ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

A VOLUME IN THE SERIES \WORLD/SPIRITUALITY AN ENCYCLOPEDIC HISTORY OF THE RELIGIOUS QUEST"

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An important function has been served by this collection of essays devoted to the spiritual dimensions of the Islamic Tradition. For Muslim and non-Muslim alike, the book contains invaluable insights into the deeper meanings and spiritual import of central aspects of the Faith; the essence of the religion is elucidated in such a manner as to reveal, on the one hand, the universal characteristics of the spiritual heart of Islam, and on the other, to make comprehensible the specific forms of the Islamic faith which flow from this heart and lead back to it. Despite the considerable range of themes discussed, the book does not cover all aspects of Islam that have spiritual meaning - nor does it intend to do so - but rather; it succeeds in illuminating the fundamental spiritual, principles of the religion, in the light of which the secondary phenomena can be more clearly appreciated and accorded appropriate degrees of significance; for it is only in relation to the spiritual essence that outward forms have any meaning, and only in terms of the principle of Unity that the phenomena of multiplicity can be truly understood.

In a very useful and clear introduction, S. H. Nasr defines Islamic spirituality in terms of this I Unity or

"The essence of Islamic spirituality.. is the realization of Unity as expressed in the Qur'an, on the basis of the prophetic model and with the aid of the Prophet".

Since the principle of Unity governs all facets of Islamic life, the quest for spirituality in Islam is therefore not restricted to some narrowly conceived domain, apart from the general life of the community; what distinguishes the spirituality of Islam from the religion taken as a whole, then, is "the dimension of depth or inwardness", so that the forms of the religion are interiorised, rather than opposed; and the journey from the form to the essence which it expresses can be conceived as the movement from the outward to the inward, the periphery to the centre, which is the locus of realized Unity. This is a good definition of Islamic spirituality, which we shall see developed and complemented in the book.

Another important point made in this introduction is that one must treat Islamic spirituality within its own terms, and not impose criteria of scholarship drawn from the western tradition of rationalism and positivism; this means recognising that there is a living tradition of spirituality in Islam, in which oral transmission of sources has a respected status, complementing and elucidating the written tradition, and the aim of which is to bring about - in conjunction with the appropriate practices - the 'realisation' of wisdom, rather than simply establish factual accuracy. This is precisely the perspective which dominates the essays in this volume, which accurately reflect the current state of authentic Islamic scholarship,

"…rooted in its own spiritual experience with its accumulated spiritual wisdom, reflected upon through its classical scholarly traditions, and employing Western methods of scholarship to the degree that these methods do not distort the authenticity of the Islamic tradition". The result is a volume which is both intelligible to a Western audience, and completely authentic in terms of the tradition; such a synthesis is far from easy, and the editor must be congratulated on having succeeded admirably in this regard.

This volume (No.19 of the series: 'World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest.") has four parts: "The Roots of the Islamic Tradition and Spirituality", dealing with the Qur'an, the Prophet and the essential rituals; "Aspects of the Islamic Tradition", looking at the main schools of Islam, and an essay on female spirituality; "Sufism: The Inner Dimension of Islam"; and finally "Knowledge of Reality", addressing itself to doctrines of the Divine, cosmological, natural and eschatological orders. (The second volume - No.20 of the series - will deal with the manifestations of Islamic spirituality as expressed through Islamic history and culture.)

The first chapter, by S.H.Nasr, establishes the primacy of the Qur'an, as the basis of Islamic-spirituality; all else is by way of elaboration upon the Revealed Word of God to His final messenger, Muhammad. I would like to retain the 'salawat'). The Qur'an contains, implicitly or explicitly, all doctrine and method, not simply in terms of its literal meaning or dogmatic content, but also, and pre-eminently, by virtue of the sacred presence, inhering in the very sounds of the revealed words, which enters into and transforms the soul of the sincere believer:

"The chanted Qur'an is the prototype of all sacred sound. It is the divine music that reminds man of his original abode and at the same time accompanies him in his dangerous journey of return to that abode; for the Qur'an although chanted in this world, reverberates through all the cosmic levels to the Divine Presence from which it has issued".

Referring to the names which the Qur'an has for itself, such as 'al-Furqan' and al-Huda' (the 'Discernment' and 'Guide', respectively), Nasr shows how all metaphysical doctrine is contained in the formulae of the Qur'an, in particular that of the first testimony of Islam, 'La ilaha illa'Llah'- 'There is no divinity but God' - and how the all-encompassing doctrine of Tawhid is derived therefrom; if the Qur'an thus objectively discerns between truth and falsehood, its name 'dhikr Allah', 'remembrance of God', indicates

its role in terms of methodic assistance to the believer in the quest for realizing the truth of Tawhid.

In a concise and highly effective manner, Nasr explains how the episodes of sacred history found in the Qur'an can be interpreted in a spiritual fashion: such history" .. is in reality the epic of the life of the soul. The forces of good and evil are to be found within ourselves, and even the prophets are the external and objective counterparts and complements of the inner Intellect, which illuminates the heart and mind of man". Without such an understanding, the full spiritual potential of the Qur'an remains untapped.

As well as being an indispensable element in the spiritual path, the Qur'an is also the supreme source of Islamic law, thus comprising within itself the pre-requisites for both outward and inward activity, whereby the former must express the latter, and be dominated by it. This theme is continued by the late A.K. Brohi's essay, ("The Spiritual Significance of the Qur'an") which stresses the relationship between simple, obediential faith, on the one hand, and the realisation of higher levels of being and truth, on the other. Man is initially called upon to obey the Law, and submit to the Will of God, this constituting the essential condition for the awakening of man's "inner resources"; these are ingrained in Fitrah', the original nature of man, which calls upon man to transcend himself, Quoting from the Qur'an on the spiritual stages through which the soul must pass in its struggle against its earthly tendencies, and commenting upon various aspects of the relationship between man and God, Brohi concludes thus:

".. a man who witnesses the awakening of his inner resources also witnesses within himself, by a gift of direct awareness, the true meaning of religious truths that he had earlier accepted on premises of faith".

While Brohi focusses selectively on particular verses of the Qur'an and derives valuable insights through reflection thereupon, the essay by A.Habil ("Traditional Esoteric Commentaries on the Qur'an") analyses in a more systematic fashion the levels of symbolism in the science of ta'wil, the

hermeneutical interpretation of the Qur'an. The word ta'wil literally means to take back to the origin ('awwal); and four levels are identified on which this symbolic process operates. The first level of symbolism concerns the Qur'an as a whole: the Sacred Book itself is the most direct symbol of the Spirit and, as seen in the first essay by S.H.Nasr, assists in concrete realisation; any ta'wil of particular verses thus emerges as the fruit of this spiritual process of interiorisation.

The second level of interpretation pertains to the natural signs in the cosmos; the Qur'an abounds in references to these objectively existing signs of the Creator and invites man to reflect upon them. These phenomena of nature are not to be considered as sentimental similes of some subjective feeling or another, but on the contrary, are symbolic in the true sense of the word, namely, "…they lead back to the higher realities they symbolize and participate in them independently of any choice or agreement on our part". This is an extremely important point and must be fully grasped, not just in the context of the exegesis of sacred scripture, but also in terms of spirituality as such, its doctrines and methods: in one respect, the symbol is other than what is symbolised, but in another respect, by virtue of its essential content, it is mysteriously identified with the supra-formal principle which it expresses on the plane of formal manifestation.

The third level of symbolism involves particular symbols referred to in the Qur'an, such as the 'Pen' (al-Qalam) and the 'Tablet' (al-Lowh), and which are the subject of different esoteric interpretations.

Finally, the very letters of the Qur'an are interpreted according to esoteric principles; out of this type of interpretation emerged the science of jafr, the numerical symbolism of all the letters of the alphabet.

In addition to the above, one must not forget that, according to prophetic tradition, each verse of the Qur'an contains at least seven levels of meaning. Habil refers to the Sunnah of the Prophet as the second source of esoteric commentary of the Qur'an, the first being the Qur'an itself; and,

among the companions of the Prophet, the esoteric commentary of 'Ali ranks as the most significant in terms of transmission, chiefly through the Shiite Imams. It is of note, in this context, that lmam Ja'far al-Sadiq ".. played the most important role in the whole history of esoteric commentaries upon the Qur'an in both its Shi'ite and Sunni facets".

The development of the tradition of esoteric commentary is then traced historically, in the context of Sufism, then within the domain of the Islamic philosophers, and finally in Shi'ite gnosis; these sections are richly annotated and invite the interested reader to go further into this vast, and very largely unexplored field. Habil concludes the essay by giving an example of esoteric exegesis, analysing the deeper meanings of the "two seas" as found in different contexts, traversing the orders of nature, metaphysics, cosmology and eschatology; the main point being that the different levels of symbolism correspond objectively to the hierarchy of being, and subjectively to the profundity of awareness: by virtue of the theurgic power of the Qur'an, this awareness means the transformation of the soul as well as illumination of the mind.

"According to 'A' ishah, the 'favourite wife' the soul of the Prophet is similar to the Qur'an". In the light of this idea, one makes the transition from the Qur'an to the remarkable essay by Frithjof Schuon: "The Spiritual Significance of the Substance of the Prophet". "We find piercing insights into the meaning of the Prophetic virtues, profound esoteric commentary upon key Qur'anic verses and the illumination of the inner meanings of important Prophetic sayings.. One is conscious of the principle of Tawhid permeating the varied and profound ideas expressed here. the elaboration of meanings in different domains, within the framework of unity, and always reminding the reader of this oneness". For example, in the analysis of the Prophetic Substance, Schuon makes use of the symbolism of numbers and the four cardinal points of space:

"The north is negative perfection, which is exclusive and surpasses or transcends; the south is positive perfection, which is inclusive and vivifies and deepens; the east is active perfection, which is dynamic and affirms, realizes and is, if need be, combative; and the west is passive perfection, which is static and peace-giving".

This quaternary very effectively establishes a framework for understanding not simply the prophetic substance, but indeed spirituality as such, with which the former coincides; but such a view is by no means held up as the only possible one, for Schuon emphasises that the qualities of the prophet's soul are ".. in principle innumerable, given that it is always possible to subdivide them and extract new modes from them". On the other hand, the Unity of the Prophetic Substance, conceived in terms of "pure substantiality is none other than the love of God in the widest as well as the deepest meaning of the word." Thus it is this love of God which stands at the summit of all possible modes of spiritual perfection, the source of the virtues which deploy it on different levels. This unity of the soul and the totality of its love is precisely what is demanded by the Unity of the object loved: the oneness of the Beloved requires a corresponding noneness, totality and exclusivity of love from the lover. If this constitutes the summit and source, why, one might ask, the need to elaborate any further? Without it any way detracting from this principle of unity, the following reason is given, succinctly and with profundity: "We are then at the source, but lacking differentiated points of reference which could impart to us the internal riches of this love".

And Schuon does indeed impart to us glimpses of this internal radiation of love complementing the previously noted geometric and relatively abstract set of coordinates with a description of the fundamental virtues which combines poetic expression with the most elevated intellectual conceptions. The relationship between virtue and spiritual realization is clearly identified; summing up, in his unique, direct and powerful style, Schuon says:

"The sincere 'yes' to that which transcends us always presupposes beauty of soul, just as the capacity of a mirror to reflect light presupposes its purity".

In the ensuing discussion of faith, the nature of "that which transcends us", and its relation with the knowledge one can have of it, is highlighted. The relative subject cannot know everything, since the object known is inexhaustible, and ".. the more one dissects and systematizes it abusively, the more it will avenge itself by depriving us of its 'life', namely that something which, precisely, is the gift of the object to the subject." If this is by way of comment on the "obscure merit of faith", then the following reminds one of the absolute primacy of metaphysical Truth:

"Total knowledge exists, certainly, for otherwise the very notion of knowledge would lose all its meaning, but it is situated beyond the complementarily between subject and object, in an inexpressible 'beyond' whose foundation is the ontological identity of the two terms".

Schuon also illustrates the connection between the Prophetic Substance and Sufism; this is achieved through elaborating the meaning of the hadith in which prayer is one of the things "made lovable" to the Prophet, and relating this to relevant verses of Surat al-Muzzammil, which en join night vigils, the recitation of the Qur'an and the remembrance of God: "The difference between the two practices - the recitation of the Qur'an and the invocation of the Divine name - is the difference between the qualities and the essence, the formal and the non-formal, the outward and the inward, thought and heart. And it is this passage concerning the two nocturnal practices which basically inaugurates the Sufic tradition. It is to be noted that the recitation must be done 'with care' (tartila), whereas the invocation demands that the worshiper 'devotes himself totally' (tartila) to God. The first expression refers to the zeal that satisfies the requirements of the formal place, and the second, to the totality of dedication needed for the realization of the supraformal element, this being the Essence, or the immanent Unity".

Sufism is thus to be understood as the crystallization of this total dedication to the Essence, the expression of this most fundamental quality of the Prophetic Substance, from which it derives all its efficacy and authenticity.

A wealth of ideas - penetrating and illuminating - are found here, but the value of this essay can hardly be gauged by selective quotations; rather it requires - and most richly rewards - careful study and deep reflection. There follows a chapter on the life of the Prophet and his Sunnah and Hadith; the first part written by Ja'far Qasimi and the second by S.H.Nasr. The contribution by Qasimi provides the volume with important background for the spiritual themes explored, without which much of the material would be difficult to assimilate for the reader unacquainted with the Islamic tradition. It is written in a fine and engaging narrative style, based completely on the earliest traditional sources, and indeed reminds the Muslim reader of the inspiring nature of these early accounts of the major events in the spiritual history of Islam; of particular note in this connection is the striking description of the Night of Ascension (Laylat al-Mira j) by al-Suyuti.

S.H.Nasr explains the importance of the Prophetic Sunnah in terms of both inner virtue and outward comportment, governing every aspect of the Muslims life, and complementing in a concrete manner the ordinances of the Qur'an. The Sunnah thus acts as the framework for socializing the everyday life of the Muslim in accordance with the spirit of the Qur'an. In terms of the spiritual life a crucial point is made:

"There is no Islamic spirituality possible without the Sunnah, for the gate to the higher worlds was opened for the Islamic sector of humanity by the prophet alone during his nocturnal journey. It is He alone who holds the key to those gates and who alone can guide the Muslim on the path of spiritual realization" (p102). This is a firm rebuttal to those calling themselves 'sufi', whilst claiming to have no need of the Sunnah, in the name of an ostensible commitment to essence over form; Nasr shows, in keeping with

our dominant theme of Unity, that the soul in its entirety must be molded by the spirituality of the Prophet - which is nothing other than the radiation of the Word of God - which means imitation of the Prophet in outward action, on the foundation of the inner virtues emanating from his spiritual Substance; and if the outward practice is to some extent contingent on external circumstances the inward assimilation of the virtues is a universal imperative.

In the discussion of Hadith, important points are made in relation to the status of the sayings of the Prophet, serving as a critique of the Western methods of scholarship in this field. Nasr also refers to the 'Divine Sayings' (al-ahadith al-qudsiyyah) in which God speaks in the first person through the mouth of the Prophet; central aspects of Sufi doctrine and method are derived from these sayings, which open up the inner aspects of worship and reveal the nature of the Divine response to the sincere prayer - taken in its widest and deepest meaning - of the believer.

It is to inner worship that the essay by Syed Ali Ashraf addresses itself. Entitled "The inner Meaning of the Islamic Rites: Prayer, Pilgrimage, Fasting, Jihad", it gives a brief description of the formal practices associated with each rite, and then interiorize them by elaboration upon their symbolic meanings. In discussing prayer, the basic principle is that unless the outward action is accompanied by a sincere heart, it remains a mere show. He quotes the Prophet's saying: "Prayer without the Presence of the Lord in the heart is not prayer at all", and continues: "Regular formal prayer should be an external manifestation of this internal prayer".

Many important points are revealed in this discussion, which practising Muslims would do well to reflect upon, and thus deepen the significance of everyday practices; without this depth, prayer can all too easily slip into an unthinking routine devoid of that central function. implied in another saying of the Prophet: "Prayer is mi'raj (ascent) for the mu'min (faithful)".

Fasting is explained on different levels, with its highest significance determining and giving meaning to the abstentions enjoined on the lower levels: this is "…fasting in which the individual abstains physically, mentally and spiritually from anything that draws a veil between him and the Lord".

Ashraf's explication of the rites of pilgrimage is particularly illuminating, connecting each rite with its symbolic meaning, and highlighting the relationship by referring to relevant Qur'anic verses and Prophetic sayings with insights into their symbolic meaning. In discussing the sacrifice, however, one is justified in questioning- his assertion that this "…spiritually symbolizes the sacrifice of al-nafs ul-mutma'innah at the altar of God the Qahhar,; the earlier statement that is the nafs (self) that is being symbolically sacrificed is less problematic: that one can sacrifice the lower tendencies that constitute the worldly ego is beyond dispute, but can the soul imbued with the quality of 'itmi'nan' - signifying the complete serenity of absolute certitude, a pure grace from Heaven and pertaining to the very essence of God - can such a soul be the subject of a sacrifice?

Turning to jihad, the essential distinction between the inner struggle against one's lower self and the outer struggle in the cause of Islam is given paramount importance. As we saw in the previous chapter by Nasr, the internal dimension is universal, whilst the external is subject to conditions; the internal, again, being the more essential, in accordance with the famous Prophetic saying that this is the jihad al-akbar, the greater holy struggle; all other struggles - whether military, political or social - being 'lesser'.

Ashraf concludes by comparing the martyrdom achieved through the two forms of jihad; he argues that the ascetic who has 'killed' his nafs is as much a martyr as one who dies on the battle-field in the cause of God. With this much we can agree; but rather more debatable is the statement that "…through the lesser jihad one may achieve the benefits of the greater jihad..."; for this appears to overlook the higher degrees of spiritual realisation possible in this world through victory over the self in the greater

jihad, stages along the Path involving not simply a complete submission of the will, but also a sublimation of the subject through total knowledge of and love for the Supreme Self, with which it realises its inner identity; these distinctions being reflected, moreover, in the ascending degrees of Paradise. (to which reference is made by Abu Bakr Siraj ed-Din later in this volume).

The central theme of this chapter is continued in A.K.Brohi's second contribution, "The Spiritual Dimensions of Prayer." Different aspects of the canonical prayer, forms of supplication and the relationship between prayer and other religious duties are discussed, drawing principally from the Qur'an. Emphasis is placed on unceasing prayer of the heart, the invocation of the Divine Names, and the recitation of the Qur'an as the "sure means to reach a higher level of spiritual exaltation".

Chapters on the three main branches of Islam follow: Abdur-Rahman Ibrahim Doi gives a relatively straight-forward account of the majority Sunni school; Syed Husain Jafri's description of the second major Islamic tradition of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism - brings out very well the distinctive and very moving dimension of spiritual passion in Shi'ism, exemplified by extracts from the supplications of the first and the fourth Imams; and Azim Nanji shows the rich esoteric aspects of Isma'ilism, the emphasis on ta'wil and the inner meaning (batin) of Qur'anic verses, as well as a very interesting and elaborate hermeneutical interpretation of ritual prayer according to Nasir Khusraw.

The contemporary world of Islam is much in need of the kind of material presented by Saadia Khawar Khan Chishti in her essay "Female Spirituality in Islam". In a climate dominated by materialism and individuals, it is important to reassert that the equality of men and women in the spiritual domain means infinitely more than any material conception of equality between the two, which regards worldly succeess as the goal, and self assertion as the means; to this must be opposed the universal goal of spiritual advancement by means of mastery over the self. This essay stresses that this

form of equality not only exists in principle in Islam, but female spirituality of the very highest order has existed in practice, continually exerting its benefic influence, whether chronicled or not: "Several works on women in Islamic history mention distinguished women saints outstanding in their spiritual character - sapiential knowledge, perfection, wisdom, graciousness, and magnanimity - but the light of the hidden jewel of the inner personality of hundreds of women saints whose shrines are found all over the Islamic world has not shone on the pages of Islamic history, and the memorial to their truly spiritual way of life has not as yet been built".

Combining relevant Quranic verses with details of women saints in particular, the remarkable Rabi'ah al-Adawiyyah - the writer effectively establishes the spiritual criteria and role-models which should guide women in their lives. If it is possible for some women to become saints, and thus realise the whole purpose and intention of religion, it is consequently possible, and necessary, that all women infuse their lives with spiritual principles to the extent of their capabilities, and in accordance with the qualities of femininity with which the Creator has endowed them; qualities which complement, rather than compete with the qualities of masculinity, and which find their principial roots in the attributes and names of God, whence their entire reason for being.

The next four chapters deal with the Sufi tradition, beginning with Abu Bakr Siraj ed-Din's excellent essay, "The Nature and origin of Sufism." The status of Sufism as the esoteric core of Islam is established through quoting and commenting upon the most significant Quranic verses and ahadith. The distinction between the pious or righteous believers on the one hand, and the 'slaves' of God the ones 'brought nigh' (muqarrabun) or the 'foremost' (sabiqun) on the other, as found in the early Meccan surahs, is shown to clearly refer to a spiritual minority among the believers who are distinguished by their totality of dedication and intensity of worship. And it is to this minority that one must look for the most proud realisation of the spiritual principles of Islam. This means, on the one hand, that the entire body of

Islam derives its spiritual nourishment, whether knowingly or not, from the working of this mystical 'heart'; and, on the other hand, the dimensions of primordiality and universality proper to the Islamic Revelation as a whole are given their deepest and widest meaning. As the last Revelation to mankind, Islam completes a cycle and this finality re joins, in a certain sense, primordiality, which Abu Bakr Siraj ed-Din illustrates through Quranic verses urging man to be ever-conscius of the miracle of creation itself, and referring to Islam as the primordial religion, "God's original upon which He originated mankind"; and, again by virtue of its finality, Islam is universal, even on the exoteric level, in a way which earlier Revelations could not be, summing up all the Messages preceding it. After quoting and commenting upon the relevant verses which indisputably establish this universality and hence the intrinsic legitimacy of other authentic religions, the writer asserts that, due to the inevitable limitations of the exoteric mentality, it falls upon Sufism to do full justice to the twin aspects of primordiality and universality: "However, few members of the Sufi orders are in fact able to escape sufficiently from the contagious limitations of the exoterism that surrounds them".

What is being expressed here is a key element which distinguishes the inner, esoteric path - the tariqah' - from the exoteric path, or shari'ah. Earlier in this volume we have seen S. H. Nasr's definition of Islamic spirituality as being Islam in depth or inwardness, and in line with this definition, the contributions of A. K. Brohi and S. A. Ashraf have shown the element of continuity between the outer and the inner, the interiorisation or inward prolongation of the form in the direction of the essence. Complementing this view of the relationship between form and essence, Abu Bakr Siraj ed-Din's essay implies the esoteric truth that as one approaches the essence, one sees all forms mysteriously contained therein, including the diverse forms of religion itself; each religious form thus expressing the essence, on the one hand, and being transcended by it, on the other. There is, consequently, both continuity and contrast as between form and essence.

Lest it be thought that such expressions involve a weakening of commitment to the Islamic form, it must be stressed that an understanding of the relativity of all forms in the face of the Absolute in no way diminishes the necessity of adherence to one's particular form as the pre-requisite for advancement along the path to the Absolute: the outward form is inwardly transcended, never outwardly abolished, it being recognised that form has its rights on the level to which it corresponds.

This point becomes all the more important in the light of the discussion of primordiality. Abu Bakr Siraj ed-Din gives a profound rendering of the meaning of fitrah, the original nature of man and the fall from this state:

"To use the traditional symbol of the tree the first men were profoundly and directly aware of being attached to their Divine Root, and they extended this subjective certainty to all that surrounded them. Everything was an object of wonder, in virtue of the Transcendent Reality which it manifested, the Hidden Treasure which it had to make known. The failure to live up to that attitude - the failure to mantain the consciousness of the symbolic nature of each object, the choice of something for its own sake regardless of its archetype - was the cause of the fall".

If it is incumbent on the Sufi to return to this primordiality, it is also necessary to realise that fallen man has need, precisely, of the formal elements of religion as the God - given framework in which to regain that unceasing remembrance of the Divine. Therefore, the formal rights of orthodoxy are underlined by this view of primordiality, whilst aspirations are directed to That which transcends all form.

Also, if it is through a recognition that the origin and goal of all authentic religions is God that esoterism can be called universal, it remains nonetheless true that Islamic esoterism necessarily takes a certain shape and flavour in terms of its doctrines and methods, which are firmly rooted in the sources of the Islamic Revelation. Earlier, S.H.Nasr had stressed that there can be no Islamic spirituality outside the Sunnah; and Frithjof Schuon

showed how the virtues of the Prophetic Substance continue to guide Muslims along the path of perfection; so it can be said that it is the Prophetic barakah that vivifies all those essential Sufi practises which are genuinely aimed at spiritual realisation.

In conclusion, Abu Bakr Siraj ed-Din underlines the strongly conservative role of Sufism, retaining the most essential aspects of the Islamic heritage whilst giving them renewed expression; if the Sufis have "added" to the body of Islamic doctrine, these acquisitions have been "…not with regard to the principles themselves, but by way of analytical formulations…"

This idea forms one of the central themes of the following chapter by Victor Danner, "The Early Development of Sufism". Tracing its origins from the time of the Prophet, through to the middle of the sixth/twelfth century, he analyses the process by which Sufism developed from its embryonic state into a fully fledged body of doctrines and methods, becoming. thereby identified with the spiritual Path of Islam. After identifying six major factors deemed responsible for the growing institutionalization of Sufism in the early period, he draws attention to the conflicts between the masters of the Way - or tariqah - and the doctors of the Law - shari'ah - leading up to the grand synthesis of the two domains by al-Ghazzali, who himself embodied this synthesis, being both a pre-eminent theologian and an enlightened Sufi. In his influential work, The Revival of the Religious Sciences, confirming the necessity of the tariqah as well as the shari'ah in the framework of Islam, "…al-Ghazzali describes the illuminative knowledge of the path, which confers immediate certitude and graces, as the very summit of the believer's life. In brief, the Shari'ah did not suffice unto itself, nor did the religious authorities have any competence in the affairs of the tariqah, which was the domain of the Sufi Shaykhs. After his day, it would not be easy for any knowledgeable religious scholar to reject the tariqah without exposing his ignorance about the spiritual contents of the Islamic message".

This work by al-Ghazzali, apart from its providential character, expresses a degree of analytical elaboration which is in marked contrast to the elliptical and concise statements made by the earlier Sufis; concomitant with this was the increased diversification of Sufi methods and practises. Confirming the point made above by Abu Bakr Siraj ed-Din, Danner emphasises the continuity in principle of the essential elements of the integral path of Islam - the doctrine of Tawhid and the practice of dhikr: "Indeed, it would seem that one of the important functions of Sufism has been to furnish these elements of the path to its seekers in the right proportions and in accordance with the needs of each generation".

In the following essay by J.L.Michon ("The Spiritual Practices of Sufism") the centrality of the practice of dhikr is underlined. After briefly describing the nature of Islamic mysticism, he gives a very useful account of the principal operative aspects of the tariqah: the meaning of initiation. the role of the shaykh, the kinds of meeting of the Sufis and the litanies and other forms of worship which are practised; all of these practices can, in one sense, be described as forms of dhikr, it being noted that dhkr means, in addition to its primary meaning of remembrance, to mention, to invoke and also to glorify, all of which is with a view to bringing about consciousness of God. In this light, dhikr can be seen as a possible resolution of the tension between the exoteric and esoteric domains; bearing in mind Nasr's earlier definition of Islamic spirituality, the practice of dhikr can be regarded as the counterpart, in the operative domain, to that element of continuity in principle between formal, outward Islam and its inner, esoteric content:

" the dhikr is the becoming aware by the creature of the connection that unites him for all eternity to the Creator. Seen in this way, the dhikr constitutes the very essence of religion, as much in its exoteric dimension (when man remembers God as his Master and transcendent and omnipotent Judge) as in the esoteric order (where the Divine Presence reveals itself as the inner dimension of the human being)".

One may add that the illumination of this inward Presence in no way contradicts the Divine Transcendence, since the Immanent Self infinitely transcends the limitations of the empirical ego.

Michon quotes extensively from the Qur'an, ahadith and Sufi sources in this very well researched essay, opening up to the reader a wealth of literary on this important subject.

In the next chapter, "The Sufi Science of the Soul", by Mohammad Ajmal, the authoritative writings of various Sufis on the nature of the soul are introduced and contrasted with modern psychology. (Of particular note is the work by Moulvi Ashraf 'Ali Thanvi, a Sufi of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent whose writings certainly deserve more attention than they have received.)

Describing the stages through which the soul passes in the course of its spiritual development, the key to his process is regarded as the working of the Spirit within the soul; the objective principle of the Spirit thus serves as the basis on which to assess and remedy the failings and weaknesses of the personality passively determined by the arbitrary and chaotic ways of the world. Various traditional course of the soul are mentioned, dealing with different kinds of imbalance, leading up to the pre-eminent role of the spiritual master as the most direct representative or embodiment of the world of the Spirit, and thus the most objective judge of the needs of the disciple. By contrast, modern psychology is revealed as a science lacking any objective terms of reference, a case of the blind leading the blind:

"Only a science such as the Sufi science of the soul can succed in curing the soul's diseases and in being an effective psychotherapy. Only the Spirit can cure the soul of its ills…"

The final section of the book, "Knowledge of Reality", begins with another very valuable contribution by S.H. Nasr. Entitled "God", this chapter serves as a summary of a great deal of the material preceding it, as

well as opening up a link with the four chapters following it, on the different dimensions of reality, all stemming from and leading back to the Divine. Nasr again emphasises the concept of tawhid, this time bringing forth its operative consequences, both in the context of the Sufi "knowledge of the heart" - wherein pure unity is realised - and also with regard to the objectivation of the One Supreme Subject - the radiation of the Self. The oft-quoted hadith qudsi "I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the world", sums up this process whereby God makes Himself known to His creation, with man at its summit, endowed with a knowledge of all the 'Names' and created in the very image of God. This ingrained knowledge of the 'Names' - or the archetypal essences - within man is intimately connected with the cosmological unfolding of the creation. Nasr explains how God manifests the universe through His Names and Qualities and that "…the goal of Islamic spirituality is to rediscover through these manifestations their unique Source and to recognize God's sovereignty over all that is contained in the bosom of time and space".

Here we have the spiritual dimension of the objective world; but to inwardly realise the unity whence spring these manifestation, man's virtual knowledge must be made actual, and it is precisely in naming His Qualities that God makes Himself known not simply in terms of doctrine but also in terms of concrete experience; and this leads ineluctably back to dhikr - the remembrance of God through invocation of His Names, which are woven into the very substance of man's soul. In a powerful passage, Nasr underscores the centrality of dhikr at the highest level of Islamic spirituality, which is ".. nothing other than being transmuted by the invocation of the Divine Name until one lives in constant relembrance of God, until man ceases to be separative consciousness and becomes nothing other than the reverberation and echo of His Name whose power transforms the creature ".

This chapter also contains on important commentary on other aspects of the Divine Nature, such as the relationship between transcendence and

immanence, the Names of Mercy and Rigour, and concludes with a remarkable section on the "Face of God "The Angels" is the title of the next chapter, by Sachiko Murata. This important domain has been overlooked by recent generations and deserves renewed study, given the fact that belief in the angels enters into the very definition of faith, and that the Qur'an, abounds in references to angels - explicit and implicit - in connection with nearly all functions in the spiritual universe. Murata gives a full account of the angelic hierarchy, the different types of angels and their respective roles; drawing from traditional spiritual authorities who used the revealed sources as the foundation for their own inspired insights, she shows the importance traditionally ascribed to the angelic realm. One particularly revealing dimension opens up with the conception of angels as the exterior counterparts to the ".. spiritual faculties of the perfect man, who is the prototype of both mankind and the universe". It is to such authorities as Ibn 'Arabi, al-Qunawi and Farghani that one must look for elaboration on this complementary, microcosmic understanding of the angels, -which, far from denying their macrocosmic role - as would the modern mind, so prone to confusing simile with symbolic analogy - establishes, on the contrary, a dynamic correspondence between the internal mechanisms of man's soul and the external cosmic functions of the Universal Spirit.

This theme is central to the following chapter, again by Nasr, on "The Cosmos and the Natural Order". Writing as an eminent authority in this field, he illuminates the spiritual facets of the relationship between man and the world around him., The Qur'an exhorts man to reflect on the 'signs' in nature as well as on the 'signs' within himself; and the same word-ayah - refers also to the verses of the Holy Book-itself, thus pointing to an underlying unity between these inter-related orders of reality. The emphasis, in terms of spiritual development, is strongly placed on the illumination of the inward 'signs': "To the extent that man turns to the spiritual world within, nature unveils her inner message to him and acts as both support and companion in his spiritual journey". Thus, while again underlining the

primacy of inwardness, the outward world of nature is given a sacred significance in Islam and is even favourable contrasted to man himself - man insofar as he is dwarfed by nature on the one hand, and manifests his 'unnatural' rebellion against the Creator, on the other. Nature can therefore function as an aid in the spiritual life since "…she abides in her perfect surrender to the One in her perpetual state of being Muslim".

This conception of nature finds its appropriate place in the overall context of Islamic cosmology, which acts as a bridge connecting pure metaphysic with the particular branches of science dealing with the empirical world. Nasr briefly outlines the main features of the different schools of cosmology in Islam - Peripatetic, Ismaili, Sufi - whilst integrating them into their common source and unifying principle: "These cosmologies differ in their language and form but not in content, which is always the assertion of the Unity of the Divine Principle, which is the origin of the cosmos, the reality of the hierarchy of cosmic and universal existence, and the interdependence and interrelation of all orders of cosmic reality and various realms of nature".

Charles Le Gai Eaton's essay, "Man", is addressed to the existential ambiguity inherent in the human being, a creature compounded of clay on the one hand, and viceregal dignity, as God's representative on earth, on the other. The coexistence of these two aspects gives rise to a necessity - at first sight paradoxical - of man's realisation of his nothingness, his 'slavehood' before the majesty of his Creator, as the essential condition for rising above himself and thus fulfilling his function as vicegerent of God. His existential nothingness is thus eclipsed by the Divine Light that is reflected in the mirror of his purified heart, that light by which he contemplates God's Names and Qualities; it is thus not man that rises above himself, but the Divine Principle - the Divine Breath breathed into man at his creation - that is brought into operation, by a gift of Grace, which requires that man remove the obstacles created by his ego and his 'natural' inclination to attribute all positive qualities to himself:

"In this context humility is no longer a moral or sentimental concept, but neither more nor less than the most favourable existential attitude for any one whishes to receive what is given".

Eaton proceeds, in a highly engaging style, to explain the consequent imperative for Muslims to use as model for this receptivity to the Divine, the "excellent example" of the Prophet. Here we find echoes of the earlier contributions by Schuon and Nasr; in this essay, we find these ideas applied rather more concretely, and illuminated through the contrast between man's principal state of essential perfection - exemplified by the Prophet - as opposed to his actual state of corruption. Eaton also highlights the Islamic conception of man through juxtaposing the believer both to the kafir and to modern conceptions of man; we are thus given a concise and revealing critique of humanism, along with a trenchant attack upon certain profane attitudes prevalent in today's world: in particular, the ".. tendency to detect feet of clay in every hero…" and" …the assumption that, in discovering some minor flaw in an otherwise virtuous man, we have succeeded in exposing flasehood and bringing truth to light".

A stark contrast to such attitudes is presented by the Islamic ideals which emerge naturally out of the implicit viceregal dignity of every man; the notion of respect is strongly emphasised, while every attempt is made to overlook and forgive the inevitable shortcomings of one's neighbour: "In its deepest sense .. respect for others derives from the hiddenness of each being's true identity; and since this identity is intimately linked to its Source, its Creator and Owner, we dare not presume that it is worthless. However misshapen the outer husk may appear, we know that the kernel is present within it; the husk is corruptible but the kernel is inviolable".

If Schuon and Nasr had earlier pointed to the intrinsic universality of the Prophetic virtues in principle, Eaton elaborates upon the extrinsic and existential dimensions implicit in that universality, by emphasising the necessity of applying the virtues despite all the ambiguities, failings and

weaknesses of our fellow creatures - and our own selves - in practice. "He who shows no mercy will have no mercy shown unto him", according to a Prophetic hadith.

The final chapter of the book deals, appropriately, with eschatology. William Chittick gives an excellent presentation of the material; the reality of the after-life is most effectively brought home and shines clearly in the light of the eschatological doctrines surveyed here. The various aspects and stages of the beyond are discussed with reference to a wealth of traditional sources, spanning the Sufi masters and poets, the sages of the Ishraqi school of gnosis, the peripatetic philosophers and also representatives of the classical tradition of theology - both Sunni and Shi'i.

The link between doctrines of the Hereafter and the spiritual life here and now is firmly established at the outset. After listing and briefly commenting upon the principal elements of eschatological doctrine as found in the Qur'an and Hadith literature, Chittick refers to al-Ghazzali's assertion that this data - concerning the 'Hour', the 'Book', the 'Weighing' etc., - must be taken as given and incontrovertible, while nonetheless allowing ".. spiritual insight and inward contemplation .." to illuminate aspects of the Hereafter which have not been explicitly mentioned - and, one could add, may not be accommodated in the framework of human language. Here we have a good example of one of the ways in which spirituality deepens the understanding of revealed doctrine, firstly basing itself entirely on these revealed sources, and then giving rise to inward assimilation of the truths to which the doctrines refer; it must be-borne in mind that the purpose of sacred doctrine is not to exhaust the Reality it describes, but rather to open out onto that reality of which it gives an adequate picture and presentiment. The "spiritual insight and inward illumination" referred to above therefore must be seen as leading to a realisation in depth of pure and universal principles, in terms of which the realities of the beyond can be intuited, in themselves, by the awakened faculty of the intellect. Chittick dewlls at some length on the nature of the human soul, taking further into the spiritual domain the preceding

discussion by Eaton of man being made in the 'image' of God. This is done in order to clarify the meaning of the 'origin' and 'return' of the soul, the cycle'of ontological possibilities through which the soul passes before coming to rest in the Centre. In this context the barzakh assumes a significant meaning. This barzakh is the intermediate reality, corresponding to the period between death and the Day of Resurrection - also referred to simply as the period in the 'grave' by many authorities. Ibn 'Arabi calls this realm the 'world of imagination', separating the level of pure spirits from the world of sensible, material phenomena; it thus "…gives meanings corporeal shapes and makes sensory objects into subtle realities". It is on this ontological plane, then, that the soul experiences the consequences of its earthly state of existence. Chittick refers thus to the conclusion of al-Ghazzali on this point:

"In death, man finds nothing but his own attributes, no longer veiled by the corporeal body but revealing themselves to him in forms appropriate to his new abode .. Man awakens to the realities of his own words, acts and moral qualities; his moral substance whether good or evil, assumes corporeal shape. Everything that had been hidden in the lower world becomes outwardly manifest".

In his account of the Lesser Resurrection, Chittick reminds us of the principle of analogy already referred to many times in this volume, and provides a key for interpreting scripture in this domain:

"The experience of death for the microcosm corresponds to the coming of the Hour for the macrocosm. Hence the Quranic accounts of the end of the world can also be understood as referring to the death of the individual".

The final section deals with the Greater Resurrection and contains material which powerfully expresses the overwhelming reality and inexorability of these events and puts our earthly existence into its true perspective. It is in this sense, above all, that the spiritual implications of

eschatological teachings become most compelling. Chittick's concluding words are indeed appropriate for bringing this volume to an end:

"..through the very majesty of his freedom and responsibility..(man)..is able to cut himself off from the effusion. of Mercy and Light that fills the universe. Whether he experiences God's Mercy or Wrath, the next stage of his existence depends upon his own choice".

To conclude: one is left feeling both grateful that such an authentic volume has been published in this field, and inspired by the profundity of its content. In the wide range of themes it covers, and in the palpable authority of its contributors, the books serves as a veritable touchstone of authenticity in the vast realm of Islamic spirituality, guiding the seeker not just to the appropriate sources, but also providing him with vital keys with which to unlock the inner depths of these sources, and thus bring about a corresponding deepening of consciousness and being. The book is remarkable in this respect, being both comprehensive in scope and profound in depth, concise without being dry, and assimilable without simplifying the supernal truths to which it addresses itself; on the contrary, one feels inspired to delve further into the sources of these truths that are given such fine expression in the book, and thereby to come into a more direct contact, for oneself, with that domain of the Spirit which is inexpressible, wherein knowledge and being are unified, and Truth is the sole Reality.