India and some of the Hindu saints have composed mystical poetry based on Persian Sufi poems. But if these men were really saints and holy men, when they sat down and invoked "Rama" or some other Divine Name, it must have been the grace issuing from the Hindu tradition that was present and displayed its efficacy by turning them into holy men and saints

who are considered by the Hindus as the incarnation of the spiritual genius of Hinduism. It is not Sufi poetry that turns them into saints but the living presence of a spiritual current issuing from Hinduism itself, although in the case of medieval India, where two great religious traditions lived side by side, a person was touched sometimes by the grace of a spiritual figure from the other tradition. Yet, here again such an experience only affirms the fact that each tradition possessed its own spiritual norm which became fully displayed in its great saints.

If so much space has been devoted here to the refutation of the common orientalists' view of the origin of Sufism, it is because such a view distorts the vision of the whole structure of Islam and makes impossible the true appreciation of Sufism. Once Sufism is made to be a foreign borrowing, then Islam itself becomes, in foreign eyes, solely as a legal and socio-political system which no longer appeals to the deepest spiritual urge of man. The reason for the relative neglect of the study of Islam in the field of comparative religion today is precisely because its more contemplative aspects are neglected and often dismissed as not genuine. Also, Sufism itself cannot be appreciated in its true light and taken seriously until it is realized that the *Ṭarīqah*, the esoteric dimension of Islam, has its roots in the Quran, and like all aspects of Islamic orthodoxy is based on the twin sources of the Quran and *Ḥadīth*.

Before turning to an examination of how the *Ṭarīqah* is grounded in the Quran, it is of some importance to specify the meaning of the names given to those who follow the spiritual Way. As the *Ṭarīqah* itself means the Way, so does Sufism or *taṣawwuf* in Arabic denote that Divine Wisdom (*al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah*) which is preserved and propagated within the *Ṭarīqah*. Whatever the etymological origin of *taṣawwuf* may have been—whether it is derived from *ṣūf* (wool), which the early Sufis wore, or *ṣafā'* (purity), which they tried to realize or many other words which have been discussed in medieval and modern sources—its metaphysical significance is precisely "Divine Wisdom." In fact in the science of numerical symbolism (*al-jafr*) connected with the Arabic alphabet, *taṣawwuf* is

numerically equivalent to "Divine Wisdom." The Sufis themselves consider *ṣūfī* too central and sublime a term to have been derived etymologically from any other word.

He who participates in *taṣawwuf* is called *faqīr*, or poor, according to the Quranic verse: "And Allah is the Rich, and ye are the poor" (47:38), poor being understood in the sense of the words of Christ "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The *faqīr* seeks to realize the "Muḥammadan poverty" (*al-faqr al-muḥammadī*), that is, to realize that he has nothing, all comes from Allah; to realize that metaphysically he is nothing; Allah is the one and only Being. In the languages of the Islamic peoples a *faqīr* is not called a Sufi. That would be impolite, for a Sufi is one who has already realized the end of the Path, the Supreme Union. Rather, he is called a *mutaṣawwif*, he who participates in *taṣawwuf*. And then there are always those who only play with the teachings of Sufism without really participating in them. Such a person is called the *mustaṣwif* (he who pretends to Sufism) who, as a Sufi master has said, is like a fly flying around sweets.

Of course the Sufis are also called by many other names such as the "people of the Way" (*ahl al- ṭarīqah*), the "people who learn through allusion" (*ahl al-ishārah*), the "people of the heart" (*ahl-i dil* in Persian) and many other appellations, each of which corresponds to a certain aspect of the reality of Sufism. The *faqīr* is also called in Persian *darwīsh* (from which comes the English word dervish) and this term is used in general in other languages of the eastern lands of Islam. He is also called the *murīd* (he who seeks or wills to follow the *Ṭarīqah*). The spiritual master, whose presence is absolutely essential as the guide on the perilous journey towards spiritual realization, is also known by several names such as *shaykh* (elder or master), *murshid* (he who guides), *murād* (he who is sought) and in Persian *pīr* (meaning, again, elder). These are all technical terms belonging to the vocabulary of Sufism, each of which denotes an aspect of the spiritual life.

If we have avoided calling Sufism "Islamic mysticism" it is only because of the "passive" and "anti-intellectual" color that

this word has come to possess in most contemporary European languages as a result of several centuries of struggle between Christianity and rationalism, and also the passive nature of much of Christian mysticism. Sufism is an active participation in the spiritual path and is intellectual in the real meaning of this word. Contemplation in Sufism is the highest form of activity and in fact Sufism has always integrated the active and contemplative lives. That is why many Sufis have been teachers and scholars, artists and scientists, and even statesmen and soldiers. If we were to use mysticism in its original sense as that which is concerned with the "Divine Mysteries" and consider as mystics men and women such as St. Augustine, Hildegard of Bingen, Eckhart or St. Gregory of Palamas, then we could certainly call Sufism Islamic mysticism and the Sufis mystics. But then the current color given to this word would have to be removed and its original meaning re-instated. In any case it must be remembered that to practice Sufism is to follow a spiritual path based on the Quran and prophetic practice actively with the aim of gaining that illuminative knowledge (*al-ᶜirfān*) which is the ultimate goal of the Way. In fact Sufism is sometimes called *maᶜrifah* or *ᶜirfān*, especially when its doctrinal aspect is under consideration.

The *Ṭarīqah* has its roots in the Quran and prophetic *Ḥadīth* in both doctrine and practice. Doctrinally the Sufi seeks to realize the meaning of the *Shahādah, Lā ilāha illaʾLlāh,* and practically he seeks to emulate the life of the Prophet who is the prototype of Islamic spirituality and who realized the unity or *tawḥīd* implied by the *Shahādah* in its fullness. The Sufi begins by asking what does it really mean to say *Lā ilāha illaʾLlāh*. He discovers the answer by living a life in conformity with the example set by the Prophet who had fully realized the import of this testament. *Taṣawwuf* begins with the quest after the ultimate meaning of the fundamental doctrinal formulation of Islam.

The realization of Unity as contained in the *Shahādah* is achieved by the Sufi precisely through basing his life on that of the Prophet who is the prototype of the spiritual life in Islam.

No group of people in Islamic society have ever sought to emulate the life of the Prophet with the same rigor and intensity as the Sufis. Not only do the Sufis seek to live in their daily life according to prophetic Sunnah, but they also walk upon the Path in quest of the spiritual experience whose perfect norm is the nocturnal ascent (*al-miʿrāj*) of the Prophet.

On a certain night, while in Mecca, the Prophet was taken to Jerusalem and there ascended through the heavens, or the multiple states of being which the concentric heavens of traditional astronomy symbolize, to the Divine Presence itself. Accompanied by the archangel Gabriel, who was his guide, the Prophet journeyed through all the worlds until he reached a limit when the archangel refused to pass any further, saying that if he were to proceed further his wings would "burn," implying that the final stage of the journey was beyond even the highest degree of manifestation which is that of the archangel. Moreover, the Prophet accomplished this journey not only "mentally" or "spiritually" but also "physically." This implies that the journey symbolizes the integration of his whole being including the body just as resurrection is also bodily and, in another context, the Quran was received in the body of the Prophet.

This *miʿrāj* or ascension is the prototype of the spiritual journey of the Sufi who can, however, hope to accomplish it in this life only spiritually and not with his total being including the body. To journey from one stage of being to another, ascending the ladder of the universal hierarchy of being to the Divine Presence, is the goal of the *Ṭarīqah*, and it is based on the example of the Prophet. Many a Sufi has written of the spiritual significance of the nocturnal ascent such as the great Persian Sufi poet Sanāʾī whose *Miʿrāj-nāmah* ("Treatise of the Nocturnal Ascent") along with certain other Sufi sources served as an inspiration for Dante. The Florentine poet in his *Divine Comedy* employs the symbolism of journeying through the cosmos to depict the ascension of the soul towards God, describing a cosmos which, however, is Christian although the architectonic model Dante used came from Islamic sources.

Not only is the practice of the Sufis or people of the *Ṭarīqah* based on the life and example of the Prophet, but its foundation lies in the Quran itself which speaks of *islām* (surrender), *īmān* (faith), and *iḥsān* (virtue). Also in the famous ḥadīth of Gabriel the Prophet was asked what religion (*al-dīn*) is. He answered that it is comprised of the three elements of *islām, īmān* and *iḥsān*, the first of which has given its name to the religious tradition itself. Everyone who accepts this religion and surrenders himself to the Divine Will practicing the proscribed rites is called *muslim* but not every Muslim is a *muʾmin* or can call himself so. *Īmān* is a stronger degree of participation in the religion implying intense faith and attachment to God. As for *iḥsān,* it is an even more profound penetration into the heart of the revelation through the possession of that "virtue" which is not given to all. It is, in fact, that reality which the *Ṭarīqah* contains and seeks to inculcate in those who follow it.

Īmān is essentially faith in Divine Unity and acceptance of His prophets, revealed scriptures and the day of judgment and *islām* submission to the Divine Will. *Iḥsān* operates upon these two fundamental elements of the religion and transforms them into what is known as *taṣawwuf*. In fact, the Sufi masters have over the ages defined Sufism by the answer given by the Prophet in the *ḥadīth* of Gabriel when asked about the definition of *iḥsān* where the Prophet said: "*Iḥsān* is to adore Allah as though thou didst see him, and if thou doest not see him he nonetheless sees thee." This definition is essentially also that of Sufism.

What the *Ṭarīqah* teaches is precisely to worship God with the awareness that we are in His proximity and therefore "see" Him or that He is always watching us and we are always standing before Him. It seeks to bring the disciple into the awareness that he is always living in the Divine Presence. *Taṣawwuf* applies this virtue or *iḥsān* to both *īmān* and *islām*. *Īmān*, when transformed by *iḥsān*, becomes that illuminative knowledge that unites, that gnosis (*ʿirfān* or *maʿrifah*) which penetrates and transforms man. *Islām,* when seen in the light of *iḥsān,*

becomes extinction in the Divine (*al-fanā'*), the realization that before God we are nothing and He is everything.

Many a Sufi master has identified *iḥsān* with sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*) in religion. To possess this sincerity is to make one's religion central and to try to penetrate into its inner meaning with all one's being. Applied to the first *Shahādah*, *Lā ilāha illa'Llāh*, it becomes the means of attaining knowledge. All of metaphysics, all of the doctrine of the *Ṭarīqah*, is contained in the *Shahādah* and can be understood when seen with the eye of *ikhlāṣ* or *iḥsān*. Applied to the second *Shahādah*, *Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh*, it provides the spiritual virtues and attitudes which the *Ṭarīqah* seeks to inculcate and which alone make the realization of the Truth possible. The *Ṭarīqah*, therefore, contains two basic elements and two kinds of teachings, a doctrine about the nature of reality or metaphysics and a spiritual instruction about the spiritual practice and stages of the Path. Every Sufi text, in fact, is either the exposition of metaphysics and cosmology or the explanation of the spiritual virtues whose attainment leads man towards sanctity and the realization of his "God-like" nature.

Sufism, like every true spiritual way, is thus based on a doctrine and a method, on discernment and union. The doctrine teaches essentially that only God is absolutely Real; everything else is relative. It is a means of discernment. The method teaches the means of uniting with the Real. It contains the means of union. Both the doctrine and the method are essential and both issue from the two *Shahādahs* as seen in the light of that "sincerity" or "virtue" that belongs to the *Ṭarīqah*.

It can also be said that from another point of view the Way contains three elements all of which are necessary: doctrine, spiritual virtues and a spiritual alchemy, or means of transforming the soul and enabling it to realize the virtues and penetrate the doctrine. The *Ṭarīqah* contains all these elements which derive from the source of the revelation. Not only the doctrine and the virtues come from the Quran and prophetic *Sunnah*, but also that grace which is indispensable for the realization of the spiritual alchemy issues from the Prophet. It is that "Muḥammadan grace" (*al-barakat al-muḥammadiyyah*),

contained in the *Ṭarīqah*, that makes the spiritual journey possible. Together with the doctrine, the spiritual virtues constitute the spiritual Way in Islam, whose end is the realization of unity through "Muḥammadan poverty."

The doctrine should not, however, be mistaken for philosophy as this term is usually used in Western languages, although in the eastern lands of Islam philosophy, when connected with the name of such sages as Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā, is essentially wisdom or *ḥikmah* and therefore closely related to Sufi doctrine. The doctrine connected with the *Ṭarīqah* is not rationalistic philosophy in the sense that it does not seek to encompass reality in a rationalistic system. Rather, in its external formulation, it is theory (*theoria*) in the original Greek sense of vision and as it is still understood in Hesychasm in Christianity. It is an intellectual vision of the Truth along with a vision of the anatomy of the Universe and man's situation in it as well as of the Divine Attributes and Qualities. And it is a vision made possible through the instrument of the intellect.

The tragedy of modern Western philosophy lies, from the Islamic point of view, in confusing intellect and reason. The intellect to which the Sufi doctrine appeals and through which it is understood is that instrument of knowledge which perceives directly. It is not reason which is, at best, its mental image. *Intellectus* is not *ratio*. The latter can create and understand philosophy in the usual meaning of the word; only the former can understand metaphysics in its true sense which lies at the heart of the doctrine. To comprehend the doctrine is therefore not just to try to conform ideas to a rationalistic pattern. Nor is it to play with ideas and seek to perform any kind of mental acrobatics. It is a contemplative vision of the nature of things made possible through intellection. The doctrine or metaphysics would be the easiest thing to teach if all men could understand metaphysically as easily as they can reason. But in fact it is most difficult to explain precisely because only a few are capable of intellection. That is why even within the *Ṭarīqah* only a small number are capable of fully comprehending the doctrine.

Doctrine is in a sense the beginning and end of the Path. It comes at the beginning as a knowledge that is "theoretical" and at the end as one that is realized and lived. Between the two there is a world of difference. Every doctrinal work of Sufism is like a key with which a particular door is opened and through which the traveller must pass until finally, at the end of the road, he realizes in his being the doctrine that he knew "theoretically" at the beginning. There are those who belittle doctrine in the name of experience. But doctrine is absolutely essential, especially at the beginning of the Path when man is lost in the maze of distracting thoughts, and especially in modern times when the confusion in the mental plane makes the possession of a clear vision of the nature of things indispensable. The doctrine at the beginning is like the map of a mountain to be climbed. At the end it is the intimate knowledge of the mountain gained through the actual experience of having climbed it.

Also, in the same way that different descriptions can be given of a mountain depending on the angle from which it is being viewed, doctrine is often expressed in terms that may seem contradictory in certain external aspects. But the subject of all the descriptions is the mountain and the content of all the expressions of doctrine is the Truth which each formulation expresses from a certain point of view. In metaphysical doctrines there is no innate opposition, as in schools of philosophy, but complementary forms that reveal the same essence.

All doctrine, as already stated, is essentially the distinction between the Real and the apparent, the Absolute and relative, or substance and accidents. Its cardinal teaching is that only Allah is absolutely Real and consequently that this world in which man lives is contingent. Between God, who transcends even Being and whose first determination is Pure Being, and this world, which is farthest away from It, there are located a number of other worlds each standing hierarchically above the other in the scale of universal existence. Together they comprise the multiple states of being, which all receive their being from God, while before Him they are literally nothing. Man

thus stands before this vast number of worlds above him, and beyond them before the Divine Presence Itself which, although completely transcendent with respect to all domains of the Universe, is closer to man than his jugular vein.

The central doctrine concerning the ultimate nature of reality has usually been called *waḥdat al-wujūd* or the (transcendent) unity of Being. This cardinal doctrine, which is not pantheism, nor panentheism, nor natural mysticism as Western orientalists have called it, is the direct consequence of the *Shahādah*. It asserts that there cannot be two completely independent orders of reality or being, which would be sheer polytheism or *shirk*. Therefore, to the extent that anything has being it cannot be other than the Absolute Being. The *Shahādah* in fact begins with the *lā*, or negation, in order to absolve Reality of all otherness and multiplicity. The relation between God and the orders of existence is not just a logical one in which if one thing is equal to another the other is equal to the first. Through that mystery that lies in the heart of creation itself, everything is, in essence, identified with God while God infinitely transcends everything. To understand this doctrine intellectually is to possess contemplative intelligence; to realize it fully is to be a saint who alone sees "God everywhere."

Next in importance to the Unity of Being is the doctrine of Universal Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), which is its concomitant. Man, as envisaged in Sufism is not just "the rational animal" as usually understood, but a being who possesses in himself all the multiple states of being, although the vast majority of men are not aware of the amplitude of their nature and the possibilities that they bear within themselves. Only the saint realizes the totality of the nature of Universal Man and thereby becomes the perfect mirror in which God contemplates Himself. God created the world so that He might be known according to the sacred *ḥadīth*, "I was a hidden treasure; I wanted to be known, therefore, I created the world so that I would be known." The Universal Man is the mirror in which the Divine Names and Qualities are fully reflected and through which the purpose of creation itself is fulfilled.

The multiple states of being which man bears within himself make him a counterpart of the Universe, and for this reason one is called the microcosm and the other the macrocosm. Both reflect in their being and symbolism the Metacosm which is their source. This metaphysical reality is prefigured in medieval cosmology in which, in the Universe, the earth stands at the center surrounded by concentric spheres each of which symbolizes a degree of being which approaches God in an ascending order. At the highest sphere stands the First Intellect or Spirit (*Rūḥ*), above which there is the Divine Presence Itself. Within man the order is present but reversed in the sense that the "earth," or the most material part of him, is the body, which is also the most outward shell. Within lies the psyche, which in turn surrounds the inner soul, leading finally to the Spirit which reigns in the innermost center or heart of man. The heart is in fact called the "Throne of the Compassionate" (*ʿarsh al-raḥmān*), like the highest heaven. Man is constituted in such a way that he occupies a central position in the world and is able to realize the Truth contained in the doctrine by realizing the totality of the nature of Universal Man. Such a potentiality is always present and can become actualized if a person undergoes the spiritual discipline of the *Ṭarīqah* and realizes the spiritual virtues which are human ways of being in conformity with the Truth and realizing the Truth in oneself.

The spiritual virtues are, alongside with the doctrine, the indispensable element of the *Ṭarīqah*. They are the means through which man can attain the saintly life. The virtues in the *Ṭarīqah* are not, of course, the over-sentimentalized virtues which one finds in many religious circles in the West today and which have driven many an intelligent person away from religion. They are rather a manner of "being" the Truth, as the doctrine is a manner of knowing It. Ultimately all virtues belong to God. That is why without the spiritual virtues it is not possible to realize the Truth in one's life and in the substance of one's soul. Man is not just a mind that thinks, but a creature that exists. Therefore, both his knowledge and his existence

have to be transformed. The virtues are essentially Divine and not just man-made moral attitudes; they are "manners of being," which transform man's existence in conformity with his inner nature. They are apophatic virtues which must be realized if man is to bear the fragrance of spirituality.

The cardinal spiritual virtues in *taṣawwuf*, which, in fact, characterize spiritual life as such, are humility, charity and truthfulness, which are in essence the same virtues that characterize the Prophet. Humility in Islam does not mean a sentimental attitude of meekness which hides the pride of the ego. Nor does it mean the hatred of intelligence, as is so often seen in certain strands of Western religious thought today. There are those who hate intelligence in the name of humility and even consider gnosis as pride as if the gnostic were not called "he who knows by God" (*al-ᶜārif biᵓLlāh*), therefore, one who knows God through God Himself and not through purely human knowledge. To hate the intelligence is to hate the most precious gift that God has given to man. It is in Christian terms to sin against the Holy Ghost, and it is the attitude farthest removed from the real meaning of humility in *taṣawwuf*.

Humility as a spiritual virtue means to realize that God is everything and we are nothing, and on another level that our neighbor—which means not only man but every creature in the Universe—can teach us something through possessing a perfection which we do not have. It means that vis-à-vis God we realize our impotence and see the "nothingness" of the human before the Divine. With regard to our neighbor it means to live in constant awareness that, however perfect we might be, others have certain perfections that we lack, and therefore we should be humble before them. Humility is against that pride which blinds the ego to its own limitations so that it seeks to assert itself, not only before man, but even before God, forgetting its own pettiness and its utter reliance upon the Divine before whose majesty man is reduced to non-existence.

As for charity, as a spiritual virtue it is not that quantitative and materialistic charity that is so prevalent today. Many want to be charitable towards men without the concomitant

attitude of reverence towards God. Thus man who is the subject of charity becomes a two-legged animal whose physical needs alone are considered and his deeper needs, such as beauty and love, become ignored or are relegated to the category of luxuries. There is no common measure between spiritual charity, the charity of the saints, and the humanistic and materialistic charity that ultimately reduces man to the infra-human and which provides him with food and clothing while depriving him of shelter in the real meaning of that word. It teaches him how to walk, while depriving him of his eyesight, which alone could tell him where to go.

Islam considers the whole of man and believes that one should either concern oneself with the whole man or not bother to concern oneself with him at all. A charity which concerns itself only with the animal needs of man ends in doing more harm to him than no charity at all. The charity which is cultivated in the *Ṭarīqah* is, in fact, concerned not only with the external act and the moral attitude connected with it but also, and most of all, with a state of being. Man must be charitable, not because of any altruistic motives, but because ultimately he is himself in need of it, because it is in the nature of things.

The carnal soul of man or his separative existence weighs heavily upon his shoulders. Only the saint is able to offer his soul in sacrifice to God. And in giving himself to God the saint performs the greatest act of charity even if he were not to feed a single mouth. His presence in society alone is the highest charity for the human collectivity. As for other men, it is the act of performing a good deed that lifts the heavy burden of their carnal soul (*al-nafs al-ammārah*). In giving himself to others man is himself uplifted. However, this act of charity has a spiritual efficacy only when it is done with the awareness that all good comes from God and that without Him no act can be truly charitable. One must realize that the Universe is ultimately one and that man finds in all things his own inner self. Man must realize that in giving himself to God he gives himself to his neighbor and in offering himself to others he is offering his soul to God. Spiritual charity implies a melting of the solidified

soul so that it flows and expands to embrace all things. If humility is the death of something in the soul or its contraction (*inqibāḍ*), so is spiritual charity an expansion (*inbisāṭ*), through which man realizes his oneness with all beings, including not only men but all creatures.

The third virtue, sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), or truthfulness (*ṣidq*), is the culmination of the other two and is based upon them. This virtue, which in general characterizes Islam itself, means to see things as they are, in their true nature which does not veil but reveals the Divine. It means to see God everywhere. There is a *ḥadīth* according to which the Prophet saw nothing without seeing God before it, in it and after it. This is perfect sincerity. Truthfulness or sincerity is, therefore, the virtue by means of which man realizes unity or *tawḥīd* and lives in the constant presence of God. By acquiring this virtue he actually realizes as experience whose doctrine he comes to know "theoretically" at the beginning of the Path.

The operational technique of the *Ṭarīqah* for the realization of the virtues and the doctrine is based on the Islamic conception of man which has been outlined already. God created man "upon His own image (*ṣūrah*)" by virtue of which he possesses this theomorphic nature that so many men ignore although it exists within them. As a result of possessing this nature, man is given certain qualities which, in their fullness, belong to God alone. God is Alive (*ḥayy*), therefore man is given life. He has Will, therefore man is given free will, and He has the Quality of Speech or the Word (*kalimah*), so that man is given the power of speech. The *Ṭarīqah* bases its techniques on meditation upon those very Divine Qualities which are reflected in man but which, in their perfection, belong to God alone.

The Quran asserts that God created the world through His Word. "But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that He saith unto it: "Be" and it is" (36:81). The Divine Word, therefore, performs two functions; it creates and it transmits the Truth. The world was created by the Word and all revelation comes from the Word or Logos. It is also through the Word and the power of speech that man returns to God.

Human speech has the ability to express the Truth and of transforming man, thus "reversing" the process of creation from the point of view of its being separation and elongation from the Divine. According to Sufism, human speech has essentially two functions: to give a discourse on some aspect of Truth or to pray, the first corresponding to the function of the Divine Word as bringer of revelation and the second to its power of creating the world. In fact the very substance of the world is "prayer"; existence is "prayer." The world was brought into being by the "Breath of the Compassionate" (*nafas al-raḥmān*) so that its ultimate substance is the "Breath," which, in the human state, is connected intimately with speech and also prayer.

The primary spiritual technique of Sufism is therefore prayer, through which man returns to God, prayer in its most universal sense as it becomes ultimately unified with the rhythm of life itself. Prayer is essentially the remembrance of God (*dhikr*). It is in fact extremely significant that in Arabic the word *dhikr*, which is the basic technique of Sufism, means both invocation and remembrance. Invocation of a Divine Name, which is the most universal form of prayer and exists in other traditions as well, also brings about the remembrance of God and an awakening from the dream of forgetfulness. Prayer in this sense makes and transforms man until he himself becomes "prayer," identified with the *dhikr* which becomes his real nature and in which he discovers who he really is.

There are many verses of the Quran instructing men to invoke the Name of God, which in a spiritual sense can, however, be practiced only under the guidance of a master and through the aid of the discipline offered by the *Ṭarīqah*. Man is, in fact, guaranteed in the Quran that this is the means to approach God, for the Quran asserts: "Therefore remember Me, I will remember you" (2:152). Likewise, there are many *ḥadīth* concerning the importance of invocation, of which the following *ḥadīth qudsī* is an example: "He who mentions Me in himself I will mention him in Myself, and he who mentions Me in an assembly, him I will mention in an assembly better than his

[i.e., in Heaven]."

These Quranic and prophetic sources are the traditional basis for the Sufi practice of *dhikr* in all its forms. Through the practice of invocation man realizes the spiritual virtues and the doctrine and ultimately awakens from all dreaming, realizing his true nature and real self above and beyond all domains of contingency and limitation. If before he was man (*insān*) because of his *nisyān* or forgetfulness, now he becomes *insān* in the true sense because of his *uns* or familiarity with the Divine.

The means of dispensing the spiritual method is contained in Islam within the Sufi orders or *Ṭuruq*. These orders have preserved the means of spiritual realization from one generation to the next. In fact the efficacy of the method is guaranteed only by that regularity of the initiatic chain (*silsilah*) which goes back to the Prophet himself and transmits his particular *barakah* and initiatic power from generation to generation. The esoteric instructions of the Prophet were given to only a few companions who are the first Sufis. Only later, in the third Islamic century, did these groups become formalized into circles identified with a particular master. In conformity with the nature of the Islamic revelation, the circles of the *Ṭarīqah* and the schools of the *Sharīᶜah* became distinct and formalized at about the same time, although both reach back to the origin of the Islamic revelation and begin with the Prophet himself. As for the formal Sufi orders, they were organized some two to three centuries later.

It is the regularity of initiatic transmission within the Sufi orders that permits the "spiritual presence" or *barakah* to be ever alive and to operate the transmutation of the soul from the chaotic to the illuminated state. The methods of Sufism can, in fact, be practiced with safety only under the direction of a master and within an order. Otherwise, they can cause the deepest psychic disequilibrium. The danger of a fall in mountain climbing is much greater than when one walks on flat ground and it is in climbing a mountain, both the physical and spiritual, that man needs a guide unless he has himself climbed before and has become in turn a guide for others.

The importance of the *Ṭuruq* even on the social and external plane has been so immense in Islamic history that no student of any aspect of Islam can afford to neglect it. The relation of the orders with the craft guilds, with learning, with certain orders of chivalry and with the perennial renovation of the social ethics of Islamic society are too obvious to be overlooked. But the most important role of the *Ṭarīqah* is that it is the dispenser of that method and grace that make the spiritual life possible. Rooted in the Quran and the *Sharīᶜah* it is like a tree whose branches stretch outward towards Heaven. Its function has always been to reveal the inner meaning of the *Sharīᶜah*, to bring man to understand what it really means to be the slave (*ᶜabd*) of God, namely, to realize that He is everything and we are nothing.

The *Ṭarīqah* is based on a doctrine that is essentially a commentary upon the two *Shahādahs*, a set of spiritual virtues which are those that the Prophet possessed in their fullness, and on a method which is intimately connected with the rites of the *Sharīᶜah* and carries the meaning of prayer to its most universal and inward level. Its method and outlook combine fear, love and knowledge of God, all of which play a role in man's realization of his own spiritual nature. The *Ṭarīqah* is the Way of sanctity in Islam and it is the *Ṭarīqah* that has produced saints over the centuries to the present day, saints who keep society together and rejuvenate its religious life by revitalizing it from within with the spiritual forces which have brought the religion itself into being. The perfume of Islamic spirituality is never divorced from the life of those who walk upon the Way or the *Ṭarīqah* and who realize that supreme state of spiritual perfection which is man's end and the final purpose of his existence.

6

SUNNISM AND SHI'ISM— TWELVE-IMAM SHI'ISM AND ISMĀ'ĪLISM

Since every religion addresses a collectivity with varying psychological and spiritual temperaments, it must possess within itself the possibility of different interpretations. By bearing within itself, providentially, several modes of interpretation of the same truth, it is able to integrate a multiplicity into unity and to create a religious civilization. In traditional and pre-modern Christianity one finds the Catholic and Orthodox churches, not to speak of the smaller eastern churches such as the Coptic and Maronite. And outside the Abrahamic family there is Buddhism with its two major schools of Mahāyāna and Theravāda and in addition the Tibetan form. Without the Mahāyāna, or northern school, it is doubtful whether this tradition could have become dominant in the Far East. Likewise, Hinduism which, like a vast sea, contains within itself numerous spiritual forms, is again divided into the Shaivite and Vaishnavite interpretations to suit different spiritual temperaments.

In Islam, which is a world-wide religion meant for various ethnic and racial types, there also existed from the beginning the possibility of two different perspectives. Sunnism and Shi'ism are both orthodox interpretations of the Islamic revelation contained providentially within Islam in order to enable

it to integrate people of different psychological constitutions into itself. Both Sunnism and Shi'ism constitute an integral part of Islamic orthodoxy which existed from the beginning. Shi'ism is not heterodox nor is it a sect, although within the world of Shi'ism there have been groups who have deviated from the main orthodoxy and are sects in the real sense.

Neither Shi'ism nor Sunnism is a late revolt against an established orthodoxy and should therefore not be compared in any way with reform movements in Christianity or Judaism. In fact Sunnism and Shi'ism, belonging both to the total orthodoxy of Islam, do not in any way destroy its unity. The unity of a tradition is not destroyed by different applications of it, but by the destruction of its principles and forms as well as its continuity. Being "the religion of unity," Islam, in fact, displays more homogeneity and less religious diversity than other world-wide religions. Sunnism and Shi'ism are dimensions within Islam placed there not to destroy its unity but to enable a larger humanity and differing spiritual types to participate in it. Both Sunnism and Shi'ism are based on the assertion of the *Shahādah, Lā ilāha illa'Llāh*, expressed in different climates and with a somewhat different spiritual fragrance.

To say that Sunnism and Shi'ism were meant for different spiritual temperaments should not, however, be interpreted strictly in a racial or ethical sense. One should not think that a particular people has always been solidly Sunni and another Shi'ite. Of course, today the Persians are nearly all Shi'ite while most Arabs and Turks are Sunnis and these ethnic divisions do have a relation with the present distribution of Sunnism and Shi'ism in the Muslim world. But it must also be recalled that during the third/tenth and fourth/eleventh centuries the stronghold of Shi'ism was southern Syria and North Africa while Khurasan was the bastion of Sunnism. Such great champions of Sunni Islam as al-Ghazzālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī were Persians, and Ash'arite theology, which is often called "orthodox" Sunni theology, had its intellectual foundation and development, to a large extent, in the hands of Persians. Nevertheless, once this point is considered, it can be

said with safety that the Persians were generally sympathetic to the cause of Shi'ism from the beginning and it was in this land that, after the Mongol invasion, Twelve-Imam Shi'ism became gradually more dominant until, with the Safavids, it became the state religion. Without forgetting the large number of Arab, Turk and Indo-Pakistani Shi'ites, one can also add that the Persians form the largest body of Shi'ism in the world and Shi'ite Islam has an intimate connection with the Persian soul.

In dealing with Sunnism and Shi'ism in this chapter we shall speak more about Shi'ism, accepting Sunnism as the norm and background with which Twelve-Imam Shi'ism and Ismā'īlism are compared. The reason for this procedure is that Sunni Islam is much better known in the external world than Shi'ism, as the West has had more historical contact with Sunnism. In fact nearly every book in European languages concerning Islam studies it from Sunni sources, although, alas, usually not without distortion and prejudice. Until recently, Shi'ism, and especially the Twelve-Imam school, was nearly unknown in European works save for the writings of a very small number of scholars of whom the notable one was Henry Corbin. Moreover, in previous chapters most of what has been said concerns Islam in general and Sunnism in particular, so that it is natural that, in this chapter, after devoting a brief discussion to Sunnism we should turn our attention to Shi'ism whose beliefs we seek to clarify both in themselves and in relation to Sunnism.

In order to understand the Sunni and Shi'ite perspectives it is necessary to glance at the religious history of Islam, the development of these two dimensions from their common origin and their subsequent history. From an external point of view the difference between Sunnism and Shi'ism concerns the problem of "successor" to the Prophet as the leader of the community after his death. The two schools may thus be said to have begun as distinct entities when the Prophet finished his earthly career, because it was precisely at this moment that difference of opinion as to his successor arose. A small group

believed that such a function must remain in the family of the Prophet and backed ᶜAlī, whom they believed to have been designated for this role by appointment (*taᶜyīn*) and testament (*naṣṣ*). They became known as his "partisans" (*shīᶜah*) while the majority agreed on Abū Bakr on the assumption that the Prophet left no instruction on this matter; they gained the name of "The People of tradition and the consensus of opinion" (*ahl al-sunnah waʾl-jamāᶜah*). But more generally the Shīᶜah of ᶜAlī, in the sense of those who backed and followed him among the companions, already existed during the Prophet's lifetime and there are several references to them in prophetic sayings. Only with the death of the Prophet did they become crystallized as a group distinct from the Sunnis.

But the question also involved the function of the person who was to succeed the Prophet, for surely such a person could not continue to possess prophetic powers. Thus Sunnism considered the "successor" of the Prophet to be his *khalīfah* or caliph only in his capacity as the ruler of a newly founded community, while the Shiᶜites believed that the "successor" must also be the "trustee" (*waṣī*) of his esoteric knowledge and the interpreter of the religious sciences. That is why, although the difference between Sunnism and Shiᶜism appears to be only a political one, it is, in reality, more than that. It is also theological. There is a question of both political succession and religious authority.

Some recent works of orientalists have, in fact, tried to reduce the distinction between Sunnism and Shiᶜism to a sheer political one. Although this view is to a certain extent true, such a perspective leaves aside the more important religious and theological considerations involved. The question of who was to succeed the Prophet as the leader of the community was combined with two different conceptions of the qualifications of the successor and the meaning of religious authority itself. Sunni Islam considered the *khalīfah* to be a guardian of the *Sharīᶜah* in the community, while Shiᶜism saw in the "successor" a spiritual function connected with the esoteric interpretation of the revelation and the inheritance of the Prophet's eso-

teric teachings as well as the knowledge of the Divine Law and its interpretations. Thereby began the two different interpretations of that one Divine message, two interpretations which nevertheless remain within the total orthodoxy of Islam and are unified in the principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) and the religious rites, which are the means of grace for saving man and assuring him felicity in the hereafter.

As far as Sunnism is concerned, the development of some of its different aspects has already been outlined in previous chapters. The four main Sunni schools of law became established in the third/ninth century and have remained to this day while some of the less popular schools gradually died out. The science of *Ḥadīth* as a distinct discipline began in the second/eighth century with a written compilation of the first collection of prophetic sayings going back earlier to the time of the Umayyad caliph, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. It also became a fully established discipline in the third/ninth century when the authoritative collections were assembled. Likewise the religious and grammatical study of the text of the Noble Quran, which had been cultivated informally from the beginning, became a well-established discipline from the second/eighth century onward.

As for theology, whose full discussion would require a separate chapter, it began in the second century with the debates over freewill and determinism as well as over the nature of the Quran. The explicit Khārijite and Murjiʾite discussions of the relation of faith to works in the second century must also be considered as a beginning for later theological developments. But again it was in the third century that theology in the Sunni world became fully established with the Muʿtazilites who were dominant during the early Abbasid period. As is well known, the Muʿtazilites applied the use of reason to the understanding of the tenets of revelation and arrived at a conception of the Divine Attributes and the Quran which was opposed by the religious community at large so that within a few centuries they disappeared as an influential theological school.

Meanwhile, towards the end of the third century, Abuʾl-

Ḥasan al-Ashᶜarī, who had himself been a Muᶜtazilite, rebelled against their views and founded the dominant Ashᶜarite school of theology. Although the domination of Ashᶜarism is not as complete as is usually thought, nevertheless, to the extent that theology was cultivated in the Sunni world, the Ashᶜarite school became the most important force. Opposed to the rationalistic tendency of the Muᶜtazilites, Ashᶜarite theology believed in the subservience of reason to revelation but nevertheless encouraged a rational understanding of the faith. The Māturīdī school, which also developed about the same time as Ashᶜarism, chartered an intermediate course between the Muᶜtazilites and Ashᶜarites and although never widespread has continued to have adherents to the present day.

In addition to these schools of theology which grew in the Sunni world and have been taught in the traditional schools or *madrasahs*, one must also remember the role of the teachings of Sufism even in this domain. Not only were some of the early Sufis such as al-Muḥāsibī also theologians, but gradually, after the sixth/twelfth century, what one might call "mystical theology" based on the teachings of the Sufi masters entered into the general field of Sunni theology. Especially after the Mongol invasion, when much of religious education was administered by Sufi organizations, this form of instruction of spiritual doctrines entered into the curriculum of many religious schools. Henceforth in the Sunni world the teachings of Sufism in its intellectual aspect were often taught combined with the more external and formal Ashᶜarite theology. There have been many Sufi masters until modern times who have combined the exposition of Sufi doctrine with theology, especially Ashᶜarism.

An important aspect of Sunnism, especially as far as its comparison with Shiᶜism is concerned, is political theory. All Sunnis accept the first four caliphs, Abū Bakr, ᶜUmar, ᶜUthman and ᶜAlī, as true vice-gerents (*khalīfah*) of the Prophet who fulfilled this function in its fullness so that they are called the "rightly-guided caliphs" (*al-khulafāᵓ al-rāshidūn*). With the establishment of the Umayyad caliphate the name of the institution of caliphate was continued, but in

reality the Islamic caliphate was transformed into an Arab kingdom. That is why later Sunni jurists accepted only the first four caliphs as full embodiments of the ideal of the caliphate.

The political theory of the caliphate was, however, elaborately developed gradually, even if it was not practically realized to its fullness at the time of its elaboration. When discussing the theory of the caliphate, the Sunni political theorists usually referred to it as the imamate by which they meant the office of the person whose duty it was to administer the *Sharī'ah* and act as judge. But since this term is particularly associated with Shi'ism, it is better to refer to the Sunni institution as the caliphate and use the term imamate in connection with Shi'ism to avoid confusion.

The earlier Sunni authorities conceived of the caliphate as the legitimate political institution of the Islamic community. According to them as there is only one community (*ummah*) and one Divine Law or *Sharī'ah*, so is there ideally one caliph who rules over the community and whose duty it is to protect the community and administer the *Sharī'ah* in conformity with the view of the *'ulamā'*. Later, when the caliphate became weakened politically and powerful kings ruled over the Muslim world, this theory was somewhat revised to include the caliph, the sultan and the Divine Law as we mentioned earlier in this work. The caliph symbolized the unity of the community and the supremacy of the Divine Law, while the sultan held actual temporal, military and political power and was supposed to enforce and uphold the Law and protect the community. In both its phases, therefore, Sunni political theory is characterized by the institution of the caliphate whose task is not to interpret the Divine Law and religious matters in general, but to administer the Law and act as judge in accordance with this Law.

It is with respect to this general background majoritarian Islam that Shi'ism can be better understood. The Shi'ah are those who believe that the right of succession to the Prophet belongs solely to his family and who follow the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) as their source of inspiration and guidance for the understanding of the Quranic revelation brought

by the Prophet. The members of his family are the channel through whom the teachings and the grace, or *barakah*, of the revelation reach the Shi^{c}ah. In a sense one can call Shi^{c}ism the "Islam of ^{c}Alī," as Sunnism can also in a certain sense be called the "Islam of Abū Bakr."

Within this segment of the Islamic community called the Shi^{c}ah there are further distinctions to be made depending upon the number of Imams who are accepted after the Prophet. The main body of Shi^{c}ism, in both number and its centrality within the traditional religious spectrum, is Twelve-Imam Shi^{c}ism. Then there is the so-called Seven-Imam Shi^{c}ism or Ismā^{c}īlism and Five-Imam Shi^{c}ism or Zaydism. Twelve-Imam Shi^{c}ism is the official religion of Persia and the majority of the population belongs to this school. It also constitutes more than half the population of Iraq and has a substantial following in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Turkey, the Persian Gulf states and certain lands of East Africa. Ismā^{c}īlism is more diffuse in its geographic distribution. It has sizeable following in India, Pakistan and East Africa and smaller Ismā^{c}īlī communities are found in many countries such as Iran, Syria, and Egypt and more recently Canada. As for Zaydism, it is found today in the Yemen, where the majority of the population are Zaydis. There are also small groups such as the ^{c}Alawīs of Syria and the Druzes of Syria and Lebanon which have branched off from the main body of Shi^{c}ism into heterodox sects and, especially in the case of Syrian ^{c}Alawīs, have only a tenuous relation with Shi^{c}ism. The Shi^{c}ites constitute about fifteen percent of the total Muslim population, although the influence of Shi^{c}ism on the total intellectual and spiritual life of Islam is much greater than what this quantitative relation might imply.

In this chapter we shall limit our treatment to Twelve-Imam Shi^{c}ism and Ismā^{c}īlism which are the two most important branches, twelve and seven being, like the days of the weeks and months of the year or the planets and signs of Zodiac, archetypal numbers which determine the rhythm of human existence. In order to understand their doctrine, howev-

er, it is helpful, first of all, to gain some familiarity with their general history.

Upon the death of the Prophet a small group of men such as Salmān, Abū Dharr and Miqdād sided with ᶜAlī, while the majority of the Meccans, swore allegiance to Abū Bakr who was thus chosen as caliph. During his caliphate, as well as those of ᶜUmar and ᶜUthmān, the Shiᶜites or followers of ᶜAlī led a quiet life while ᶜAlī himself retired from public activity (although he advised the other caliphs when necessary) and devoted his time to the training and instruction of his disciples who, meanwhile, became more numerous. Then he became himself caliph and for a short period of five years the Shiᶜites realized their ideal to which they always look back, although the years of ᶜAlī's caliphate were full of hardship.

With the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty Shiᶜism entered into the most difficult period of its history during which it was openly and secretly opposed and often persecuted. Only the rule of ᶜUmar ibn ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz marks an exception to this general trend. Moreover, it was during this period that the grandson of the Prophet, Ḥusayn, was massacred in Karbalaᵓ marking a tragedy which has colored the whole subsequent history of Islam and particularly Shiᶜism. During the Umayyad period several Shiᶜite uprisings did take place which, however, were crushed each time. Yet, this very opposition weighed heavily upon the shoulders of the Umayyads and played a major role in their downfall.

The revolt of Abū Muslim in Khurasan was based on strong Shiᶜite sentiment and, in fact, he asked allegiance of the people for the "House of the Prophet." Yet, once the Abbasids came to power, their opposition to the Shiᶜah was hardly less severe than that of the Umayyads. Only at the beginning of the third Islamic century and especially during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Maᵓmūn did Shiᶜism have the opportunity to function relatively freely, in fact to the extent that the eighth Imam—ᶜAlī al-Riḍā—was chosen as the successor of al-Maᵓmūn. But after his poisoning and later the death of al-Maᵓmūn the situation became difficult once again, to such a degree that the new

caliph ordered the tomb of Imam Ḥusayn in Karbalaʾ to be destroyed and turned into a field.

The fourth century marks the first period in which Shiʿism really flourished. The Būyids, who were Shiʿites, controlled all of Persia and wielded power even in Baghdad. The Fāṭimids meanwhile conquered Egypt and established an Ismāʿīlī caliphate in North Africa that rivaled the Abbasid caliphate in power. Henceforth Shiʿism continued to flourish even after the coming of the Ayyūbids and the Seljūqs, both of whom were strong supporters of Sunnism. It is true that in certain regions such as Syria and the Lebanon, the failure of the Fāṭimids before the Crusaders, and the singular success of the Ayyūbids, particularly Ṣalāh al-Dīn, before the same forces, caused Shiʿism to decline in particular areas in favor of Sunnism, but in general between the fifth and ninth Islamic century Shiʿism spread gradually, especially in Persia, while it declined in Egypt and North Africa. The Ismāʿīlī movement of Alamut must also be mentioned in this connection although after the Mongol invasion it was outwardly crushed and went underground.

Meanwhile, the success of Twelve-Imam Shiʿism can be gauged by the conversion of the Il-Khānid king, Maḥmūd Khudābandah, to Shiʿism. Already the background was prepared for the Safavids, who in the tenth/sixteenth century, conquered all of Persia and established Twelve-Imam Shiʿism as the state religion. Under them, gradually, most of that country became Shiʿite and continues to be so to the present day. Meanwhile Shiʿism has persisted in the Yemen, which was separated from the main current of political events in other Muslim lands. In India, also, sizeable Twelve-Imam Shiʿah communities were established and even ruled for some time in the south. Moreover, India eventually provided a base for Ismāʿīlism, whose spiritual center finally found its home in that land.

In discussing Shiʿism it is logical to begin with the Twelve-Imam school because of its centrality and the balance it preserves between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of the rev-

elation. As far as the intellectual life of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism is concerned, it can be divided into four periods for the sake of convenience in studying it. This division has, in fact, been carried out by Corbin in his many studies on Shi'ism. The first period is that of the Prophet and Imams stretching from the life-time of the Prophet to the major occultation (*al-ghaybat al-kubrā*) of the Twelfth Imam, or Mahdī, in the year 329/940. During this period, which is unique in the history of Shi'ism, the Prophet and later Imams lived among men whom they instructed in the meaning of the Divine Law as well as the esoteric sciences. Upon the knowledge and experience of this period rests the whole spiritual and religious life of Shi'ism. During this period the Divine Law was revealed through the Prophet and its interpretation made known by the Prophet and the Imams.

The second period may be considered as stretching from the time of the occultation of the Mahdī to the Mongol invasion, not only because of the great changes brought about by this event, but also because this last date corresponds to the life of Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī. With this remarkable genius, who was an outstanding mathematician, astronomer and philosopher, Shi'ite theology reaches its most perfect formulation. He may, in fact, be considered in many ways as the greatest of the Shi'ite theologians. This period is marked by the appearance of authoritative collections of *Ḥadīth* and religious doctrine which form the very substance of Shi'ite religious life. It begins with Kulaynī, the author of the *Uṣūl al-kāfī* ("Sufficient Principles") which is the most outstanding compilation of the traditions of the Shi'ite Imams. It is also the age of Ibn Bābūyah, Shaykh al-Mufīd and Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, who are the authors of the main traditional sources of Shi'ite religious sciences. Also during this period Sayyid Sharīf al-Raḍī compiled the sayings of 'Alī in the *Nahj al-balāghah* ("The Path of Eloquence") which, after the Quran and prophetic *Ḥadīth*, is the most important work in Shi'ism.

The third period, stretching from the Mongol invasion to the establishment of the Safavids, is the most obscure because the

sources of this period have not been well studied. Just as the political and social history of this period is not well known, due to the general turmoil of the age and the presence of so many local dynasties, so the details of the religious life of Shi^{c}ism in this age are as yet unknown. It can, however, be said that in general during this period the school of Naṣīr al-Dīn continued both in theology and philosophy, as can be seen by such figures as his students ^{c}Allāmah Ḥillī, one of the most prolific Shi^{c}ite authors, and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, the well-known philosopher and scientist. Moreover, the Sufi school of Central Asia connected mostly with the name of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā became combined with the school of Ibn ^{c}Arabī often in the bosom of Shi^{c}ism, as can be seen in the works of such a figure as Sa^{c}d al-Dīn Ḥamūyah.

Ibn ^{c}Arabī, the great Sufi master from Andalusia who settled and died in Damascus, exercised an immense influence over Shi^{c}ite gnostics at this time. His doctrine became integrated with Shi^{c}ism in the hands of such men as Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr and Ibn Turkah. Sufi metaphysics was even influential within Shi^{c}ite theology, not to speak of the theosophy (*al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah*) which was cultivated at this time in Persia under the influence of the Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) doctrines of Suhrawardī.

The fourth period, extending from the Safavid period to the present, began with the remarkable Safavid renaissance. Shi^{c}ite Law and theology were revived leading finally to the composition of the immense religious encyclopedia, the *Biḥār al-anwār* ("Oceans of Light"), composed by Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī. Shi^{c}ite religious and metaphysical doctrines found some of their most outstanding expositors in Mīr Dāmād, Bahā$^{'}$ al-Dīn al-^{c}Āmilī, one of the many Shi^{c}ites from Jabal ^{c}Āmil in Lebanon who had come to Persia, and especially Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrazī, usually known as Mullā Ṣadrā. This last named, who is perhaps the greatest Islamic philosopher, or more correctly theosopher (*ḥakīm*), founded a new intellectual dimension in Islam, combining the teachings of Ibn ^{c}Arabī, Suhrawardī, Ibn Sīnā and Naṣīr al-Dīn in the texture of Shi^{c}ism. Henceforth,

Shi'ite learning flourished in Persia and Iraq and also in Lebanon and certain centers in India. The outstanding figures of the Safavid period have had many disciples and followers in the later centuries, men who have kept their religious and intellectual teachings alive to the present day.

As for the history of Ismā'īlism, until recently it was more difficult to study this subject because of the esoteric nature of the movement itself and the lack of sources concerning its early life. The information given in standard histories by Western and even non-Ismā'īlī Muslim scholars is usually from the point of view of those who opposed Ismā'īlism and it is only recently that Ismā'īlī scholars or those closely associated with them have begun to write their own early history, the best example of this type of writing being the general history of Ismā'īlism by Farhad Daftary. Among classical works available until a few years ago, the *'Uyūn al-akhbār* ("Foundations of Information") of the Yemeni *dā'ī*, Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, and a few extant works of similar nature represented the Ismā'īlī point of view itself. That is why Muslim and Western scholars alike have not been able to agree on many important problems of early Ismā'īlism.

Of course the earliest history of Ismā'īlism is the same as that of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism because up to the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, there is essentially one body of Shi'ites. Upon the death of this Imam, however, the Twelvers accepted Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim whom Imam Ja'far had himself chosen as Imam, while the Ismā'īlīs followed his older son, Ismā'īl, who had been chosen earlier but had died while Imam Ja'far was still alive. The followers of Ismā'īl and his son Muḥammad were the first Ismā'īlīs, although among themselves also there existed several different views. Henceforth, Twelve-Imam Shi'ism and Ismā'īlism separated and their histories became distinct. It is of interest to note that although small groups followed the eighth and some of the other Imams, they were never able to gain any substantial support and died out as separate movements. Twelve-Imam and "Seven-Imam" Shi'ism or Ismā'īlism continued as the major forms of Shi'ism as if their

existence were already guaranteed by the archetypal nature of the numbers with which they were connected.

Scholars of Ismāᶜīlism have distinguished at least four different groups of early Ismāᶜīlīs: the early *daᶜwah* (which is a special Ismāᶜīlī term for religious and missionary activity) centered around the personalities of Ismāᶜīl and his son Muḥammad; the *daᶜwah* in the Yemen and North Africa leading to the establishment of the Fāṭimid caliphate; the movement in Syria and Mesopotamia in the third/ninth century; and finally, the Qarāmiṭah movement in Bahrain. Of course all of these movements had certain connections in as much as they propagated some aspect of religious doctrine connected with Ismāᶜīlism. But politically and socially they cannot in any way be identified with each other. In any case, some of these movements were gradually subdued and what emerged was the well-known form of Ismāᶜīlism connected with the name of the Fāṭimids in North Africa and the famous Ismāᶜīlī *dāᶜīs* in Persia and other eastern lands of Islam.

As for the history of Ismāᶜīlism, Corbin, one of the most sympathetic interpreters of Ismāᶜīlī doctrine in the West, divides it into the five periods which are mentioned here to facilitate our understanding of the development of this school.

(1) The period of the early Imams up to Ismāᶜīl, Muḥammad and Abuᵓl-Khaṭṭāb.

(2) The period from Muḥammad to ᶜUbayd Allāh al-Mahdī, the founder of the Fāṭimid caliphate. During this period the Ismāᶜīlī Imams, who were three or four in number, were hidden from the public eye (*mastūr*), although there was much activity in the Yemen and North Africa preparing the way for the establishment of the Fāṭimids. The idea of being hidden (*mastūr*) must not, however, be confused with the occultation (*ghaybah*) of the Twelfth Imam. The first implies simply being hidden from the eye of the crowd and from public notice while the second means disappearance from the physical world.

(3) The establishment of the Fāṭimid caliphate until the rule of the eighth caliph, al-Mustanṣir biᵓLlāh. During this period Ismāᶜīlism had its own caliphate which was a powerful

state competing with the Abbasids for the allegiance of the Muslim world. This period marks also the appearance of the major doctrinal works of Ismā^{c}īlism by such outstanding figures as Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Qāḍī Nu^{c}mān, Abū Ya^{c}qūb al-Sijistānī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī and the celebrated Persian poet and Ismā^{c}īlī philosopher Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

(4) The period from the eighth caliph to the Mongol invasion, during which Ismā^{c}īlism divides into two branches. After the eighth Fāṭimid caliph the eastern Ismā^{c}īlīs, who were connected with the movement of Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ and Alamut, followed Nizār ibn al-Mustanṣir and became known as the Nizārī branch, while those of Egypt and the Yemen accepted his brother al-Musta^{c}lī bi^{c}Llāh and became known as the Musta^{c}līs. It is of interest to note, also, that the Druze movement broke away from Ismā^{c}īlism shortly before this period and followed the seventh Fāṭimid caliph, al-Ḥākim bi^{c}Llāh, as a "divine incarnation." The Musta^{c}lī branch of Ismā^{c}īlism believed in a hidden imam like Twelve-Imam Shi^{c}ism. Its chief *dā^{c}ī* resided in the Yemen until the tenth/sixteenth century when he emigrated to India, where the head of the community is still to be found. The Nizārī branch stayed in Persia until its head, the Aga Khan, migrated to India in the nineteenth century. The present Aga Khan is the spiritual leader and Imam of this branch of Ismā^{c}īlism.

(5) The period of the Mongol invasion marked by the destruction of Ismā^{c}īlī power in Persia. During this period, whose history is not well known, Ismā^{c}īlism "Went underground and appeared in many places within Sufi orders. There is, in fact, a definite coming together between Ismā^{c}īlism and certain forms of Sufism at this time which, however, has not been well studied. Henceforth Ismā^{c}īlism continued as a religious phenomenon without the violent political character of its earlier days. And it is as a religious community that it continues to live in the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, East Africa, Syria and other regions, the Nizārī branch being united and directed by the Aga Khan and the Musta^{c}lī branch by the chief *dā^{c}ī* in India.

Concerning the doctrines and beliefs of Shi'ism, it is again appropriate to begin with Twelve-Imam Shi'ism, then to turn to Ismā'īlism, and finally to the difference between them and also the similarities and differences between Shi'ism and Sunni Islam. The major idea which underlines the whole Twelve-Imam Shi'ite perspective—and is in fact shared by Ismā'īlism—is the distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric to which we have alluded previously. Every manifestation must be the manifestation of something; every appearance implies a reality which "appears." All objectivized reality possesses an exterior and an interior aspect, this reality including not only the world of nature but also revelation which originates from the same source as nature, namely the Divine Origin of all things. In the Quran God Himself is called the Outward (*al-Ẓāhir*) and the Inward (*al-Bāṭin*).

Twelve-Imam Shi'ism emphasizes above all else the balance between the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*) aspects of religion and in this, as in many other instances, joins Sufism in its point of view. The *ẓāhir* cannot exist without the *bāṭin*, for then there would be nothing to manifest it and give it objective existence. And the *bāṭin* could never become objectivized and revealed without the *ẓāhir*. In this relation there lies the secret of the necessity for the existence of the Imam. A prophet in a religion brings a law from Heaven to guide the lives of men. After him the revelation ceases and men are left with a law which corresponds to the exoteric aspect of the revelation. There then must come those who can interpret the inner meaning of the law and the esoteric content of the revelation.

Specifically in Islam the door of prophecy closed with the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). He was both the exoteric and esoteric source of the revelation but in his function as revealer of Divine Legislation he represents the exoteric aspect. After him there must be those who inherited his esoteric function and whose duty it is to expound the inner meaning of the Divine Law. Just as the function of prophecy, in as much as it concerns the bringing of Divine Legislation, is called *nubuwwah*, so is

the function of interpreting its inner meaning to men and preserving a link with the source of the revelation called *walāyah* in Shi'ism. In general the word *walāyah* in Arabic, Persian and other Islamic languages means sainthood and the saint is called *walī Allāh* "the friend of God." But in the specific context of Shi'ism it refers, not only to the saintly life in general, but to the very function and power of interpreting the esoteric dimension of the revelation.

The cycle of prophecy (*dā'irat al-nubuwwah*) terminated with the Prophet, who was the "Seal of prophecy." Henceforth no new revelation will come in the present cycle of humanity. But with the termination of this cycle there began, as already mentioned, what one might call the "cycle of initiation" (*dā'irat al-walāyah*), although this translation is not fully adequate to convey the idea of *walāyah/ wilāyah* (or *walāyat* as used in Persian works on Shi'ism). What this second cycle implies is the beginning of a chain of authorities concerned with the esoteric interpretation of the revelation and issuing directly from the Prophet himself who is the source of both the exoteric and the esoteric dimensions. Moreover, this cycle will continue until the Day of Judgment when the historic cycle itself is brought to a close. But as long as man lives on this earth the cycle of *walāyah* subsists, providing a direct channel to the source of the revelation itself and the means whereby man can perform the fundamental operation of *ta'wīl*, of hermeneutic interpretation, of going from the exoteric to the esoteric. This basic process of *ta'wīl*, or of journeying from the *ẓāhir* to the *bāṭin*, is made possible only through the presence of the cycle of *walāyah*. Without it there would be no way of escaping from the prison of limited forms to the abode of the celestial essences.

The person who inaugurates the cycle of *walāyah*, and whose duty it is in every age to fulfill the function of *walāyah*, is the Imam, whose figure is so central in Shi'ism, although it must never be forgotten that the power of *walāyah* issues from the Prophet himself who was both perfect *nabī* and perfect *walī*. That is why the first Imam, 'Alī, is in fact called *walī*

Allāh. In general *imām* means the person who stands in the front and therefore the leader of the congregational prayers. It is in this sense that this term is usually used in everyday language in Sunnism and Shi'ism alike, such as when one says so and so is the imam of this or that mosque. It also has an honorific sense meaning one who stands at the head of the religious community. It is in this context a title bestowed on outstanding religious scholars such as Imam al-Ghazzalī or Imam al-Shāfi'ī, etc. As already pointed out it is also used in Sunni political theory to designate the ruler of the Islamic community, the imamate being in this sense synonymous with the caliphate.

But as used specifically in Shi'ism the Imam means that person who is the real ruler of the community and especially the inheritor of the esoteric teachings of the Prophet. He is one who carries the "Muḥammadan Light" (*al-nūr al-muḥammadī*) within himself, and who fulfills the function of *walāyah*. As already mentioned, according to both Sufism and Shi'ism there is a prophetic light which has existed from the beginning within the being of every prophet from Adam onwards. It is the source of all prophetic knowledge and is identified with the "Muḥammadan Light" or "Muḥammadan Reality" (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyyah*), which is the Logos. It is this Light that continues from one cycle of prophecy to another and it is this Light that exists within the Imam, by virtue of whose presence he becomes the Imam in the Shi'ite sense.

The Imam who fulfills the function of *walāyah* is the sustainer of the religious law and the guarantee of its continuation. A prophet brings a Divine Law and then himself leaves the world. There are thus times when the world is without a prophet. But the Imam is always present. The earth can never be devoid of the presence of the Imam, be he even hidden or unknown. Therefore, once the Prophet of Islam has left the world it is the Imam who, in his continuous presence, sustains and preserves the religion from one period to the next. The Imam is, in fact, the sustainer and interpreter par excellence of the revelation. His duty is essentially threefold: to rule over the

community of Muslims as the representative of the Prophet, to interpret the religious sciences and the Law to men, especially their inner meaning, and to guide men in the spiritual life. All of these functions the Imam is able to perform because of the presence of the "Muḥammadan Light" within him.

As a result of the presence of this "Light" the Imam also possesses the quality of inerrancy (*ʿiṣmah*), in spiritual and religious matters. He is in his inner nature as pure as the Prophet who is the source of this Light as well as his daughter, Fāṭimah, who is the mother of the Imams through ʿAlī. That is why the Prophet, Fāṭimah and the Twelve Imams, are together called "The Fourteen Pure Ones." The *ʿiṣmah* of the Prophet and Imams is the logical consequence of the presence of the "Muḥammadan Light" within them for it is this "Light" that is the source of all revelation and ultimately all knowledge. To be guided by this "Light" is to be protected from error. In fact only one of the many children of each Imam becomes himself the Imam, because only one carries the "Prophetic Light" within himself. The relation between the Imams is not only a carnal one but, most of all, a spiritual connection based on the passing of this "Light" from one Imam to another by virtue of which each becomes "*maʿṣūm*" or "pure" and gains authority as the sustainer and interpreter of the Divine Law.

The Imams are also, along and through the Prōphet, the intermediaries between man and God. To ask for their succor in life is to appeal to the channel God has placed before men so as to enable man to return to Him. They are, in this sense, the extension of the personality of the Prophet. Their tombs as well as those of their descendants, the *imāmzādahs* in Persian, are visited by pilgrims and are the centers of religious life. Shiʿites from all over the world make pilgrimage to the tombs of ʿAlī in Najaf, that of Ḥusayn in Karbalaʾ and Cairo, of the seventh and ninth Imams in Kaẓimayn, of the last Imams in Samarraʾ, of Imam Riḍā in Meshed, of his sister Ḥaḍrat Maʿsūmah in Qum, of the sister of Imam Ḥusayn, Sayyidah Zaynab in Cairo and Damascus, and his daughter, Sayyidah Ruqayyah, in Damascus and to many other sites. In the popular daily life of

the Shi^{c}ah these sites fulfill the same function as those of the great saints in the Sunni world such as Mūlay Idrīs in Fez, Maqām Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ^{c}Arabī in Damascus, the tomb or *dargāh* of Mawlanā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī in Konya, that of Hujwīrī in Lahore, the tomb of Mu^{c}īn al-Dīn Chishtī in Ajmer, or the shrine of Shaykh ^{c}Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī in Baghdad. Of course often the two categories of sacred places merge. For example, in the Shi^{c}ite world the tombs of Sufi saints who are considered the spiritual progeny of the Imams are visited frequently and in the Sunni world the tombs of the Imams and their descendants are very often visited as tombs of great saints.

The twelve Imams of Shi^{c}ism are as follows:

(1) ^{c}Alī ibn Abī Ṭālīb, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, who is the origin of the imamate and the representative of the esoteric dimension of Islam. According to the Shi^{c}ah he was chosen at Ghadīr Khumm by the Prophet as his "entrusted" (*waṣī*) and successor.

(2) ^{c}Alī's elder son, Imam Ḥasan, who was caliph for a short time after him and who died in Medina after retiring from public life.

(3) His younger son, Imam Ḥusayn, who took the field against Yazīd, the second Umayyad caliph, and was killed with nearly the whole of his family near Karbala$^{\circ}$. His martyrdom on the tenth of Muḥarram (61 A.H.) marks to this day the height of the religious calendar in the Shi^{c}ite world and his tragic death symbolizes fully the ethos of Shi^{c}ism.

(4) Imam ^{c}Alī entitled Zayn al-^{c}Ābidīn and al-Sajjād who was the only surviving son of Imam Ḥusayn, his mother being the daughter of the last Sassanid king, Yazdigird. He is especially known for his prayers *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-sajjādiyyah* which is, after the *Nahj al-balāghah* of ^{c}Alī, the outstanding literary work of the Imams containing some of the most moving lines of religious literature in Arabic. It has even been called "The Psalm of the Family of Muḥammad."

(5) Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the son of the fourth Imam, who resided like his father in Medina. Since, at this time, the

Umayyad caliphate was faced with internal revolts the Shi'ah were left more free to pursue their religious teachings. Therefore, many scholars travelled to Medina to study with the fifth Imam and numerous traditions survive from him.

(6) Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the son of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, who continued the propagation of Shi'ite sciences to the extent that Shi'ite Law is named after him. More traditions are recorded of him and the fifth Imam than all the others combined. Thousands flocked to his religious classes including such well-known Shi'ite figures as Hishām ibn Ḥakam and the alchemist Jābir ibn Ḥayyān. Even Imam Abū Ḥanīfah, the founder of one of the four Sunni schools of law, as well as several other well-known Sunni scholars studied with him. It is also with Imam Ja'far that Ismā'īlism separated from Twelve-Imam Shi'ism, the question of the successor to the sixth Imam having been made particularly difficult by the fact that the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr had decided to put to death whoever was to be chosen officially by the sixth Imam as his successor thereby hoping to put an end to the Shi'ite movement.

(7) Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim, the son of Imam Ja'far, who faced extreme hardship due to the renewed opposition of the caliphate, this time the Abbasid, against the Shi'ites. He lived much of his life in hiding in Medina until Hārūn al-Rashīd had him imprisoned and brought to Baghdad where he died nearby the city. Henceforth the Imams lived for the most part in the vicinity of the caliph and left Medina as their permanent abode.

(8) Imam 'Alī al-Riḍā, the son of Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim, who was called by al-Ma'mūn to Marw in Khurasan where he was chosen as the successor to the caliphate. But his immense popularity and the rapid growth of Shi'ism in that region turned the caliph against him, and he was finally removed. According to Shi'ite belief, he was poisoned and buried near the city of Tus or the modern city of Meshed which is today the foremost religious site in Persia. Imam Riḍā participated in many of the scholarly gatherings of al-Ma'mūn and his debates with theologians of other religions are recorded in Shi'ite sources. He is

also the origin of many Sufi orders and is even called the "Imam of initiation."

(9) Imam Muḥammad al-Taqī, the son of Imam Riḍā, spent his life in Medina as long as al-Maʾmūn was alive, even though al-Maʾmūn, in order to keep him in Baghdad, had given his own daughter to him in marriage. Upon al-Maʾmūn's death he returned to Baghdad where he died.

(10) Imam ʿAlī al-Naqī, the son of the ninth Imam, who resided in Medina until al-Mutawakkil became caliph and invited him to come to Samarraʾ, the seat of the caliphate. But there he was very harsh with the Imam as a result of his general extreme anti-Shiʿite policy. The Imam endured the hardship until the caliph's death but did not return to Medina afterwards. He died in Samarraʾ where his tomb and that of his son are to be found today.

(11) Imam Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, the son of Imam ʿAlī al-Naqī, who lived in extreme secrecy in Samarraʾ, and was closely guarded by the agents of the caliph because it was known that the Shiʿites believed his son to be the Mahdī. He married the daughter of the Byzantine emperor, Nargis Khātūn, who had embraced Islam and sold herself into slavery in order to enter the household of the Imam, and from this marriage the twelfth Imam was born.

(12) Imam Muḥammad al-Mahdī entitled *Ṣāḥib al-zamān* (the master of time), who is the last Shiʿite Imam, went into minor occultation upon the death of his father. From 260/873 to 329/940. He had four representatives (*nāʾib*) to whom he appeared from time to time and through whom he ruled the Shiʿite community. This period is thus called the minor occultation (*al-ghaybat al-ṣughrā*). Henceforth, there began the major occultation (*al-ghaybat al-kubrā*) which still endures. During this time, according to the Shiʿah, the Mahdī is alive but invisible. He is the *axis mundi*, the invisible ruler of the Universe. Before the end of time he will appear again on earth to bring equity and justice and to fill it with peace after it has been torn by war and injustice. The Mahdī is an ever-living spiritual being who guides on the spiritual path those who are

worthy and whose succor all the devout ask in their daily prayers. He who is spiritually qualified is, in fact, in inner contact with the Mahdī.

The twelve Imams are like the twelve constellations of the Zodiac in the spiritual firmament. At their center stands the Prophet, the sun whose light illumines these constellations. The Imams are, for the Shi'ah, a part and continuation of the spiritual reality of the Prophet and together with him, who is their source and origin in both the metaphysical and biological sense, determine the contours of that spiritual universe in which the Shi'ah live.

As far as the political aspect of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism is concerned, it is directly connected with the personality of the Imam. The perfect government is that of the Imam, one which will be realized with the coming of the Mahdī who even now is the invisible ruler of the world but does not manifest himself directly in human society. In his absence every form of government is of necessity imperfect, for the imperfection of men is reflected in their political institutions. The Shi'ites, especially of Persia since the Safavid period and lasting until the Revolution of 1979, have considered the monarchy as the least imperfect form of government under existing conditions. But there have even been some like the Indian Shi'ites, Amir 'Alī and Tayyibji, who supported the Sunni caliphate on a purely political level, although Shi'ism does not accept the caliphate in the usual sense as the legitimate Muslim political authority. Here a distinction must be made between the ideal political ruler whom Shi'ism sees embodied in the person of the Imam and Sunnism in the caliph and acceptance of an existing situation. In the latter case there have been Shi'ites who have paid allegiance to the caliphate and even supported it. But the structure of political theory is different in the two cases, especially as it concerns the caliphate.

The distrust of all worldly government after the disappearance of the Mahdī and the early experience of the Shi'ite community made Twelve-Imam Shi'ism for the most part apathetic towards political life. This is one of the features that distin-

guishes classical Shi'ism from both Sunnism and Ismā'īlism. The Twelvers or Imamites remained during most of their history and until quite recently content with being observers of the political scene which they sought to influence morally rather than originators of political movements.

It must be remembered that the Safavid movement itself, which represents the one instance of major political victory for Twelve-Imam Shi'ism before recent events in Persia, did not begin as a purely Shi'ite movement in the restricted sense of the word. The Safavids were a Sufi order which became so well organized and so powerful that it was able to exercise actual political authority and finally conquer all of Persia. Of course, the Safavids then made Shi'ism the state religion, but the movement itself began from a Sufi order. Furthermore, even the engagement of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism in political life, made necessary by the new situation in Safavid Persia, did not completely remove the traditional distrust of the Shi'ite *'ulamā'* towards all government. It is an attitude that persists in certain quarters to this very day.

The withdrawal of the Shi'ites from political life should not, however, be interpreted as their withdrawal from the life of the community. On the contrary, this very apathy towards politics intensified the religious and scholarly activity of the Shi'ah. For centuries, freed from the burden and responsibility of political life, they devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the cultivation of the religious sciences and the arts and sciences in general. Most of the early Muslim educational institutions were established by the Shi'ah as were many branches of the traditional sciences. Therefore, although politically aloof, Twelve-Imam Shi'ism made an immense contribution to the life of the Islamic community in domains that were more connected with the knowledge of things rather than the ruling of men.

As for the other important branch of Shi'ism, namely Ismā'īlism, it was marked from the beginning by an intense interest in political life and was even a revolutionary force. In this domain it has stood opposed to the view of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism, but in many other questions it shares the world view

of the Twelvers. Ismā'īlism also emphasizes the existence of two aspects to all things, the exoteric and the esoteric. It distinguishes between the *nabī* and *walī*, the first representing the Law and the other its esoteric meaning. But whereas Twelve-Imam Shi'ism preserves a balance between the exoteric and the esoteric, Ismā'īlism tends to emphasize the esoteric over the exoteric and elevates the rank of the *walī* to a degree that is not found in Twelve-Imam Shi'ism. The name Bāṭini sometimes given to the Ismā'īlīs is as a result of their emphasis upon the esoteric or *bāṭin*.

Of great interest is the identification of the esoteric dimension of the religion, or *bāṭin*, by Ismā'īlism with theosophy (*ḥikmah*), which is also called *dīn-i ḥaqq* (the religion of the truth), in Persian. If the Persian term has been used here, it is because the majority of Ismā'īlī works on theosophy are in Persian. Naṣir-i Khusraw, who is perhaps the greatest Ismā'īlī philosopher, wrote every one of his works in Persian. In fact, Ismā'īlī philosophy is one of the few branches of Islamic philosophy in which the Persian texts are even more numerous than the Arabic.

Ismā'īlism believes that this philosophy, or theosophy, contained in the *bāṭin* of religion leads to spiritual rebirth (*wilādat-i rūḥānī*) through which man is transformed and "saved." What they mean by philosophy is therefore quite different from the subject known by that name today. Much of modern philosophy is in fact not at all a "love of wisdom" but a hatred of it so that it should appropriately be called "misosophy." By philosophy the Ismā'īlīs meant a *sophia* which was not just a mental play but a doctrine of a metaphysical and cosmological order closely connected with means of its realization. This view is also to be found in later Islamic philosophy cultivated in the bosom of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism.

It is not accidental that whenever Ismā'īlism was strong a sudden burst of activity in the arts and sciences, and specially the intellectual sciences, took place. This connection can moreover be seen with respect to Shi'ism in general. Al-Azhar University, which is the most famous seat of learning in the

Sunni world today, was founded by the Fāṭimids. The intense activity in the "intellectual sciences" (*al-ᶜulūm al-ᶜaqliyyah*) in Fāṭimid Egypt, shown by the presence of so many outstanding men of science such as Ibn al-Haytham and Ibn Yūnus, is directly connected with the religious structure of Ismāᶜīlism itself. It is connected with the concept of *ḥikmah* in Ismāᶜīlism and its direct relation with revelation.

Ismāᶜīlism contains an elaborate metaphysics, cosmology and spiritual anthropology. In metaphysics and theology it emphasizes Unity (*tawḥīd*) keeping a mid-way position between *taᶜṭīl* and *tashbīh*; that is, between considering the Divine as an abstract unity by refusing man the ability of understanding the meaning of His Qualities and Attributes, or by describing the Divine anthropomorphically, by comparing His Qualities and Attributes to human ones. In this fundamental point, therefore, it joins the view of the rest of Islamic orthodoxy.

According to Ismāᶜīlī doctrine the Origin of all things is not Pure Being but the Reality that transcends even Being and is called *Mubdiᶜ*, the Reality through Whose Original Act the chain of being is created. Islamic philosophy in general begins with being and is concerned with the nature of God or the Origin of the Universe as Pure Being. In Sufi metaphysics, however, the Divine Essence (*al-Dhāt*) is Absolute and Infinite above all determinations, even that of Being, which is its first self-determination and the Principle of creation. Ismāᶜīlī doctrine thus joins Sufi metaphysics and Oriental metaphysics in general by considering the Supreme Principle to be at once Being and Beyond Being. Its primordial act brings into being the order of universal existence.

The first being in the created order is the First Intellect, or Universal Intellect, which is identified with the Divine Word. It is a reality that at once veils and reveals the Supreme Name, Allah. From this highest spiritual reality, which has its own limit (*ḥadd*), there comes into being the Second Intellect and from the Second Intellect the Third Intellect which, in Ismāᶜīlism, is identified with the Spiritual Adam (*Ādam-i rūḥānī*). This Intellect is the angelic prototype of humanity. It

is the celestial Imam who is the archetype of the terrestrial Adam and of all men. The life and drama of man on earth is but a reflection of his celestial reality.

The Third Intellect, or Spiritual Adam, sought to reach the Supreme Principle without observing the proper hierarchy of the archangelic worlds above him. He committed an act of idolatory, from the metaphysical point of view, as a result of which he fell into a state of forgetfulness and stupor. Once he came to himself he realized that he had been punished by God and removed to the rank of the Tenth Intellect. He had been removed from his original abode by "Seven spiritual worlds" which came as a result of his forgetfulness. These seven worlds are the prototypes of this world. That is why everything is governed by the cycle of seven. This world was created in order to enable man to regain his lost state, to be delivered from his own "shadows." And being based on its celestial model, it consists of seven heavens, seven earths, seven cycles of prophecy and seven imams.

Time in which man is situated is itself "retarded eternity," an image of the retardation caused by man's fall from the Third to the Tenth Intellect. In this spiritual anthropology time itself has a trans-historic significance being based on the forgetfulness of man which is the cause of his having fallen into the domain of time, decay and death. Separation from God comes from man's forgetfulness, a point of view that is central to Islam in general and emphasized so much in Sufism.

Ismā^{c}īlism has a cyclic conception of history closely allied to its metaphysical conception of time. Although a cyclic conception of time is implied in certain Twelve-Imam Shi^{c}ite sources—cyclic not in the sense of ever recurring sets of events, but of other historic cycles than the present one—it is nowhere as much emphasized as in Ismā^{c}īlism. The Ismā^{c}īlī works speak of a large cycle of aeons sometimes mentioned as of 360,000 years within which there are seven cycles of prophecy. Each cycle is commenced by a prophet (*nabī*) who has his esoteric representative or Imam who dominates over that cycle, the seventh bringing the cycle to an end. The prophets and their

Imams for the present cycle of humanity are mentioned usually as:

Adam	Seth
Noah	Shem
Abraham	Ishmael
Moses	Aaron
Jesus	Simon
Muḥammad	ᶜAlī

The seventh divinely guided figure is the Mahdī or "Imam of Resurrection," who does not bring a new *Sharīᶜah* but reveals the inner meaning of all revelations and prepares the coming of the new cycle. Moreover, the historical cycles alter between that of epiphany and occultation, between a period when the truth is revealed and one in which it is hidden, this alteration continuing until the end of the great cycle. At this moment comes the "Great Resurrection" (*qiyāmat al-qiyāmah*) when man and his celestial prototype are re-instated in their original condition. Thus, through the prophets and Imams the purpose of creation is fulfilled and man regains the state that he lost through his own negligence.

If one wishes to compare Twelve-Imam Shiᶜism and Ismāᶜīlism, it can be said that they share together, besides the general tenets of Islam, the basis concept of the Imam; the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of religion and *taᵓwīl* that is based on them. The first six Imams are of course also common between them with all that such a common ground implies. As far as the differences between them are considered, there is first of all the fact that one accepts twelve Imams and the other a continuous chain extending to today. For example, a figure such as the eighth Imam, ᶜAlī al-Riḍā, who plays such a major role in the life of the Shiᶜah does not exist in the same capacity in the Ismāᶜīlī scheme. Also for the Twelvers the twelfth Imam, the Mahdī is in occultation although alive, while the Imam of Ismāᶜīlism, at least the Nizārī branch, is always liv-

ing and present on earth among men. The idea of awaiting the appearance of the Imam (*intiẓār*) which is so important to the religious psychology of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism therefore does not exist in the same sense in Ismā'īlism.

The political nature of Ismā'īlism and the apolitical nature of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism is another distinguishing feature of these two groups as already pointed out. It appears as a paradox of history that Ismā'īlism, which played such an important role in the social and political movements during the early centuries of Islamic history, should become today free of direct political association while Twelve-Imam Shi'ism, which had remained aloof from political life, should be thrown in a certain sense in the middle of the political arena with the establishment of the Safavid dynasty. Therefore, as far as their historical careers are concerned, both Twelve-Imam Shi'ism and Ismā'īlism have experienced direct engagement in political life. But the theological role of political action in the two communities does remain different in as much its in one the Imam is absent and in the other living among men.

Finally, another distinguishing feature is the role of exoterism and esoterism. Twelve-Imam Shi'ism goes to great length to emphasize the necessity of preserving a balance between the two. Even the role of the Imam is considered in both its exoteric and esoteric aspect. Ismā'īlism, however, especially that of Alamut, tended to emphasize the *bāṭin* or esoteric dimension above all else. Of course in the daily life of the community the exoteric elements persist, for no general community of men can be simply esoterists. But the accent is somewhat different although the basic concept of the imamate exists in these two major branches of Shi'ism which are united in their belief in the Imam and particular reverence for the family of the Prophet.

Concerning the differences and similarities between Shi'ism and Sunnism, it can be said that, first of all, there is the difference of view concerning political rule, from the question of the political successor of the Prophet to the later crystalization of the general attitude of the Shi'ah towards the

powers of the world and especially concerning the attitude of the *ʿulamāʾ* towards established political authority. The Sunni *ʿulamāʾ* have throughout history tended to support the existing political institutions in fear of creating civil strife while the classical Shiʿite *ʿulamāʾ*, basing their views on the role of the Imamate and the ideal rule of the Imam, have distrusted all political institutions and kept away from political authorities.

There is also a distinction between the question of intermediaries between man and God. The modern puritanical movements in the Islamic world which emphasize only the transcendence of God and discourage all intermediaries between man and God present a view that is opposed to the religious psychology of Shiʿism. But in traditional Sunnism there are intermediaries in daily religious life, the role of the intermediary being fulfilled by the Prophet and also by the saints. In Shiʿism the Prophet and the Imams together fulfill this function. In fact, in so many ways, what the traditional Sunni, especially he who is touched by the spirit of Sufism, sees in the person of the Prophet the Shiʿite sees in the Prophet and Imams together. This is demonstrated by the fact that the litanies and chants in the name of the Prophet common in the Sunni world correspond, even in content, to those that the Shiʿah perform for the Prophet and Imams together. Nevertheless on the theological level there is some difference concerning the role of the intermediary between man and God, not that of course man prays to anyone other than to God in Shiʿite Islam any more than he does in Sunnism.

In Islam man stands before God as his vice-gerent on earth. It is, however, in seeking to approach him that he needs the spiritual intermediaries who are the Prophet, Imams and the saints. For his daily religious life the Shiʿite believer has no more need of human intermediaries between him and God than does the Sunni. Every Muslim is himself a priest, be he Sunni or Shiʿite. The presence of "intermediaries" in Shiʿism or Sunnism is a matter concerning the inner religious life and does not in any way alter the structure of Islam as a religion without a specific priesthood or religious hierarchy which

would act as intermediaries between man and God in religious rites and acts of worship.

In the field of law the difference between Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism lies in the question of *ijtihād*. Since in Shi^{c}ism the Imam is alive, the possibility of applying the Divine Law to new situations is always present. In fact the *mujtahid* (he who can exercise his opinion in matters of the Law) who is in inner contact with the Imam must in each generation apply the Law to the new conditions which that generation faces. This does not, of course, mean to change the Law for the sake of circumstances, but to extend it to cover any new situations that might arise. And it is the duty of each Shi^{c}ite to follow the rulings of a living *mujtahid*. In Sunni Islam, since the third Islamic century, the gates of *ijtihād* have been closed, although here again the opinions or *fatwās* of the *^{c}ulamā$^{\circ}$* over the ages have to a large extent provided a continuous commentary upon the *Sharī^{c}ah*.

In the official theological formulations of Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism there is some difference in approach and content. Sunni theology may be characterized as being more concerned with rational aspects of the faith and Shi^{c}ite theology with the "mystical," in the sense that Sunni theology does not concern itself as much with esoteric questions as does Shi^{c}ite theology. But here again Sufi doctrine, which is often combined with theology in the Sunni world, does provide an esoteric dimension even in the exoteric domain. Also, Shi^{c}ite theology is more sympathetic to the arts and sciences and the "intellectual sciences" (*al-^{c}ulūm al-^{c}aqliyyah*) than is Ash^{c}arite theology. This difference is seen in the ups and downs of the career of these sciences over the centuries which have depended on the political domination of one group or another.

Finally, as far as differences between Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism are concerned, it can be said that in one the *barakah* or grace of the Prophet is felt and realized through all the companions of the Prophet including his family, while in Shi^{c}ism it is felt primarily in the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*). What the companions (*ṣaḥābah*), and the family (*āl*), mean for the Sunni, the

family (*āl*) in themselves means to the Shi^{c}ah. This is even seen in the two forms of benediction upon the Prophet prevalent among the two groups. It is not that the family of the Prophet do not hold a special place in Sunnism or that the companions are unimportant in Shi^{c}ism. But in one case one sees Islam through the whole community that surrounded the founder, and in the other through a particular spiritual elite which is his family and those who were spiritually related to him, such as Salmān al-Fārsī, about whom the Prophet said: "Salmān is a member of my household." Here again it is a matter of emphasis and difference of interpretation of a single reality rather than total opposition.

As against these differences there are numerous points of similarity between Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism which far outweigh the differences and only prove that they are two branches of the same tree. Sunni and Shi^{c}ite Islam are united in the Quran and the Prophet, the foundation of all of Islam. They share in the principles of religion, namely in the basic doctrines of *tawḥīd* (unity), *nubuwwah* (prophecy) and eschatology (*ma^{c}ād*). They also agree to the fact that God must be just, although one emphasizes more the aspect of freedom and the other necessity. One believes that whatever God does is that which is just, while the other emphasizes that God could not be unjust. The agreement of Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism on the principles of religion is what places them within the total orthodoxy of Islam and guarantees the presence of the basic principles of the doctrine in the formulation of both groups.

On the level of religious practice also Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism are nearly the same. The day-to-day practice of the *Sharī^{c}ah* is the same in both worlds. Except for one or two points, such as the amount of inheritance of the female side or temporary marriage, the rulings of the *Sharī^{c}ah* are common to them. And in practice, the prayers, ablutions, fasting, the pilgrimage, etc. are the same, save for minor differences which in the prayers are no more than the differences between the four Sunni schools of law. Only the Shi^{c}ites add two further phrases to the call to prayers, one affirming the *walāyah* of ^{c}Alī and the other the

importance of good works. Also, because the Imam is absent, the Shi'ites have not emphasized until recently the Friday prayers to the same degree as the Sunnis and it lacked until the Iranian Revolution of 1979 the political significance that it has always possessed in the Sunni world. Similarities of religious practices based on the *Sharī'ah*, from the prohibition of alcohol and pork to ways of sacrificing an animal, are so many that they cannot be enumerated here.

Similarity between Sunnism and Shi'ism in daily practice is far greater than a comparison of theological texts might show. If Shi'ism is the "Islam of 'Alī," the *barakah* of 'Alī is also spread in the Sunni world through the presence of the Sufi orders of which he is the "Imam" even for Sunnis, and the social ramifications of these orders in guilds, orders of chivalry, etc. If one compares the daily life of a traditional Sunni, which is based on the *Sharī'ah* and punctuated with visits to the tombs of saints, reading of prayers and litanies usually written by Sufi masters such as 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, with the daily life of the Shi'ites, one is struck by the profound resemblances. The function of the Imams and their descendants in the Shi'ite world is fulfilled in the Sunni world by the saints, who are in fact in a metaphysical sense the spiritual progeny of the Prophet and the Imams. The names of many of the Imams appear in the chain of transmission (*silsilah*) of every Sufi order. This essential identity can be "existentially" experienced in the presence of the *barakah* of the tombs of Sufi saints on the one hand and of the Imams and their descendants on the other, although of course the particular perfume of each can be recognized.

In conclusion it can be said that Sunnism and Shi'ism are two orthodox dimensions of Islam providentially placed in this tradition to enable collectivities of different psychological and spiritual temperament to become integrated within the Islamic community. Being each an affirmation of the doctrine of Unity, they do not in themselves destroy the profound unity of Islam, whatever their formal differences may be. They are rather two ways of asserting the truth of the *Shahādah, Lā ilāha*

illaʾLlāh. They are two streams which originate from the same fountain, which is their unique source, namely, the Quranic revelation. And they finally pour into a single sea which is the Divine Unity whose means of realization each contains within itself. To have lived either of them fully is to have lived fully as a Muslim and to have realized that Truth for the sake of whose revelation the Quran was made known to men through the Prophet of Islam.

waʾLlāhu aʿlam

GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS

adhān, the call to prayer announced from the top of minarets and other places to draw the attention of the community to the time for the canonical prayers.

ahl al-kitāb, literally "people of the book," the Quranic expression used to describe people to whom a holy book has been revealed. At the beginning of Islamic history the term was used in reference to the Christians, Jews and the Sabeans and later with the conquest of Persia to Zoroastrians. But the principle was applied afresh whenever Muslims encountered a genuine living tradition so that later Hindus and Buddhists were also described by certain Islamic spiritual authorities as "people of the book," as were Confucians.

al-ʿālim (pl. *ʿulamāʾ*), literally "he who knows," but more specifically the scholar versed in the religious sciences and therefore authorized to interpret these sciences and especially the Divine Law.

ʿaql, both intellect, in its original sense as *intellectus* or *nous*, and reason (*ratio*), depending on the context in which it is used and the way it is qualified.

barakah, grace, the spiritual presence and influence which is at once "supernatural" and flowing within the arteries of the cosmos.

bāṭin, the inward aspect of revelation and of manifestation both cosmic and supracosmic; and also a Name of God, who is described in the Quran as being both the Inward (*al-Bāṭin*) and the Outward (*al-Ẓāhir*).

dhikr, meaning literally to mention, to invoke and to remember, it is the central technique for spiritual realization in Sufism.

fiṭrah, the original and primordial nature of man and of things.

ghaflah, negligence or forgetfulness of God, which in Sufism is considered as the major impediment to spiritual realization and in Islam more generally speaking as the root of

most sins.

ḥadīth (pl. *aḥādīth*), literally saying or tradition, but more specifically in the context of religion the sayings of the Prophet of Islam, which are one of the major foundations of Islam, both as a religion and as a civilization and culture. In Shi^{c}ism, the sayings of the Imams are also incorporated in the collection of *Ḥadīth*, although clearly distinguished from the sayings of the Prophet.

ḥadīth qudsī, "sacred tradition," a small number of *aḥādīth* in which God speaks in the first person through the Prophet. This collection is of particular importance for Islamic esoterism.

ḥajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca which is incumbent on all Muslims who have the means to perform the rite.

ḥaqīqah, at once the "Truth," the spiritual essence of things, and Ultimate Reality. Contrasted in the context of Sufism with *Sharī^{c}ah* and *Ṭarīqah*.

ḥikmah, wisdom, *sapientia*; also the school of "theosophy," which in certain contexts is used synonymously with traditional Islamic philosophy.

^{c}ibādah (pl. *^{c}ibādāt*), worship under all its forms. In Islamic Law all injunctions are divided into those which deal with various forms of worship (*^{c}ibādāt*) and those which deal with human relations and transactions (*mu^{c}āmalāt*).

ijmā^{c}, the consensus of opinion of the community, or more particularly the classes of learned men (*^{c}ulamā$^{\prime}$*), concerning various religious problems.

ijtihād, the exercising of authority and giving of independent judgment concerning matters pertaining to the religious sciences and more specifically to Islamic Law on the part of those who possess the necessary traditional qualifications.

imām, literally he who stands at the front, hence the leader of the daily prayers and also he who is the leader of the community. In the Sunni world the term is also used as an honorific title for outstanding religious scholars, while in Shi^{c}ism "Imam" refers to the person who carries within himself the special initiatic power issuing from the prophetic revelation.

īmān, religious faith and also the more inward dimension of religion which is characterized by the quality of intense faith and fervor.

al-insān al-kāmil, the Universal or Perfect Man who contains within himself all the possibilities of universal existence and who finds his embodiment in the prophets and saints, foremost among them for Muslims being of course the Prophet of Islam, who is *al-insān al-kāmil par excellence* in Islamic esoterism.

ʿirfān, gnosis or divine knowledge.

jihād, holy struggle, of which the "lesser" is against external obstacles to the establishment and functioning of the divine order and the "greater" against the inward forces which prevent man from realizing God within the center of his being.

khalīfah, vice-gerent or lieutenant; in the political domain, it refers to the representatives of the Prophet in his politico-social and juridical functions who came to be known as caliphs and in the spiritual sense it is a designation for the Universal Man in his function as God's vice-gerent for the whole of creation.

mahdī, literally the "guided one," but in the context of Islamic history the title of the person who will be sent to reestablish justice on earth before the end of time and to prepare the second advent of Christ. In Sunnism the identity of the *mahdī* is not specified, while in Shiʿism he is identified with the Twelfth Imam.

maʿrifah, divine knowledge or gnosis, which follows the love (*muḥabbah*) and the fear (*makhāfah*) of God.

muʿāmalah (pl. *muʿāmalāt*), the portion of Islamic Law dealing with transactions (see *ʿibādah*).

mujtahid, he who because of his mastery of the religious sciences and integrity of character has gained the right to practice *ijtihād*, that is, give independent judgment on religious problems.

nabī, prophet, he who, being chosen by God, brings tidings from the invisible world.

nafs, the soul or the psyche which stands between the body

(*jism*) and the spirit or intellect (*rūḥ* or *ʿaql*).

qiyās, in logic, syllogism, and in the religious sciences, analogical thinking; in certain schools of jurisprudence it is one of the bases of the *Sharīʿah*.

rasūl, a particular class of prophets who bring a message for a particular humanity.

Shahādah, the testimony of faith in Islam consisting of the two formulas *Lā ilāha illaʾLlāh*, "There is no divinity but the Divine" and *Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh*, "Muḥammad is the messenger of God."

Sharīʿah, the Divine Law of Islam and more generally the religious law of any revealed religion.

shirk, the cardinal and only unforgivable sin in Islam, which consists of envisaging a partner for the Divinity and therefore of compromising God's inviolable Unity.

Sunnah, the way of living and acting of the Prophet of Islam, which has become the traditional ideal according to which Muslims seek to mold their own lives.

tafsīr, commentary upon the Quran, which is usually distinguished from *taʾwīl*, the hermeneutic and esoteric interpretation of the Holy Book.

tajallī, the theophany of God's Names and Qualities, which in Islamic metaphysics is expressed in the symbolism of the reflection of an object in a mirror or shiny surface so as to emphasize that the "object" is reflected without entering into the mirror. The Truth is reflected in this world through *tajallī* and therefore does not enter into the world, nor is it affected by the becoming inherent in this world.

Ṭarīqah (pl. *ṭuruq*), literally the path or the way, hence the spiritual path leading to God. The Sufi order, which embodies the discipline necessary for spiritual realization, is thus called the *ṭarīqah*, the path to God.

taṣawwuf, the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam, which acquired this name from the 2nd/8th century onward.

tawḥīd, Unity, at once of the Divine and of all things and also the integration which leads to the awareness and realization of Unity.

taʾwīl, literally "to take something back to its origin," hence the esoteric and spiritual interpretation of both the Quran and creation, the esoteric or the inward being also the origin and the beginning of things.

ummah, the Islamic community, as defined by the adherence of its members to the Islamic revelation and the traditions of the Prophet of Islam. By extension other religious communities are also known to Muslims as the *ummahs* of different prophets.

waḥdat al-wujūd, the transcendent unity of being, the central and characteristic doctrine of Sufi metaphysics, formulated explicitly for the first time by the students of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī.

waḥy, revelation in its technical Islamic sense, which is distinguished clearly from inspiration (*ilhām*), the first being reserved exclusively for prophets and the second being available in principle to all men.

ẓāhir, the outward or the external aspect of manifestation and also of God, *al-Ẓāhir*, the Outward, being a Divine Name, contrasted with *al-Bāṭin*, the Inward.

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——— *Middle East Legal Systems*, Glasgow, Royston, 1985. Shows the role and significance of the *Sharī^{c}ah* in the contemporary laws of various Middle Eastern countries as well as the Sudan.

Arnold, T. W., *The Preaching of Islam.* Lahore, Shirkat-i

Qualam, 1956. A still outstanding work on the history of the spread of Islam and the *Sharīᶜah* over the world.

Asad, M., *Islam at the Crossroads*, Lahore, Muhammad Ashraf, 1947. An excellent study of the significance of the *Sharīᶜah* in the light of the problems that he Muslim world faces in the modern world.

Al-Azami, M. M., *On Schacht 's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence,* Oxford, Oxford Center for Islamic Studies and Cambridge (UK), The Islamic Texts Society, 1996. An important Islamic response to the views of Joseph Schacht and by extension his students concerning the origins and sources of the *Sharīᶜah* and especially the role of the *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah* in its formation.

Baillie, N. B., *A Digest of Mohammadan Law*, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1887. The English translation of *Sharāʾiᶜ al-islām*, one of the most authoritative Shiᶜite works on law.

Coulson, N. J., *Islamic Surveys*, 2, *A History of Islamic Law,* Edinburgh, University Press, 1964. A handy and useful survey of the *Sharīᶜah* and its history with a good bibliography but following the usual view of orientalists towards *Ḥadīth* and the formation of the Divine Law.

Doi, A. R. I., *Sharīᶜah: The Islamic Law*, London, Ta Ha, 1984. A clear and simple account of the significance of the *Sharīᶜah* and its contents presented from the orthodox Sunni point of view.

Al-Fāsī, ᶜAllāl, *Defense de la loi islamique*, trans. Ch. Samara, Casablanca, Commision du Patriomoine de Feu, 1977. The translation of a work of one of the major contemporary religio-political figures of Morocco in the defense of the *Sharīᶜah* from criticisms made against it from various modernist circles.

Fyzee, A. A. A., *Outlines of Muhammadan Law*, London, Oxford University Press, 1955. A handbook of Islamic Law, both Sunni and Shiᶜite, outlining the teachings of the Law as especially administered in the Indo-Pakistani subcontient.

Gardet, L., *La Cité musulmane, vie sociale et politique,* Paris, J. Vrin, 1961. Perhaps the best European source on Muslim social and political ideals with a certain amount of comparison with Christian beliefs.

Gibb, H. A. R., *Muhammadanism*, Chapter VI. A simple yet clear account of the nature and function of the *Sharīᶜah*.

——— "Law and Religion in Islam," *Judaism and Christianity*, ed. E. I. J. Rosenthal, Vol. III, pp. 145-170, London,

Shelden Press, 1938. A good survey of the significance of the *Sharīᶜah* in Islam.

Goldziher, I., "The Principles of Law in Islam," *The Historian's History of the World,* ed. H. S. Williams, Vol. III, pp. 294-304, London, The Times, 1908. A clear statement of the principles of Islamic Law.

——— *Vorlesungen* über *den Islam*, Heidelberg, Winter, 1925; English translation as *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* by A. and H. Hamori, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981. An influential work on the contents of the *Sharīᶜah* and one of the important writings of Western orientalists on this subject.

Hallaq, W., *A History of Islamic Legal Theories,* Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 1999. A thorough and scholarly study of the historical development of legal theories in Islam based on the Islamic perspective but also making use of Western scholarly and historical methods.

Hamidullah, M., *The Muslim Conduct of State,* Lahore, Muhammad Ashraf, 1954. A Muslim account of Islamic political theory and practice with special emphasis on the early period of Islam.

Kamali, M. H., *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence,* Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1991. An important scholarly study based on traditional sources and using the language of Muslim authorities in jurisprudence, dealing with all the principles of Islamic jurisprudence *(uṣūl al-fiqh)* ranging from the Quran and *Ḥadīth* to personal reasoning.

Khadduri, M. (trans.), *Islamic Jurisprudence, Shāfiᶜī's Risāla*, Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1961. A good English translation of the well-known treatise of al-Shāfiᶜī which is the basis of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam.

——— *The Islamic Conception of Justice*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1985. A thorough study based on the traditional sources of the concept of justice which underlies the *Sharīᶜah.*

Khadduri, M. and Liebesny, H. J., (ed.), *Law in the Middle East*, I, Washington, Middle East Institute, 1955. A survey of law in its foundations and daily application in the Middle East today.

Levy, R., *The Social Structure of Islam,* Cambridge, University Press, 1962. A well-written study of the social structure of Islam with many chapters devoted to different aspects of the *Sharīᶜah* and meant as an introduction to the whole of Islam and its

civilization.

MacDonald, D. B., *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory*, New York, Russell and Russell, 1965. Although somewhat out of date, it is still a useful outline of Islamic Law and theology.

Mahmasani, S., *The Philosophy of Jurisprudence in Islam*, trans. F. Ziadeh, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1962. An outstanding analysis of the principles and philosophy of Islamic jurisprudence based on traditional sources and practices.

Merchant, M. V., *A Book of Quranic Laws*, Lahore, Muhammad Ashraf. 1960. The laws outlined in the Quran are enumerated and discussed as seen by a Muslim.

Milliot, L., *Introduction à l'étude du droit musulmane*, Paris, Receuil Sirey, 1981. An introduction to facilitate the study of Islamic Law for Western students of the subject written in a systematic fashion but from the Orientalist perspective.

Modarressi Tabataba'i, H., *An Introduction to Shī'ī Law*, London, Ithaca Press, 1984. A major bibliographical study of both authors and various domains of Islamic Law as interpreted by Twelve-Imam Shi'ites with preliminary chapters on the sources, characteristics, contents and periods of Shi'ite Law.

Naqvi, S. N. H., *Ethics and Economics-An Islamic Analysis*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1981. Brings out the profound relation between that aspect of the *Sharī'ah* dealing with economics and ethical considerations, seeking to outline an Islamic economic system based on Islamic ethics.

Nasr, S. H., *Islamic Life and Thought*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1981. Contains a discussion of some of the problems that the spread of secularism poses for the *Sharī'ah* and an evaluation of modern threats to the *Sharī'ah* from the view of traditional Islam.

Roberts, R., *The Social Laws of the Quran*, London, Williams and Norgate, 1925. An outline of those aspects of the *Sharī'ah* that are mentioned in the Quran.

Rosenthal, E. I. J., *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, Cambridge, University Press, 1958. A well-documented and sympathetic survey of Islamic political theory in which both theological and philosophical sources are examined.

Santillana, D., *Istituzioni di diritto musulmano malichita, con riguardo anche al sistema sciafiita*, 2 vols., Rome, Istituto per

l'Oriente, 1926-38. Still one of the most thorough and detailed analysis of Islamic Law in a European language.

Schacht, J., *An Introduction to Islamic Law,* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964. A detailed survey of Islamic law containing both a historical and a systematic analysis and an outstanding bibliography by one of the leading European students of the *Sharīᶜah* who, however, like most other orientalists does not accept the traditional Muslim view of the origin and role of the Divine Law.

Siddiqi, A. H., *Caliphate and Sultanate*, Karachi, Jamiyat Faleh Publications, 1963. A contemporary orthodox Muslim discussion of the caliphate and sultanate.

Thanawi, Mawlana Ashraf ᶜAli, *Beheshti Zewar or Heavenly Ornament*, trans. Maulana Farid-uddin, Delhi, Taj, 1983. The translation of a well-known work on both Islamic doctrines and the *Sharīᶜah* by one of the major Islamic scholars of the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent during the 20th century.

De Zayas, F., *The Law and Philosophy of Zakāt*, Damascus, al-Jadidah Press, 1960. A thorough study of *zakāh* in both its social application and religious significance from the Islamic point of view.

Chapter 5: The *Ṭariqah*—The Spiritual Path and Its Quranic Roots

Anawati, G. C., and Gardet, L., *La Mystique musulmane,* Paris, J. Vrin, 1961. A systematic yet brief history of Sufism and a study of the main Sufi spiritual techniques containing much of value although the point of view is that of considering Sufism as natural mysticism.

Ásin Palacios, M., *El Islam cristianazado*, Madrid, Plutarco, 1931. Although based on a thesis which cannot be accepted by Muslims, this work contains a wealth of information on Sufism especially that of Andalusia written by a Spanish orientalist who devoted many studies to the Sufis of that land.

Bakhtiar, L., *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1997. Copiously illustrated introduction to Sufism and some of the sciences associated with it treated with devotion.

Bonard, Ch., *Le Souftsme—al-tasawwuf et la spiritualité islamique*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1991. A sympathetic treatment of Sufism as the expression of Islamic spirituality with an extensive bibliography of works on the subject in European lan-

guages.

Burckhardt, T., *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D. M. Matheson, Wellingborough (UK), Crucible, 1990. The most lucid exposition of Sufi doctrine in a European language and an indispensable introduction to any serious study of Sufism based on Western sources, written with authority and from within the Sufi tradition.

Chittick, W., *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1989. A monumental study of Ibn ᶜArabī based on extensive translations from his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* arranged thematically and expounded from the traditional point of view.

——— *The Sufi Path of Love*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1983. An exposition of the main themes of classical Sufism through the translation of Rūmī's poetry from both the *Mathnawī* and the *Dīwān* and their explanation.

——— *Sufism-A Short Introduction*, Oxford, One World, 2000. A short but clearly written introduction to various aspects of Sufism combining thorough scholarship with spiritual depth.

——— *The Self-Disclosure of God-Principles of Ibn al-ᶜArabi's Cosmology*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1998. The most extensive study of Sufi cosmology ever carried out in the West based primarily on the *Futūḥāt*.

Chodkiewicz, M., *An Ocean without Shore-Ibn ᶜArabī, The Book, and the Law*, trans. D. Streight, Albany (NY) State University of New York Press, 1993. One of several important studies by the author on Ibn ᶜArabī from the traditional perspective emphasizing the master's attachment to the Divine Law and his drawing of his teachings from the inner message of the Quran.

——— *Seal of the Saints-Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ᶜArabī*, trans. L. Sherrard, Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1993. The most important and authentic study available on the notion of sainthood (*walāyah/ wilāyah)* in the teachings of Ibn ᶜArabī.

Corbin, H., *En Islam iranien*, 4 vols., Paris, Gallimard, 1971-72. A monumental work summarizing a life-time of research on Islam in Persia. The third volume is devoted to Sufism in its various manifestations in the Persian world.

——— *Alone with the Alone-Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ᶜArabī*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998. An analysis of certain aspects of the Sufism of Ibn ᶜArabī and its influ-

ence in the East carried out with sympathy by one who accepts the spiritual originality and creativity of Sufism.

Cornell, V.J., *The Way of Abū Madyan*, Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1991. A major study of Maghribi Sufism from within the tradition and a translation of all the extant works of Abū Madyan, one of the seminal figures of Sufism in North Africa, presented in conjunction with the original Arabic.

——— *Realm of the Saint-Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1998. The definitive work on the teachings and history of Maghribi Sufism written from within the tradition and on the basis of long personal contact with Sufism in Morocco.

Ernst, C. W., *Words of Ecstasy in Early Sufism*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1985. A careful and sympathetic study of the meaning of the ecstatic utterances (*shaṭḥiyyāt)* of the early Sufis.

Gramlich, R., *Gedanken über die Liebe*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1977. A scholarly study of love in Sufism carried out with care and empathy toward the subject. The book also includes the translation of Aḥmad Ghazzālī's *Sawāniḥ*.

Haeri, F., *The Elements of Sufism*, Shaftesbury (MA), 1998. A brief history as well as treatment of the doctrines and practices of Sufism and biographies of some of the major Sufi figures. Writing from within the Sufi tradition, the author also deals with the phenomenon of pseudo-Sufism in the modern world.

Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, trans. R. A. Nicholson, Lahore, Islamic Book Foundation, 1976. A fine translation of one of the earliest and most authoritative works of Sufism containing the essential Sufi teachings as they have been practiced and followed over the centuries.

Ibn ᶜArabī, *Les Illuminations de La Mecque-The Meccan Illuminations*, under the direction of M. Chodkiewicz, Paris, Sindbad, 1988. A major bilingual anthology of sections of *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* representing most of the major themes of doctrinal Sufism and marking the culmination of numerous translations of Ibn ᶜArabī into French and English in recent years.

Ikbal Ali Shah, S., *Islamic Sufism,* London, Rider and Co., 1933. A discussion of Sufism by a contemporary Sufi, although some of the references made to Western concepts and ideas are inaccurate and may be misleading for a Westerner not already acquainted with

Sufism.

Al-Iskandarī, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, *The Key to Salvation-A Sufi Manual of Invocation*, trans. M. A. K. Danner, Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1996. A fine translation of perhaps the most important Sufi text in Arabic on the central Sufi practice of *dhikr* or invocation with an extensive study of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh and the origin of the Shādhiliyyah Order.

Kabbani, M. H., *The Naqshbandi Way*, Chicago, Kazi Publications, 1995. A unique work in English on the history of one of the main branches of the Naqsbandiyyah Order written by one of its present day masters and copiously illustrated.

Lewisohn, L. (ed.), *The Heritage of Sufism*, 3 vols., Oxford, One World, 1999. A rich collection of essays on Sufism in the Persian world containing scholarly essays, many of which are written from within the Sufi tradition.

Lings, M., *A Moslem Saint of the Twentieth Century*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1961. Also as *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1971; Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1972. A precious and indispensable study of a contemporary Sufi master containing both a sympathetic portrait of the saint and selections of his writings on the most salient features of Sufism.

——— *What is Sufism*?, London, Unwin Paperbacks, 1988. One of the most eloquent and profound introductions to Sufism available dealing at the deepest level with the doctrines and methods of Sufism as well as its history.

Massignon, L., *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj*, trans. H. Mason, 4 vols, 1994. The *magnum opus* of the leading French orientalist who devoted a lifetime to the study of Sufism and displayed much sympathy and profound insight in his writings on the Sufis and especially on Ḥallāj.

——— *Essays on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism,* trans. B. Clark, Notre Dame (IN) University of Notre Dame Press, 1997. The pioneering European work on the history of Sufism based on close textual study and a vast knowledge of Sufi writings.

Mir Valiuddin, *The Quranic Sufism*, Delhi, Asia House, 1959. Sufism as based directly on the Quran studied sympathetically from the point of view of the Sufi tradition.

——— *Contemplative Disciplines in Sufism*, ed. G. Khakee,

London, East-West Publications, 1980. A rare treatment of the contemplative disciplines and practices of Sufism, especially of the Qādiriyyah and Naqshbandiyyah Orders by a leading contemporary Sufi author.

Nasr, S. H., *Science and Civilization in Islam*, Cambridge (UK), The Islamic Texts Society, 1987; New York, Barnes and Noble, 1992. Besides treating the relation between Islamic science and Sufism, the final chapter contains a summary of the doctrines of Sufism pertaining to nature.

——— *Sufi Essays*, Chicago, ABC International, 1999. A collection of essays on various aspects of Sufism and the application of the principles of Sufism to the solution of some outstanding contemporary problems.

——— *Three Muslim Sages*, Delmar (NY), Caravan Books, 1986. A study of the School of Illumination of Suhrawardī and the Sufism of Ibn ᶜArabī and his followers.

——— *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, and Ipswich, (UK), Golgonooza Press, 1987. Contains many chapters on the relation between Sufism and various Islamic arts including sections devoted to Rūmī and ᶜAṭṭār.

——— *Islamic Spirituality Manifestations*, New York, Crossroad Publications, 1991. Contains the most extensive treatment of the Sufi orders in the English language written by both Muslim and Western authorities on the subject.

Nicholson, R., *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978. The best known work of the translator of the *Mathnawī* and a leading English orientalist, containing good translations of important Sufi works and an analysis which however is too much colored by categories of the European philosophy of his day.

Nurbakhsh, J., *In the Tavern of Ruin*, New York, Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1978. One of several works available in English on various facets of Sufism by the present-day master of one of the major Sufi orders which is particularly strong in Persia.

Schaya, L., *La Doctrine soufique de l'Unité*, Paris, Andrien-Maisonneuve, 1962. The traditional exposition of the doctrine of Unity based mostly on the writings of the school of Ibn ᶜArabī.

Schimmel, A. M., *As Through a Veil-Mystical Poetry in Islam*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982. The best introduction to Sufi literature in English treating the Arabic and Persian classics as

well as works in vernacular languages.

——— *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1975. A fine survey of both the teachings and history of Sufism written with great scholarly care as well as sympathy for the subject, especially as far as the early manifestations of Sufism are concerned.

Schuon, F., *Dimensions of Islam*, trans. by P. Townsend, London, Allen & Unwin, 1970. Discusses with amazing penetration some of the most delicate metaphysical questions of Islamic gnosis.

——— *The Eye of the Heart*. An exposition of many different aspects of Sufi doctrine including cosmology and the position of Sufism in the Islamic tradition.

——— *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, trans. P. Townsend, Pates Manor (UK), Perennial Books, 1987. Contains a masterly comparison between Sufism and the Vedanta as well as a discussion of the spiritual virtues and their role in Sufism.

——— *Understanding Islam*, Chapter IV. The outstanding study of Sufism as the esoteric dimension of Islam and as rooted directly in the Quran.

——— *Sufism, Veil and Quintessence*, Bloomington, (IN), World Wisdom Books, 1981. A masterly treatment of what is quintessential in Sufism as well as some of the problems posed by the veils through which the truths of Sufism have been expressed over the centuries.

Sirāj ed-Dīn, Abū Bakr, *The Book of Certainty*, New York, S. Weiser, 1970. A contemporary Sufi work on some of the teachings of Sufism based on the traditional symbolism of the degrees of certainty.

Trimingham, J. Spencer, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971; New York, Oxford University Press (Galaxy Books), 1972. A thorough study on the history and organization of the various Sufi orders covering nearly the whole of the Islamic world.

Chapter 6: Sunnism and Shi'ism—Twelve-Imam Shi'ism and Ismā'īlism

Amīnī, Ayatollah Ibrāhīm, *al-Imām al-Mahdī-The Just Leader of Humanity*, trans. A. Sachedina, North York (ONT), 1996. The translation from Persian of a major contemporary work presenting the traditional Shi'ite view of the Mahdī and responding to ques-

tions and doubts raised by modernized Shi'ites or Sunnis.

Anonymous. *A Brief History of the Fourteen Infallibles*, Tehran, World Organization for Islamic Services, 1984. A biography of the Prophet, Fāṭimah, and the Twelve Shi'ite Imams based completely on traditional Shi'ite sources.

Ayoub, M., *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: a Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism*, The Hague, Magnes Press, 1978. A scholarly study of the devotional dimension of Shi'ism, especially in relation to the tragedy of Karbala', by a Shi'ite scholar who also brings out the theological significance of suffering and mourning associated with this aspect of Shi'ism.

Chapman, J. A. (trans.), *Maxims of Ali*, Lahore, Muhammad Ashraf. An English translation of some of the sayings of 'Alī whose totality is found in the *Nahj al-balāghah*.

Chittick, W. C. (trans.), *The Psalms of Islam*, London, The Muhammadi Trust, 1988. A scholarly and eloquent translation of *al-Ṣaḥīfat al-sajjādiyyah* of the fourth Shi'ite Imam, one of the main devotional works of Shi'ism.

——— *A Shi'ite Anthology*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1981. A translation of some of the most important prayers and sayings of the Shi'ite Imams as selected by 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī.

Corbin, H., *En Islam iranien*. The first volume contains a detailed study of Shi'ism in its esoteric and metaphysical aspects.

——— *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Part II. A penetrating description of both Twelve-Imam Shi'ism and Ismā'īlism concentrating especially on the exposition of their metaphysical doctrines with some attention given to their religious history.

——— *L'Imam caché et la rénovation de l'homme en théologie shi'ite, Eranos Jahrbuch*, (Zurich), XXVIII, 1959. Contains a profound study of the figure of the Twelfth Imam and is role in the spiritual life in Shi'ism.

——— *Pour une morphologie de la spiritualité shi'ite, Eranos Jahrbuch*, XXIX, 1960. A general study of the structure of Shi'ite spiritually carried out with much sympathy for the Shi'ite perspective.

——— *Le Combat spirituel du shi'isme, Eranos Jahrbuch*, XXX, 1961. The role of the Imam in the inner spiritual life of Shi'ism.

——— *Au "pays" de l'Imam caché, Eranos Jahrbuch*, XXXII, 1963. A description of the "intermediate" spiritual world or the

"eighth climate" which is the abode of the Hidden Imam and the meaning of this world for the spiritual life.

——— *Le Temps cyclique dans le mazdéisme et dans l'ismaélisme, Eranos Jahrbuch*, XXI, 1951. The concept of cyclic time in Ismāᶜīlism analyzed and compared with Mazdaean ideas on time.

——— (ed. and trans.) *Trilogie ismaélienne*, Tehran, Institut Franco-Iranien, 1961. The text and French translation of three works of different periods connected with Ismāᶜīlism as well as Shiᶜism and Sufism with a comparative study by Corbin of these three aspects of Islam.

——— *Temple and Contemplation*, trans. W. Sherrard, London, KPI, 1986. A major study of the meaning and symbolism of the temple in general and the Kaᶜbah in Ismāᶜīlism and Twelve-Imam Shiᶜite thought in particular, with a section devoted to comparison with Jewish and Christian sources.

Daftary, F., *The Ismāᶜīlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990. The most thorough study to date of the rise and subsequent history of Ismāᶜīlism based on both traditional sources and works of Western scholarship.

——— *The Assassin Legends-Myths of the Ismāᶜīlīs*, London, I. B. Tauris, 1995. A masterly analysis of the way in which the legend of the assassins was formed and brought to Europe.

——— (ed.), *Mediaeval Ismāᶜīlī History and Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996. An important collection of essays written by both Muslim and Western scholars on various aspects of Ismāᶜīlī thought of both the classical and the Nizārī phases.

——— *A Short History of the Ismailis*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1999. A very readable and reliable short history of Ismāᶜīlism summarizing the author's more extensive work *The Ismāᶜīlīs*.

Halm, H., *Kosmologie und Heillehre der frühen Ismāᶜīliya: Studie zur islamischen Gnosis*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1978. A scholarly study of early Ismāᶜīlī cosmology describing many important early ideas in this domain although not explaining them from the esoteric Ismāᶜīlī point of view itself.

Al-Ḥillī, ᶜAllāmah Ḥasan b. Yūsuf, (trans, W. M. Miller), *Al-Bābu'l-hādī ᶜashar: a Treatise on the Principles of Shiᶜite Theology*. London, Royal Asiatic Society, 1928. The translation of one of the most popular summaries of Twelve-Imam Shiᶜite theology which has

served as a standard text in religious schools for centuries.

Hollister, J. N., *The Shi^{c}a of India*, London, Luzac, 1953. A historical survey of Shi^{c}ism in India containing also a general study of Shi^{c}ite doctrines and beliefs.

Ibn Bābawayh, trans. A. A. Fyzee, *A Shi^{c}ite Creed*, London, Oxford University Press, 1952. A literal translation of an authoritative traditional statement of Shi^{c}ite beliefs.

Ivanow, W., *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey*, Tehran, University Press, 1963. A thorough survey of Ismā^{c}īlī works compiled by one of the leading expositors of Ismā^{c}īlī doctrine and history.

——— *Studies in Early Persian Ismailism*, Leiden, Brill, 1948. A historical outline of the early phases of the Ismā^{c}īlī movement in Persia.

——— (ed. and trans.), *Kalāmī Pīr: a Treatise on Ismaili Doctrine*, Bombay, Ismaili Society, 1955. An English translation of a standard statement of Ismā^{c}īlī beliefs of the later period after the Alamut reform.

Jafri, S. M. H., *The Origins and Development of Shia Islam*, London, Longman, 1979. A detailed historical account of the rise of Shi^{c}ism written from the Shi^{c}ite point of view and at the same time based on a critical study of the historical sources.

Madelung, W., "Der Imamat in der frühen Ismailitischen Lehre," *Der Islam*, vol. 3. 1961, pp. 43-135. An important historical study of the concept and history of the Imamate in early Ismā^{c}īlism.

Marquet, Y., *Poésie ésotérique ismaïliennes-La Tā$^{\prime}$iyya de ^{c}Āmir b. ^{c}Āmir al-Baṣrī*, Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose, 1985. One of several important philosophical studies by the author of Ismā^{c}īlism, this one dealing with the esoteric poems of a 9th/14th century poet with an introduction on the origin of Ismā^{c}īlism and translation and commentary upon the poems.

Massignon, L., *Salmān Pāk et les prémises: spirituelles de l'Islam iranien,* Paris, Societé des Études Iraniennes, 1934. A monograph on the significance of Salmān for Shi^{c}ite Islam containing profound observations on the role of this figure in the religious consciousness of the Persians.

——— *Die Ursprünge und die Bedeutung des Gnostizismus in Islam, Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1937. Gnostic doctrines of Ismā^{c}īlism considered in their origin and significance.

Momen, M., *An Introduction to Shi^{c}i Islam: The History and*

Doctrines of Twelver Shiᶜism, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985. A carefully and scholarly written history of Shiᶜism from the perspective of Western historical studies.

Nanji, A., *The Nizārī Ismāᶜīlī Traditions in the Indo-Pakistani Subcontinent*, New York, Caravan Books, 1978. A history of Ismāᶜīlism in the Subcontinent written from within the Ismāᶜīlī perspective and using important traditional sources.

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