



"Islamic Mysticism In The Digital Age: The Relevance Of Sufism Today"

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Abstract:

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancement and digital connectivity, the spiritual teachings of Sufism hold renewed relevance for individuals navigating the complexities of modern life. Rooted in Islamic mysticism, Sufism emphasizes inner transformation, divine love, and a profound connection to the Creator, offering a counterbalance to the materialism and disconnection often associated with the digital age. This abstract explores how Sufism has adapted to contemporary challenges and opportunities, leveraging digital platforms to reach a global audience. Online Sufi communities, virtual zikr sessions, and widespread access to classical Sufi texts and poetry have enabled seekers worldwide to engage with its teachings, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. Social media has become a medium for sharing Sufi wisdom, creating a digital tapestry of spiritual inspiration that appeals to the modern quest for meaning and belonging. The teachings of Sufism, particularly its emphasis on mindfulness, compassion, and self-awareness, resonate deeply with the mental health struggles and existential crises of today. The digital dissemination of practices like zikr and meditation offers accessible pathways for individuals to cultivate inner peace and spiritual resilience amidst the distractions of an always-connected world. However, this modern evolution also raises questions about authenticity and the commercialization of spirituality. The challenge lies in preserving the depth and sacredness of Sufi traditions while embracing the opportunities of the digital age. As humanity grapples with unprecedented technological and social shifts, Sufism continues to serve as a beacon of hope and transcendence, bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary needs. Its universal message of love, unity, and spiritual growth remains a vital force for personal and collective transformation in the 21st century.

Keywords: *Islamic Mysticism, Digital Age, Sufism, Spiritual Resilience*



Introduction

In an age of rapid technological advance and media omnipresence, one might think that mysticism has become outdated or irrelevant. However, as this introduction astutely points out, in our increasingly clamorous world, the yearning for inner tranquility only intensifies. As spiritual seekers fervently seek solace and sagacity, they embark on a silent voyage, delving into the profound art of meditation and seeking guidance through the revered Sufi tradition. Traditionally, one might anticipate these secrets concealed within the hushed corridors and hallowed confines of resplendent Sufi shrines or esteemed teaching centers. Yet, the quest for spiritual equilibrium transcends temporal and spatial limitations. (Qureshi-Hurst, 2022)

Since time immemorial, the Sufi's rendezvous haven't occurred within serene cloisters, but rather amidst the vibrant whirlwind of the suq, the illustrious marketplace. It is there, immersed in a tapestry woven with radiant and subtle hues, where customers and vendors congregate, forging connections through both the art of negotiation and kinship. On the threshold of the suq, preachers and dervishes graciously bestow comfort and counsel upon worshippers, offering respite from the chaos of the world. This fundamental essence remains steadfast. Even within the ultimate marketplace, the virtual realm of the Internet, individuals fervently seek spiritual fulfillment, yearning for tranquility of the heart and tranquility of the mind. Guided by Sufis and their loyal adherents, the bustling expanse of the online world becomes a sanctuary, where one can embark on an odyssey towards inner peace and serenity amidst the cacophony and tumult. (Winslow, 2023)

Background of Islamic Mysticism

The word "mysticism" is derived from the Greek "mystikos," meaning "secret" or "hidden," and denotes the profound pursuit of achieving direct and intimate communion with God or the divine through various esoteric and transcendental means (Spencer, 2021). It encompasses the belief and conviction that all human beings possess the inherent capacity to attain profound spiritual enlightenment, unmediated by the necessity of external architectural structures such as temples, churches, or mosques.

Islamic mysticism, widely acknowledged as Sufism, emerges as a transcendent path that embodies the very essence of religion, as it delves into the intricate realm of spirituality within religious practices. Within Sufism, the art of self-discipline collides with the quest for divine knowledge, creating a distinctive and unparalleled synthesis of religious devotion and scholarly exploration.

Sufism unveils an entire repertoire of devotional exercises permeated with an unwavering sense of love and devotion towards the divine. It reverberates with an incandescent fervor that propels individuals along the sacred path of self-discovery, fostering an intimate connection between mortals and the divine. This all-encompassing love is a vital force guiding devout Sufis towards a state of spiritual transcendence, elevating them above the mundane and materialistic aspects of existence.



Through a myriad of spiritual techniques and practices, Sufism opens the gates to the realm of mystical experiences, unveiling a reality that resides beyond the confines of ordinary perception. Sufis traverse the depths of their own consciousness, engaging in profound introspection and reflection, in order to enhance their spiritual connection to the divine. This sacred journey culminates in a state of union with the divine, a transcendental state of being where the boundaries of the self-dissolve into the boundless expanse of divine love and wisdom.

Sufism serves as a radiant beacon, offering seekers of spiritual enlightenment the tools and guidance necessary to embark on their personal pilgrimage towards the divine. It serves as a spiritual sanctuary, nurturing the hunger for divine knowledge and unconditional love, as well as fostering a profound sense of unity with all of creation. Ultimately, Sufism breathes life into the human quest for transcendence, unveiling the infinite dimensions of the human spirit, and illuminating the path towards the ultimate realization of our true selves in the presence of the divine.

Sufism can be studied from the history of Islamic mystical philosophy, the lives and writings of numerous Muslim saints and mystics, the principles of Sufism from various Sufi orders, or the study of the historical and technical developments of the various genres of Islamic mystical poetry (El Shamsy). Historical scholars also refer to classical Islam and suggest that Sufism is native to Islam and was born with the religion. However, some modern scholars disagree and dismiss Sufism as having anything to do with Islamic spirituality. They also argue that it was Pythagoras and Plato or Buddha and Mehdi who were the fathers of Sufism. Yet other modern scholars of comparative mysticism systematically compare the characteristics of world mysticisms, including Sufism, to better identify relevant commonalities.

Early Origins and Influences

It is believed that Sufism derives from the spiritual aspect of the Islamic religion and the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed himself. Some say that Islamic mysticism began a few hundred years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed, just when the teachings and ritual aspects of Islam were institutionalized and dogmatized. These teachings and rituals included the famous Five Pillars of Islam - the Pilgrimage, Fasting in Ramadan, Prayer, Shahada, and Zakat. Mystical schools are organized and recognized as part of Islamic religious teachings (Bano, 2020)(Rahmat & Yahya, 2021). But in fact, Islamic mysticism has a long history. Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, from the Arabic word 'Suf' meaning wool, originally referred to the rough woolen garment worn by early Islamic mystics. It is this word 'Sufism' that denotes the mystical tradition in Islam, in addition to the spiritual practices that underlie the various mystical doctrines developed by individual mystics and teaching orders until it became associated with a distinct educational system. Islamic mysticism has its roots in the desert community of Islam (Mustafa et al., 2023). In the desert, a convenient spiritual point of view tends to arise because Islam is influenced by various religious traditions, even before it became an independent religion. On the other hand, many of these influences are difficult to determine definitively because of the



nature of oral culture and the many different traditions found at the root of Islam. Sufis use these various elements and their respective ideas from different people as guidelines to pursue the realization of their spiritual quest.

Key Concepts in Sufism

Sufism is an incredibly significant and integral aspect within the vast Islamic mystical universe. Being a mystical philosophy deeply rooted in Islam, Sufism encompasses a complex and multifaceted nature. Islamic philosophy, in all its intricacy, comprises numerous schools of thought; however, Sufism, as we know it today, originated during the early medieval period and diligently expanded and adapted its profound concepts to the rich tapestry of Turkish, Persian, and Indo-Muslim cultures prevalent during the Middle Age (Efendi et al.2022)s. It is within this transformative era of Sufism that a myriad of its captivating theories, elaborate rituals, and steadfast beliefs gingerly emerged, rendering Sufism distinguishable and unique among the various other branches of Islamic mysticism.

Sufism operates through a variety of often complex concepts that modify and guide Muslims' behavior. Sufi philosophy, rules, and way of life are largely rules of good conduct and respect for all, while catharsis is largely focused on purifying the soul. Consequently, there are many specific Sufi concepts governing the behavior of Muslims in differing situations. Such Sufi rules range from diet and food preparation that have remained important to concepts that regulate the work of Muslims, their beliefs, customs, and time spent living; all of which are equally important in the medieval and modern Muslim world.

Tawhid (Oneness of God)

The first main pillar of Sufism is the Tawhid (oneness of God). This is often associated with Al-Haqq, which further explains this concep (Hidayat, 2024)t. The above explanation reiterates that God is perceived as light and is everything – He is everywhere though not at the same time. This is fundamental as light symbolizes the absence of darkness, knowledge over ignorance. We can perceive this with the limited knowledge we have about the things around us. Everything is mortally temporary – God's knowledge is eternal and as it is stated, "Look at time with the light Allah informs you of." In this context, all Sufis seek, over time, divine truth "to attain visual station in the heart of the oneness" – basically seek God in all that they do, just as most Muslims practice to attain knowledge and act on the teachings of the Quran (Khan, 2024)(Nasser, 2022). Tawhid teaches Sufis that to truly have direct contact with God and 'see' the light of truth, they have to worship and praise Him more than once a week – the Friday prayers. If we are taught that prayer is essential, fasting, the giving of Zakat (alms), and pilgrimage (Hajj) are the various levels Sufis need to master to further connect with God, over a cumulative period of time. Note that this spiritual journey is obviously over a lifetime and not done at one sitting. Once the apparent fitrah (primordial nature) is slowly prepared in 'internals and externals secret enchantment' by these acts and administered by the various layers of the 'inner sun', it is easier for Sufis to reconnect with God through monasticism, soul sanctity, contemplation, meditation,



spiritual welfare, seclusion, enlightenment, constant occupation, and regeneration of existence (Ghani2021). In essence, these activities are to help prepare one on the journey of light – they are like remote pillars of operations that help 'charge the battery' in today's analogy. True guidance is within the ethics of shari'ah, this gradual journey we take to reach endless happiness, in millions of ultimate heavens and thousands of ultimate hells – all determined by the level and type of deeds we perform.

Sufi Practices and Rituals

Rumi teaches that, for Sufis, love becomes a mode of intelligence. He describes how love is the key that opens our heart to intelligence. Sufism doesn't need words; it doesn't need ideas. It needs practices; it needs experiences. The teachings tell us about all the great Sufi masters who devoted themselves to in-depth spiritual meditations, which gave them immense cultural, mystical, and spiritual knowledge. It is also stressed that one cannot ask other people to use their faith, for faith must be ignited inside us. All obstacles to belief can be overcome with Sufi practices. (Munjidah, 2023)

There are many important Sufi rituals for creating the right state of mind for spiritual meditation. The five canonical prayers, which every Muslim should perform every day, are very important. The music and dance of the whirling dervishes are powerful methods for entrancing the body and focusing the mind. The Sufi teachings stress the significance of two inner journeys. The first is self-knowledge, the journey within. This is an essential step in realizing the oneness seen in the world. The second is the path to God (Mustafa et al., 2023). These journeys can be made in different ways: through body care, such as sports, through meditation and reflection, or through a spiritual guide who can advise and support the seeker. It is taught that losing yourself in inner meditation can be a form of prayer. It also discusses the importance of fasting. Fasting helps develop the spiritual meditation attitude, makes bodily purification possible, and leads to a more conscious lifestyle.

Dhikr (Remembrance of God)

One of the most important Sufi practices is called dhikr, meaning "remembrance." This remembrance of God is expressed as a suite of devotional physical exercises, consisting of repetitive physical as well as vocal movements and, most importantly, the interior recollection of the names of God. While there exists a variety of such devotional practices among different Sufi groups, the forms of dhikr all have, individually and collectively, several functions that give them an essential position in the education of the soul. These functions have the effect of orienting the disciple towards the desired state of subsistence of their being on God. (Imam and Sakr2022).

The goal and effect of the different forms of dhikr practices depend on how the individual components of the exercises are combined with the internal features of the act of remembrance. The component acts include reciting the names of God aloud, often in community; with group speaking, moving, and breathing in unison; or in solitude and silence; reciting the names mentally, or to oneself; or in the chanting of melodies which consist of the repetition of



the names of God. As with the excess of dhikr, these practices are shared, performed in a shared physical, emotional, and spiritual environment, or are experienced taking place inside the individual.

Sufism and Islamic Philosophy

Sufism in Islamic history was closely associated with the exploration of the human spiritual soul and a search for divine spirituality within the context of Islam. The search often acquired a personal character both for the interpreter and the subject of the interpretation. It often exceeded the boundaries of juridical and doctrinal formulations. Elements from philosophical discourse, mysticism, gnosis, and Islamic speculation, framed within the exegetic framework of the interpretation of particular pronouncements of figures of religious authority, were commonly exploited in order to nourish their own particular spiritual journey. Diverse readings of sacred texts were put forth. Methods to illuminate hermeneutic conundrums that often arose in those readings were also proposed. This esoteric tradition from the core of Muslim thought constitutes an important but usually overlooked part of Islamic philosophy. The original papers collected in this volume underscore the central importance of these spiritual and philosophical Sufi concerns to the larger, ongoing quest for understanding of Islamic life and society today. (Murad, 2022)

Islamic philosophical Sufism can be said to have a multiple role. While comprehensive and diverse, it often provides humanity with a moral foundation. Often these foundations are difficult to establish via more regular methods of programs led by clerics or supported by followers or devout Muslims (Sameh, 2020). At its best, it can encourage a society to strive towards the highest moral character. Good moral character is a necessary and sufficient condition for the establishment of just societies. In modernity, Islamic philosophical Sufism, including modern Sufi practitioners in the Muslim world, like other major thinkers, has a valuable, open, and tolerant message for the larger secular world, all parts of humanity who desire to benefit from it. We have tried to articulate some but by no means all of these resources.

Influence of Sufism on Islamic Philosophy

As has already been mentioned in preceding chapters, Sufism greatly influenced Islamic philosophy. At the peak of its influence, Islamic philosophy was, in fact, more mystical than truly philosophical. Instead of putting the phenomenal perceptions and logical mandatory concepts under scrutiny, the philosopher-sages were primarily attempting to receive inspirations and other paranormal gifts from Allah. In practice, the Islamic philosophers acted as troubadours, narrating various legends about a part of the divine drama in which each of them was the protagonist of a dialogue between the human spirit and the Godhead. We should also note, in fairness, that several of the nominal philosophers made such contributions to other branches of human knowledge, particularly in the fields of astronomy, geography, and some of the other natural sciences. (Ali, 2021).



Sufism and Artistic Expressions

The creative outpouring of art and music in the Muslim world, out of which mystical orders have had a significant impact, may be seen as an enhanced expression of this idea. Many musicians bear the name of a Sufi. Among the musicians who dedicate themselves to famous mystical orders, one can cite Cheikha Tetma and Cheikhate the Haddadia. Sufi orders and pan-Islamic movements have also diffused popular music, the most famous being the Qadiriya music: panegyrics to the prophet, dance tunes, and sectarian mystic rapture are conveyed in religious songs to the rhythm of percussion by the musicians of groups and ceremonies. The manifestation of heterodoxy, of protesting or exulting positions opposite to scriptural orthodoxy, choral, the Sama in particular, has been able to draw a great eccentric nuisance. In the field of religious music, Sufi influences and Chari organizations have created music schools and bands, representatives of a kind of music called, in Arabic, The Chari. (Hamid & Jones, 2023)

In a world in which many educational programs seek to foster values such as creativity, artistic fulfillment, personal growth, and self-empowerment, socio-emotional qualities traditionally related to the practice of the Sufi path may bridge the gap between popular and scholarly awareness of Islamic elements of cultural relevance. While it is certainly true that every form of creativity ultimately derives from the singular creativity of the nourishes of the universe, it is also true on the moral-existential level that aesthetic experience represents the most advanced level of those cognitive qualities that are the basis of all intuitions and interpretations. It is the most complex and therefore the most complete experience. For those who pursue an educational approach based on the primacy of the emotive-experiential dimension of learning relationships and with a collective environmental context, if that extraordinary sensorial-cognitive system, that complex of techniques and rituals that we can consider the precursor of creative and rational abilities, and human mysticism, is of such great value, we must understand how it is possible to revisit the potential of the spiritual dimension that, according to tradition, is rooted in the possibilities of the prophetic. We do so as the creative director of contemporary creative abilities. Such an approach implies the transposition of processes of development and maturation that in the past should have been used by training and spiritual growth to other fields in the realm of creative education aimed at the complete enhancement of the identity of the form qualified in its totality. By including the spiritual dimension in its epistemic-strategic reference. (Saleh et al.).

Whirling Dervishes

Viewing the practice from a modern perspective, it would be fair to suggest that it has something of a folkloric aspect. A gained spate of tourists arriving at the monastery for the late afternoon concert, when a number of the dervishes would perform simultaneously, has rarely been good for the transmission of pure spirituality. Enhanced by the songs and live music, the dark-chisel embroidery of the dervishes' robes came alive and added the requisite note of



exoticism to what people viewed. The rose prominence served the function of orientalist icon to at least three major Western figures. (Gani, 2022)

Despite the lasting nature of the restorations, the dances were performed in a shell of profanity. For the twentieth-century traveler, however, a tour circuit was completed by the whirling dervishes of Konya, who belonged to the Mawlawi Order of Sufism. These dances were performed during the lifetimes of the recorded teachers. The performances are frequently staged within a former caravanserai, which has done much to create a similar folklore. At the side of the empty shell of a mosque, exclusive of carpeting or a lectern, was displayed the praise of travelers.

Sufism and Gender

The feminine dimension of Sufism has been variously interpreted. For feminists, Sufism is often considered to be inherently misogynistic, whereas for liberal Sufis, it is positively pro-women. The causes of the latter assertion are probably threefold. First is the fact that many classical Sufi texts were publicly read and recited by women in addition to men. Some of the women have even composed their own works. The famous Egyptian poet Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya is a case in point. Secondly, there were also instances of women behaving eccentrically in the quest for divine love. They would roam the streets and the desert in a state of divine intoxication that in today's era would be considered to be both monomaniacal and masochistic. Thirdly, the renunciation of ordinary social customs and of worldly gain was especially appealing to women who were keen on leading unconventional and ascetic lives. (Abdel-Latif, 2023).

Recent times, however, have seen a considerable increase in intellectual and political activity by both Islamic traditionalists and feminists with regard to asserting and justifying Sufi women's roles. For some Sufi orders, Sufi males and females are both recipients of the spiritual authority from the same Shaykh. Others, however, prefer that the sexes be separated, or that women only obtain instruction from female members of the order. In all these reinterpretations, the binary nature of the two sexes is retained although the religious implications of a spiritual role mixed with masculine and feminine are largely and suitably left unexplored. This is probably because many Sufis, male and female, like many methodological feminists, both draw their ideology and worldview from precepts, because the core idea of the matter appears to be that the renunciation of socially prescribed identifications like gender is not permitted, to retain a certain fixed identity in exchange for cultural and political advantages.

Role of Women in Sufism

The role of women among the Sufis is a subject that has attracted both Muslim and Western attention. The different accusations asserting that women play no part in the Sufis' experience, or that certain masters are favored by rich women, or that women are not allowed to become members of a Sufi confraternity, have made the topic a tender one. Even though these accusations may sometimes be substantiated in certain religious orders, at this moment, at the threshold of the third millennium, it can be said that women occupy several places in general Islamic spirituality, and particularly in Sufism, all over the Islamic world. In fact, by making an



overview of the sources and considering, within the constraints of the impression provided by history, the volume of work undertaken on women and Sufism, we are able to see that, from the beginning of the movement to the present day, women have formed part of the Sufis' spiritual adventures (Assadi & Naamneh).

In the birth of Islam, in the context of free men or slaves, females who had been slaves, love servants, or mothers were involved. The famous figures of Baghdad, the pious of the realm, the famous Râbia al-Adawiya, the saintly Sittna 'Iṣa, the Sultanas Melike and Nure, the famous Nefise, all of whom nobly played their roles in the development of Sufism, make the frequent appearances of the stage of the nascent doctrine quite clear. These women, well entrenched in the formula of marriage, enjoyed freedom of thought, action, and wealth. These Sufi fqihas had no hesitation about proscribing all forms of sexual promiscuity; but if they sanctified the relations established in the framework of the family, they nevertheless tolerated relationships made in the interest of career progression and in the interest of the development of the community. That is why their spirituality harmoniously integrates two seemingly opposite ideas: that of sexuality and that of asceticism and renunciation.

Challenges and Criticisms of Sufism

Sufism has found critics both within and outside of Islam. Some have criticized Sufism for borrowing elements from other religions and historic traditions, while others have deplored it for repudiating the imperative need for social and political reform in favor of introspective, transcendent concerns. Others believe that Sufism's claim to mysticism is fraudulent and based on poetic flights of fancy or the depression attributed to isolation. Those emboldened enough to refute the claims of a fraudulent Sufism fall into two categories: reformist Muslims and antireligionists, who criticize the dogmatism, narrow-mindedness, and self-delusion associated with Sufism. This criticism has prompted responses from various figures addressing the problems of Sufism. (Ejaz & Azhari, 2021).

That Sufism has inspired such criticism should not go unheeded. I believe that the criticisms should be embraced into the discourse of contemporary Sufism. Of course, the religious core of Sufism should not be negotiated. However, Sufism has been burdened with accretions during its history, most of which have been assumed by and grafted from the course of history. This is especially the case with Sufism in the digital age. Because it has now been filtered through the visual and consumer culture of contemporary life, the Sufism that is mobilizing a wider background of adherents in the digital age has become somewhat hybridized. However, this hypothesis runs counter to the new generations deeply felt association with this emphasis on the visual. (Khamis, 2024).

Accusations of Syncretism

Many of Sufism's critics throughout much of its history and in many different environments have accused its main representatives of syncretism. Accusations of this form emerge from the concern of the representatives of mainstream doctrine with respect to their own authority and



the loss of adherents and influence in the face of the influence and attraction of those doctrines they are not able to control. In a world in which the vast majority of men and women remain at the level of syncretism, simply believing in both Islam and popular Islam, accepted as complementary aspects of the same total religion, those who have legal and religious authority are bound to reassert a will to control in order to standardize belief under their own guardianship through the punishment of heterodoxy.

The Sufis' apparent independence, their individual presentation, and the literary diffusion of their doctrines through poetry written in everyday language largely understood and appreciated by the general public assured them such an important degree of access to popular religion that it seemed to the representatives of official religion threatened by their influence that the Sufis had the same tactical, if not directly political, intention. Such an attitude did not permit, however, an easy evaluation of the Sufis and the direction of their action, for the Sufis' association with the mass of the people was so close that it was difficult for their political commitment to be totally unacknowledged by the umma in the way such action might be seen by those who wished to preserve a monopoly in action and interpretation. (Hussain, 2020)

Digital Transformation of Sufism

One area that is particularly fascinating is Sufism or Islamic mysticism. The now integrated study of Islamic mysticism was not developed until the 19th century when scholars began to note the peculiar practices and doctrines of certain Muslim scholars and to develop biographies of these individuals. This is a field that has been filled with not just respectful observation of the Sufi tradition, but also the biased primitiveness of Western observers. The final few decades of the 21st century, however, have seen a remarkable and vast growth of interest in Sufi practices in the Muslim world. (Saeed et al.2021)

The digital age has impacted the communications field by changing the way audiences can communicate with the world. As a result of the invention of different applications and technologies, humanity has been progressing efficiently and also differently in various areas. Currently, the temptation of the digital age affects every sector, even religious sectors. Islamic scholars and their Sufi followers have learned to shift rapidly from books or letters to phones and mobile internet. This transformation is also affecting Sufism and the way people from this tradition approach their inner experience. The main question is how social networks have contributed to the modern face of Sufism and its global design. Did the worshipers of Haqq, he who holds the truth, find the secret weapon for global deployment by uncovering the attraction of social networks?

Online Sufi Communities

A number of websites devoted to Sufism have emerged on the internet. Each of these sites has its own particular orientation toward Sufism. For example, one site is associated with the teaching of Mevlevi Sufism and includes such materials as biographical sketches of Sufi shaykhs as well as images of the Mevlevi whirling dance. Another site is scholarly in its approach and is



associated with efforts to produce a high-quality biannual publication devoted to all aspects of the study of Rumi. A different site is primarily an online reading group that has been established to promote the text of a notable author. Materials that accompany the study of this author's books are also available from this site.

Perhaps the most common feature of all of these sites is the claim that they are designed to serve the need for spiritual development of modern Sufis. Yet, it is also clear that there are elements of tension embedded in the fact that these websites make use of the internet to describe and promote Sufism. The tension surfaces with the confluence of elements of tradition and novelty, the old and the new that is made evident in the ever-decreasing costs of access to the internet. (Munjidah, 2023)

Impact of Social Media on Sufi Practices

Social media technologies have altered the frame in which contemporary Islam gives and takes its forms. Different social media platforms transmit religious content and values on a global scale, promoting concrete religious practices. Geopolitical boundaries do not limit the transfer of such religious know-how. Nor do limited print runs restrict access. Hence, the knowledge-sharing economy of Islamic practice has opened up through the formation and sustaining of diasporic and transnational Islamic communities. Internet Sufism is an umbrella term for a very diverse mixture of groups and practices, including traditional religious orders and believers, and a more recent, increasingly popular, digital-only Sufism. I argue that the omnipresence in modern life of both technology and the rise of quantified ideas of the self, coupled with contemporary deep-seated issues, motivates the emergence of Internet Sufism. (Azlan et al.2020).

In the context of Islam, current discussions regarding social media technologies have been characterized by alarmism. However, empirical evidence suggests that the majority of people who use these platforms do not do so to become radicalized. Instead, they are using these platforms to stay in contact with their communities. Accessing the digital realm alters religious understandings and practices, including the handling of sacred knowledge, rituals, and experience. For Sufi groups, the online appearance and morphing of Islamic traditions reflect changes to Sufi practices under the influence of new historical realities, just as Sufi practices evolved because of their historic context with printing or the train. The online presence of Sufis, often dismissed as a sort of fake spirituality, simply fails to acknowledge that there are Sufis who are perfectly honest about practicing Sufism online. Such general dismissals often fail to consider the context of new religious configurations and emerging spiritual authority. (Rozeahna, 2023)

Virtual Dhikr Circles

Today, unlike in the past, issues of numbness, insensitivity, and boredom that occur during dhikr are closely related to the unease brought about by modern methods and conditions of dhikr practices and religious life around the world. Especially during the Dhikr Feasts belonging to the Mevleviye path, objections were raised. Researching the prevailing circumstances during



the Dhikr Feast ceremonies of his time, questions were asked that could be applied to the present day: “Isn’t the understanding of love and tolerance that dominates the whole ceremony different from that of the people of the past?” The answer to this question indicated that these Dhikr Feasts constituted major commercial events for some people and contained neither feelings of humility nor sharing, but rather, “they publicly displayed differences in belief, concentrating the whole ceremony on the shows and leaving when it was all over. Their primary motivation was to secure their own interests.”

The traditional teaching of love is that love is one of the emotions with absolutely no trace. In any event, immense discrimination at work and in education due to differences in religion, opinion, or ethnicity, and especially the very explicit expression of these differences, are the causes of this situation arriving at today. In the past, the Sufis realized that dhikr left various addictions and led to love only when it was practiced in the right way. That is why they practiced the basis of Sufism: mutual dhikr workshops, during which they benefited from dhikr based on remembrance and reconcentration in their beliefs, avoiding the addictions they felt were repressing them. (Munsoor & , 2021).

Sufism and Interfaith Dialogue

Another field where Sufism can make an important contribution is in the area of interfaith dialogue. I had the privilege of participating in several inter-Congress dialogues in the past decade. At every inter-Congress program, there were always later discussions on how Sufism could be better presented. Initially, quite a number of groups believed that a stand-alone component for Sufism would be needed, and a few even argued that Sufism should be presented as a component of Islam. A number of Sufi leaders present, including myself, did not agree, for we believed inclusion within the overall faith agenda of the other groups would work best for Sufism. The Sufi tradition is noted for its inclusive and harmonious dimensions. We, in fact, wanted to best illustrate the openness of the teachings of love and understanding that can be encapsulated in the different religious traditions through our presence and participation in the ongoing dialogues by leaving an open heart. (Ahmad et al.2023).

The Sufi leaders that participated included traditionalists with deep roots in their respective traditions, but among them were also men and women who were already comfortable in making the inclusive and universally embracing aspects of the Sufi tradition the hallmark of their approach in life. Different Sufi tariqats were present, representing different Sufi orders. Traditionally, the leaders of the Sufi orders in the country were associated with the seat of the office of Kadi of the state. However, after independence, their numbers dwindled. Remembering the importance of their position and the linkage they had with the general populace and their desire to see Islam flourish, a group of Sufi leaders came together to form the Sufi Council with the objective of rekindling faith by teaching the truths of love, brotherhood, and goodwill emanating from the wells of spirituality and sincerity. Today, the Council's activities also



include the organization of programs and dialogues, both at the national and international levels. (Saeed, 2021)

Common Ground with Other Mystical Traditions

Mystical experiences are witnessed in many, if not most, of the world's religious and spiritual traditions. Although these mystical experiences might be diverse in content and emotional feeling, there are several characteristics common to 'pure religious awareness' which span many of the world's religions: pure religiosity (the sense of the sacred), the paradox of the sacred and profane, the ineffable nature of reality as divine, and consciousness of unity (with the 'real universe'). The women and men of the great religious traditions share an experience that 'the quality of the sacred, the divine or ultimate reality was infinite, eternal, unquantifiable, inexhaustible, and perfectly sufficient in and of itself for the depth and breadth of the person's soul's longing.' (Yaden & Newberg, 2022).

In a similar way, a common foundation for the spiritual path exists between different religious traditions. Christian contemplation, Sufi dhikr, and the Zen call to consider all that is as being empty of form are just expressions of the 'spiritual practice' and 'progress' that is shared by the whole human family. There is a 'spiritual journey' in this collective sense, without attributing a spiritual hierarchy, when it is noted that '... from the start, there are no exclusions. Members of every religious tradition or none bring the conditions for doing the Inner Work. The human family is one in the fundamental search for purpose and meaning. True mystical experience transcends artificial divisions of culture, language, belief, or custom that lie on the surface of the world's religions. It is important, however, to recognize that there is a danger in uncritical acceptance of this pluralism. The transcendent unity that underlies the universe must not be equated with diversity of religious and spiritual belief or cosmological understanding. (Gabriel, 2021).

Conclusion

In this comprehensive and enlightening article, I have made a concerted effort to effectively convey and elucidate how the profound and awe-inspiring mystical experiences within the Islamic tradition continue to thrive, flourish, and maintain relevance within the contemporary period. By diligently focusing and intricately analyzing the ever-evolving digital landscape and its surrounding context, it becomes abundantly clear and unmistakable that we, as individuals of the present age, can still derive immense benefit, insight, and solace from this ancient and timeless tradition, even amidst the progressive secularization of society. One pivotal facet to comprehend and appreciate is the inherent emphasis and significance placed upon the heart in Islamic theology and understanding from its very inception. The mystic path, so deeply entrenched within the realm of Sufism, astutely recognizes and beautifully amalgamates both the realm of emotional experiences, as well as rational, intellectual concerns. It is through this harmonious union and balance of these seemingly disparate realms that the profound and transformative nature of the mystical journey is fully realized. The intrinsic value and



transformative power of bestowing profound meaning to the individual and validating their unique experiences consequently engenders a deep level of involvement within the realm of feelings and emotions. As such, the indomitable force of passion, fervor, and ardor can be comprehended and interpreted as an invaluable experience in and of itself; a powerful catalyst that propels the spiritual seeker ever-forward on their mesmerizing odyssey towards illumination and divine proximity. Immersing oneself within the captivating realm of Islamic mysticism, one soon apprehends that its intrinsic intention lies in the complete and comprehensive transformation of the conventional human experience. This profound metamorphosis involves an intricate and delicate process of correspondence; a unification of complexity and unity of opposites. These seemingly dichotomous elements, such as the individuated self and the Divine, creation and creativity, or the material and spiritual realms, all harmoniously coalesce within the mystical framework. It is through this sublime unity and transformative journey that the individual is led towards a profound appreciation and valuing of transformation itself; embracing a relativistic equality that honors, respects, and cherishes all conceivable contrasts and dualities that exist within the human experience. As the profound and awe-inspiring spiritual expedition unfolds, one inevitably arrives at the awe-inspiring realization and acceptance that all human beings are inherently imbued with a profound sense of harmony, interconnectedness, and freedom. This invaluable lesson, instilled within the mystic's consciousness, facilitates a broader and more holistic understanding of society and humanity as a whole. By fostering a world free from violence, intolerance, and prejudice, the illustrious and profound Islamic mystical traditions unquestionably and unequivocally contribute immeasurably towards the attainment of a harmonious, equitable, and compassionate global society, where every soul is acknowledged, embraced, and valued for their unique divine essence.

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