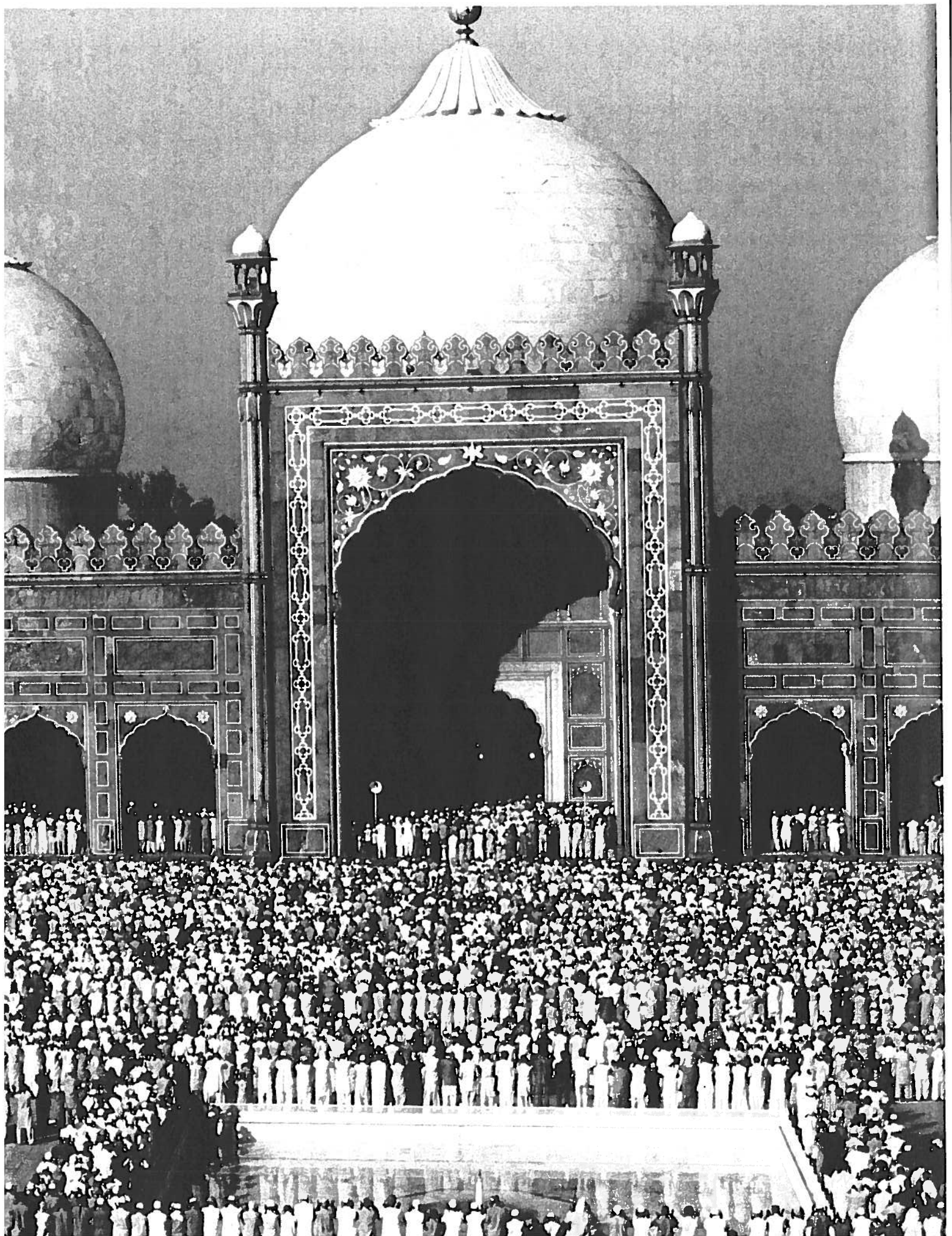




CHAPTER TWO

Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND PRACTICE IN ISLAM

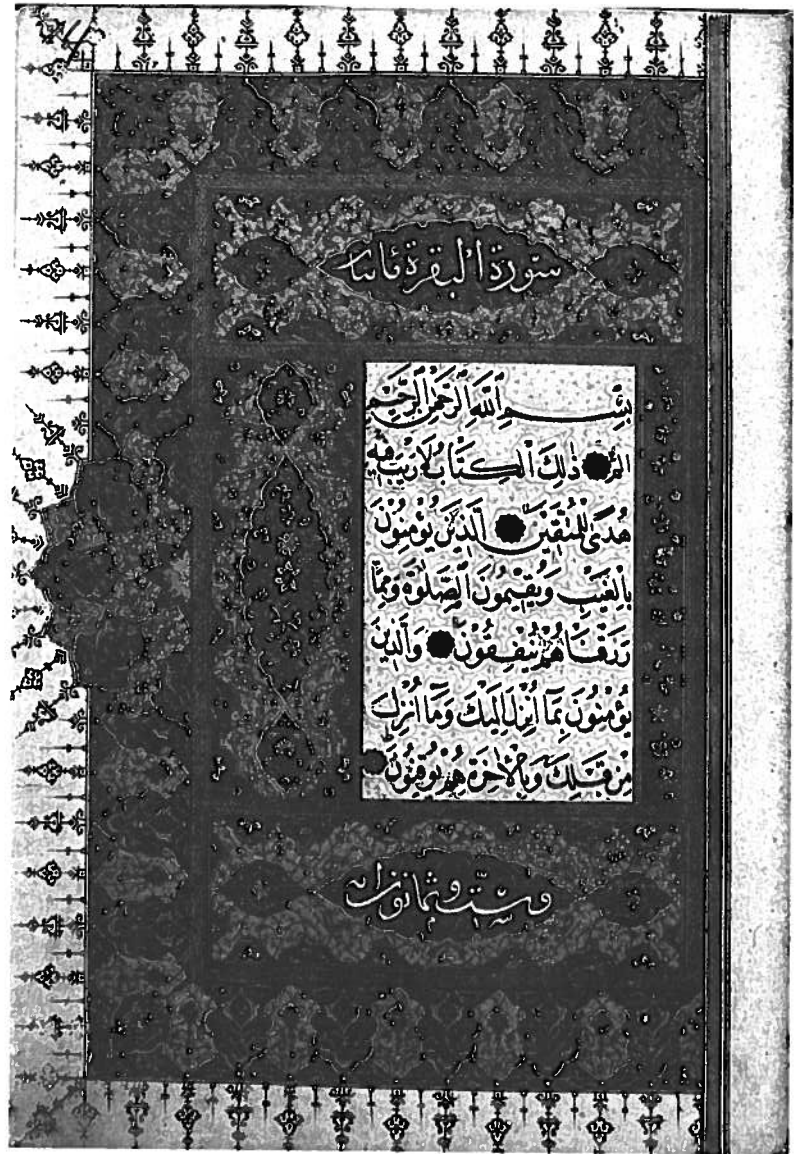
Vincent J. Cornell

Knowledge without practice is like a tree without fruit.

—The Moroccan Sufi Ahmad ibn Ashir of Salé

Faith in Islam is never blind. Although belief in the unseen is just as important in Islam as it is in other religions, there comes a point at which the spiritually aware human being transcends the level of simple faith. At this point the person is more than just a believer, for his or her spiritual consciousness has penetrated the fog of the unseen, leading to knowledge of the true nature of things. The Quran speaks of this progression from faith to knowledge as an inward metamorphosis in which belief (*iman*) is transformed into certainty (*yaqin*). This certainty is expressed in the Quran in terms of three types of knowledge of God, which were discussed by philosophers, mystics, theologians, and jurists during the Islamic Middle Period (the ninth through fifteenth centuries C.E.).

(Left) Thousands of Muslims gather for communal worship at the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, Pakistan, to celebrate the Feast of the Sacrifice that commemorates the willingness of Ibrahim (the Biblical Abraham) to sacrifice his son and the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.



God's word, as revealed in the Quran, is the centerpiece of Muslim faith. Copying the Quran was the noblest of arts and luxury manuscripts were produced at all times. This copy, transcribed in 1491 by the noted Ottoman calligrapher Shaykh Hamdullah and lavishly decorated with arabesque designs, is a worthy testament to Muslim faith.

Modalities of Certainty

The most basic and fundamental type of knowledge is the "knowledge of certainty" (*ilm al-yaqin*, Quran 102:5). This type of certainty, which is analogous to Aristotle's concept of intellectual knowledge, refers to the knowledge that results from the human capacity for logical reasoning and the appraisal of what the Quran calls the "clear evidences" (*bayyinat*) of God's presence in the world. It is also the knowledge that comes from the study of Islam through the Quran, the

traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (*hadith*), and books of theology and exegesis. By nature, the "knowledge of certainty" is rational and discursive, a point that the Quran acknowledges when it admonishes human beings to "travel throughout the earth and consider how [Allah] initiated the Creation" (Quran 29:20). The same type of knowledge is involved when the Quran presents rhetorical arguments for the existence of God: "It is [Allah] who brings things to life and causes them to die, and [Allah's] is the alteration of the night and the day. Will you not understand?" (Quran 23:80).

Over time and under the influence of contemplation and spiritual practice, the "knowledge of certainty" may be transformed into a higher form of knowledge of God, which the Quran calls the "eye of certainty" (*ayn al-yaqin*, Quran 102:7). This term, which broadly corresponds to Plato's concept of the "vision" of the intellect, refers to the knowledge that is acquired by the spiritual intelligence, which Islam locates metaphorically in the heart. Before attaining this type of knowledge, the heart of the believer must first be "opened to Islam" (Quran 39:22). Once opened, the heart receives knowledge as a type of divine "light" or illumination, which leads the believer toward remembrance of the Creator. Just as with the "knowledge of certainty," with the "eye of certainty" the believer apprehends God's existence through God's presence in the world. In this latter case, however, what leads the believer to the knowledge of God are not arguments to be understood by the rational intellect, but rather theophanic "appearances" (also called *bayyināt*) that strip away the veil of worldly phenomena to reveal the divine reality beneath.

The metaphor of the "eye of certainty" is thus more than just a simple gloss on the axiom "seeing is believing." From a spiritual perspective the one who holds knowledge of God, who perceives reality in this way, is the true "intellectual." Unlike the scholar, who develops his or her skills through years of formal study, the spiritual intellectual does not need book-learning to apprehend the divine light. Although the Prophet Muhammad was barely able to read or write, he has always been regarded by Muslims as the greatest intellectual of Islam. A spiritual intellectual can be anyone, scholarly or otherwise, whose knowledge extends both outward, to take in the physical world, and upward, to realize his or her ultimate transcendence of the world through his or her link with the Absolute. Without such a vertical dimension of the spirit, the scholar's knowledge, whatever its extent may be in academic terms, is of little worth. By being blind to divine illumination, such a person is bereft of real wisdom, and according to a famous prophetic tradition amounts to little more than "a donkey carrying a load of books."

The third and most advanced type of knowledge builds on the transcendent nature of knowledge itself. This highest level of consciousness is called the "truth

of certainty" (*haqq al-yaqin*, Quran 69:51). Also known as *ilm ladunni* ("knowledge by presence," Quran 18:65), this form of knowledge partakes directly of the divine reality and leaps across the synapses of the human mind to transcend both cognitive reasoning and intellectual vision at the same time. The "truth of certainty" refers to that state of consciousness in which a person knows the "real" through direct participation in it, without resorting to logical proofs and without objectifying either subject or object. Viewed in terms of Islamic sacred history, this type of knowledge characterizes God's Prophets and Messengers, whose consciousness of the truth is both immediate and participatory, because the knowledge on which it is based comes from direct inspiration.

Although Muhammad is the final Prophet of Islam, many scholars in the Islamic Middle Period were open to the possibility that divine inspiration could remain accessible to believers even after Muhammad's death. This possibility is symbolized in Islamic tradition by the figure of al-Khidr (Green One). Appearing first in the Quran as an unnamed servant of God and companion of the Prophet Musa (Moses), al-Khidr is endowed with a knowledge of the unseen that Musa himself lacks. The Quran describes this enigmatic sage, who is not a prophet yet partakes of divine inspiration, in the following way: "We have bestowed upon him a mercy from Ourselves, and have taught him a knowledge from Our own presence" (Quran 18:65). Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad would later highlight the difference between al-Khidr's knowledge and the knowledge of prophets, while at the same time affirming its complementarity to prophecy. For example, in the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, or "sound collection" of prophetic traditions by Muhammad al-Bukhari (810–70), al-Khidr is depicted as saying to Musa: "Verily, I act on knowledge from the knowledge of Allah, which He has made known to me but has not made known to you, while you act on knowledge that He has made known to you but has not taught to me."

Thus, according to both the word of God as expressed in the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, faith in Islam has as much to do with what today would be called theoretical and experiential knowledge as it does with simple belief. This multidimensional conception of knowledge comprehends a reality that lies hidden within the phenomenal world yet can be revealed by the human mind and the vision of the spiritual intellect through the signs of God that are present in the world itself. In the Quran, God calls on humanity to "bear witness to what you see and what you do not see . . . a Message sent down from the Lord of the Worlds . . . verily this is the Truth of Certainty" (Quran 69:38–39, 43, 51).

The Quranic notion of religious belief as dependent on knowledge is actualized in practice in the term *Islam*. In Arabic *islam* is a verbal noun that is derived

from the root *aslama*, which means “he gave up, surrendered, or submitted.” In purely etymological terms, *islam* thus signifies the idea of surrender or submission. Following this logic, the religion of Islam can be characterized as the religion of self-surrender: Islam is the conscious and rational submission of the contingent and limited human will to the absolute and omnipotent will of God. Such a complete surrender of one’s personal will clearly is not easy for everyone and is likely to be resisted by the human ego. Islam’s advocacy of self-surrender should not be thought of as irrational, however, or dismissed as the product of a passive or fatalistic mentality. On the contrary, the type of surrender Islam requires is a deliberate, conscious, and rational act made by the person who knows with both intellectual certainty and spiritual vision that Allah, the God who is the subject of the Quranic discourse, is reality itself. This knower of God is the *muslim* (fem. *muslimah*), “one who submits” to the divine truth, and whose relationship with God is governed by *taqwa*, the consciousness of humankind’s responsibility toward its creator.

But consciousness of God alone is not sufficient to make a person a Muslim. Neither is it enough to be merely born a Muslim or to be raised in an Islamic cultural context. The concept of *taqwa* implies that the believer has the added responsibility of acting in a way that is in accordance with the three types of knowledge previously discussed. The sincere believer must endeavor at all times to maintain herself in a constant state of submission to God. By doing so, she attains the honored title of “slave of God” (*abd Allah*, fem. *amat Allah*), for she recognizes that all power and all agency belong to God alone: “Allah has willed it. There is no power but Allah’s” (Quran 18:39). Trusting in the mercy of her divine master, yet fearing God’s wrath, the slave of God walks the road of life with careful steps, making her actions deliberate so that she will not stray from the path that God has laid out for her (Quran 1:5–7). Such is the epistemological “leap of faith” that Islam requires of its believers. It is an all-encompassing and highly personal type of commitment that has little in common with the academic understanding of Islam as a civilization or a cultural system. Rather, this “leap of faith” has much more in common with the spiritual perspective of the “born-again” Christian or the mystic within a traditional religion, whose heedless soul is “resurrected” or awakened by the light of the truth. This similarity between the spiritual knowledge of Muslims and the adherents of other religions is a reminder that religious experience is not limited to specific peoples or cultures; it is universally human in nature.

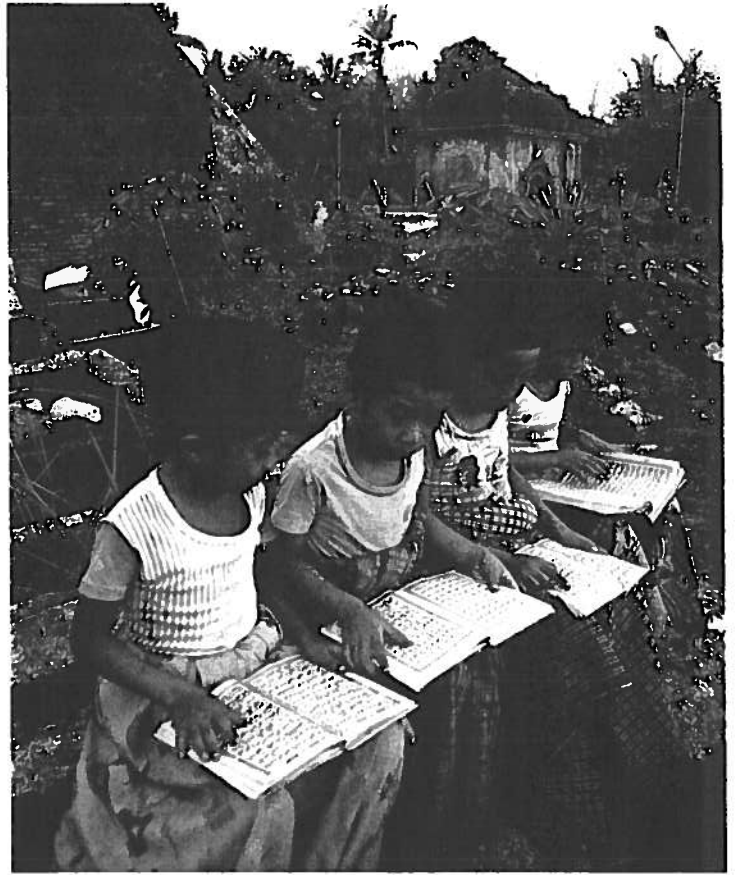
The universality of religious experience is an important premise of the Quran’s argument against the profane or secular life. Taking a different tack from the *hadith* (the corpus of prophetic traditions that provides detailed instructions on how to act as a Muslim in specific ritual or moral contexts), the Quran is less concerned with defining creedal boundaries than with affirming the universal



When praying, worshipers separate themselves from the ground with a mat or rug. Wealthy people might use a beautiful prayer carpet, such as this exquisite wool and silk example made in the seventeenth century under the Mughal emperors.

obligation to believe in one God. The Quran thus speaks of broad verities of religious experience to which every human being can relate. Similarly, when dealing with religious practices, the Quran is less concerned with the details of ritual than with the meaning that lies behind the rituals it prescribes. The details of ritual practice, which serve to define Islam for most believers, are usually left for tradition to define. By speaking in a transcendental voice and presenting a discourse that is relevant to human experience in general, the Quran overcomes the cultural limitations of the Arab civilization in which it was originally revealed and makes its message accessible to peoples of different cultural backgrounds. This universalism has never been more important than in the present day, when the majority of Muslims are South or Southeast Asian in origin and when only one-fifth of them are Arabs.

Such a transcendence of culture is necessary for any religion that aspires to universal validity. As the vehicle for the word of God, it is necessary for the Quran to overcome linguistic and cultural differences and express itself in a metalanguage that can be understood even when its original Arabic is translated into a non-Semitic tongue such as English or Indonesian. An example of this metalanguage can be found in the tripartite model of knowledge previously discussed. Despite the exceptionalism of postmodern philosophy, which accentuates cultural boundaries by hypostasizing the notion of difference, the comparative study of human societies reveals that most people—whatever their experiences and regardless of variations in culture—think in similar ways and have similar wants and needs. Responding to this fact, the Quran seeks to establish a common foundation for belief that is based on such shared perceptions and experiences. Over and over again, the Quran reminds the reader to think about the truths that lie behind the familiar or mundane things of the world, such as the signs of God in nature, the practical value of virtue, and the cross-cultural validity of fundamental moral principles. What is good for Muslims is meant to be good for all human beings, regardless of gender, color, or origin. The Quran thus appeals to both reason and experience in determining the criteria for differentiating between truth and falsehood.



The majority of Muslims today live in south or southeast Asia. The universalism of Islam transcends the cultural boundaries of Arab civilization for these children studying the Quran in Malaysia.

The most important theological point made by the Quran is that there is one God—Allah (The God)—universal and beyond comparison, who creates and sustains both the material universe and the world of human experience: “[Allah] has created the heavens and the earth in Truth; exalted is He above the partners they ascribe to Him!” (Quran 16:3). All other forms of so-called truth are either false in their initial premises or contingently true only in limited situations. The recognition of this fact produces an alchemical effect on the human soul that forever transforms the outlook of the believer. This is eloquently described in the following passage from *Fi Zilal al-Quran* (In the shade of the Quran), a commentary by Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), the Egyptian activist and chief ideologist of the Muslim Brotherhood:

When a conception that sees nothing in the world but the reality of Allah establishes itself in the human mind and heart, it is accompanied by the vision of this genuine, permanent reality in every other being that has sprung from it. This is the stage at which the heart feels the hand of Allah in everything and beyond which it feels nothing but Allah in the whole universe. There would be no other reality to be felt.

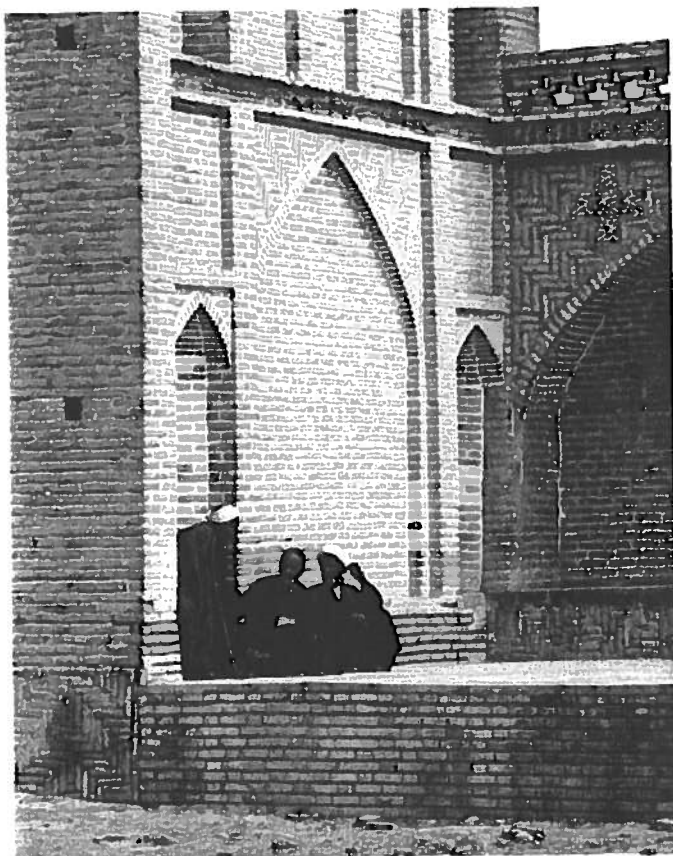
It is also accompanied by the attribution of every event and every movement in this life and in this universe to the first and only cause, that is, Allah, that brings other causes about and influences their effectiveness. The Quran takes great care to establish this truth in the Muslims’ concept of faith. It has always put aside apparent causes and associated events directly with the will of Allah. It says, “When you threw (a handful of dust) it was not your act, but Allah’s” [Quran 8:17]. “There is no triumph except that given by Allah” [Quran 8:10 and Quran 3:126]. “You have no will except as Allah wills” [Quran 76:30].

A faith such as Islam, based on certain knowledge, is both a liberation and a limitation. It is a liberation in the sense that certainty of the divine reality allows the human spirit to expand both outward and upward, so that the consciousness becomes three dimensional. But it is also a limitation, because with the knowledge of God comes a concomitant awareness of the limits and responsibilities imposed on the person as a created being. Unlike the secular humanist, the true Muslim who submits to God cannot delude herself by claiming that she is the sole author of her destiny. She knows that such a statement is absurd, for a person’s fate is routinely influenced by factors beyond her control. This truth has even been recognized by some thinkers in the Western secular tradition. The German political philosopher Karl Marx, for example, acknowledged that a person’s destiny is to a large extent dependent on external factors. For the Muslim, however, the “hidden hand” that guides

a person's fate is not some idealized construct such as political economy, class, or ideology; rather, it is the divine will that governs both the social and the material universes. In Islam it is not religion that is the "opium of the masses" but the heedless arrogance of the human ego, which deludes itself by claiming that it can be all things to all people: "[Allah] created the human being from a tiny drop [of sperm]; yet see how he has become a brazen disputer!" (Quran 16:4).

A middle position between the limits and possibilities of human agency can be found in the doctrine of choice (*ikhtiyar*), which has become an important part of Shiite theology. According to this doctrine, the overall fate of the human being, like that of all creatures, is governed by the fore-knowledge (*qada*) of an all-powerful and all-just God. This does not mean that the believer must throw up his hands in resignation and do nothing on his own behalf, however. Quite the opposite. According to this perspective, God's determination of affairs is immutable only on the universal level, the level of the whole. On the level of the part, the necessity of a meaningful choice between good and evil demands that absolute predestination be replaced by the possibility of human agency, which allows the human being to choose between ethical alternatives. On the personal level, an individual's fate (*qadar*) is to a large extent dependent on the choices that he makes during his life. These may be moral choices such as seeking virtue rather than vice, political choices such as whom to regard (the family of the Prophet or subsequent dynasties of caliphs) as Muhammad's successors, or eschatological choices such as whether to believe that the Shiite "Hidden Imam" will return at the end of time. In other words, each person's fate is the result of an ongoing and continuous interaction, on many levels and over many years, between the human will and the will of God. Each individual makes his or her choices freely, but the options from which to choose are divinely determined, and thus beyond the individual's ability to control.

For the Muslim, belief in God's determination of affairs is not fatalism but common sense. A believer feels liberated in knowing his or her limits, because the acceptance of what can never be changed removes the worry and frustration of striving in vain and opens the door to constructive engagement with the possible. Just as knowledge of the truth compels a person to accept God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe on the level of the macrocosm, the same knowledge requires him or her to accept the givens of material life on the level of the microcosm. Either a person puts her mind at ease by practicing what some Christians refer to as "letting go and letting God," or he suffers the endless frustration of the "secular fideist" or doctrinaire secularist, who vainly believes that humankind can overcome all obstacles, only to find that no strategy can save him from death. The Quran admonishes such people in the fol-



The doctrine of choice (*ikhtiyar*) plays an important role in the ethical philosophy of Shiite Islam. Shiism is prevalent in modern Iran, where clerics often meet to discuss religious affairs in local shrines, as at the Imamzada Sayyid Ali in Nain.

lowing verse: "Do not be like those who forgot God so that [God] made them forget their own souls" (Quran 59:19).

In this sense Frithjof Schuon, the noted writer on comparative religion, defines Islam in his work *Comprendre l'Islam* (Understanding Islam) (1976) as "the juncture between God as such and man as such." Schuon adds that when the Muslim conceives of God, it is not "in the sense that [God] can manifest Himself in a certain way and in a certain time, but independently from history in that [God] is what He is, and also that He creates and is revealed by His nature." Conversely, when the Muslim is conceived as a rational agent, it is not "in

the sense that he is lost and is in need of a saving miracle, but in the sense that he is created after the image of God (*déiforme*), is given an intelligence capable of conceiving of the Absolute, and a will capable of choosing that which will guide it." If humankind is to be saved through faith, and the essence of faith is knowledge, then it is incumbent upon God as the source of all knowledge to provide humanity with the knowledge that will enable it to apprehend the truth and thus save itself. In this sense the message of Islam echoes that of the Gospel: "Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free."

From the Knowledge of God to the Practice of the Sunna

As a revealed text, the Quran is God's book, not the Prophet Muhammad's. Although one of the discourses (*surah*) of the Quran is named after Muhammad

(Quran 33) and the Prophet is often addressed directly by God in the Quran, he is mentioned by name only four times (Quran 3:144; 33:40; 47:2; 48:9). More often the Quran expresses itself in the first-person or imperative voice. In all such cases, the voice that speaks in the text is God's, not that of the Prophet. This first-person perspective imparts an immediacy to the Quranic discourse that is somewhat similar to the tone used in the New Testament. Also like the New Testament (and parts of the Hebrew Bible), the Quran is not only didactic but "autobiographical," because God is often depicted as speaking about God's own divine nature. Thus, to assert that the authorship of the Quran is anything but divine is to strip the Quran of the very reality that it claims for itself. Such a stance would never be acceptable to a believing Muslim.

While it would be a travesty of Islam's claim to the truth to call the religion "Muhammadanism" or to say that in the Quran "Muhammad says such-and-such," it is equally wrong to say that the Prophet had nothing whatsoever to do with the Quran. First, the Quranic revelation came out of the Prophet's mouth and in his own Arabic language, either as the result of a direct revelation from God or through the mediation of the angel Gabriel. In addition, during more than twenty-two years of revelation, the Prophet was the prime interpreter of the Quran, and his recorded statements about how its teachings are to be put into effect form the basis of the *Sunna*, the paradigm of behavior that every Muslim must follow. As God says to the Prophet: "We have revealed unto you the Remembrance, so that you may explain to people that which has been revealed for them" (Quran 16:44).

The concept of the *Sunna* is based on the belief that the Prophet Muhammad is a role model for all Muslims, both male and female. This is confirmed by the Quran in the following verse: "A good example you have in Allah's Messenger, for all whose hope is in Allah and in the Final Day and who remember Allah frequently" (Quran 33:61). Besides being the human vehicle of revelation, the Prophet is also mentioned in the Quran as the executor of God's laws. For this reason the Prophet's orders must be obeyed by Muslims as if those orders came from God Himself: "Obey Allah and the Messenger so that you may find mercy" (Quran 3:132). Finally, by extending the word of God through the process of Quranic interpretation, the Prophet acts as a legislator for the Muslim community: "[The Prophet] will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit them only the bad, and will relieve them of their burdens and the fetters which they used to wear" (Quran 7:157). These Prophetic roles of moral exemplarity, executive decision making, and legislative law making all have an important bearing on religious practice. Thus, it is not surprising to discover that there are more statements about practice in the *Sunna* than in the Quran.

During his lifetime the Prophet's authority was accepted without dispute, because it was already confirmed by God in the Quran and thus did not depend on the Muslim community's assent. The question of the Sunna's authority after Muhammad's lifetime, however, was not explicitly discussed in the Quran. In the first century after the Prophet's death, many Muslims preferred to follow local or regional interpretations of Islamic practice rather than uncertain accounts of Muhammad's behavior that were orally passed down through the generations. In the second and third centuries of Islam, tradition-minded legal scholars such as Malik ibn Anas (ca. 715–795) and Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafii (767–820) argued through analogical reasoning that the collective example of the Prophet, his Companions (*al-Sahabah*), and their followers (collectively known as *al-Salaf al-Salih*, "The Virtuous Forerunners") was to be accepted along with the word of God as a primary and thus normative source of practice. This extension of the living authority of the Prophet and his Companions into future generations became so widely accepted in the Muslim world that all pious Muslims now see themselves as following the Sunna in one way or another. Today the Sunna enjoys near canonical status as a source of Islamic precedent—so much so that in the hands of politically motivated Islamists, those who follow the doctrines of the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, and other so-called Muslim fundamentalists, the Sunna has been denuded of all historical contextualization and stands nearly equal to the Quran as a source of truth.

The raw material of the Sunna is the corpus of *hadith* (pl. *ahadith*). This consists of collected accounts of the Prophet's deeds and sayings, which are at times supplemented by the actions and comments of the Prophet's Companions. The word *hadith* means "report or saying." In Sunni Islam this term most often refers to a consensually legitimated body of sayings and reports about Muhammad's behavior that was compiled in six major collections (the Six Books or *al-Kutub al-Sittah*) in the late ninth to tenth centuries, about two and a half centuries after the Prophet's death. These collections are seen today as primary sources of both juridical and moral precedent and are second only to the Quran in their practical significance and authority.

During the period in which they were compiled, the *hadith* were classified according to the soundness of their chains of transmission and the character, piety, trustworthiness, and reputation of their transmitters. The Six Books of Sunni *hadith* attained their status as normative sources because few if any of the traditions contained therein were found to be spurious. Two of these collections have been designated by a consensus of scholars as particularly sound (*sahih*). These works—*Sahih al-Bukhari* (mentioned earlier) and *Sahih Muslim* (named after Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Nisaburi, ca. 817–875)—are the most authoritative books

of Sunni hadith. The remaining books are also named after their compilers and are known either as collections of precedents (*sunan*)—such as the *Sunan* of Abu Daud al-Sijistani (817–88), the *Sunan* of Ibn Majjah al-Qazwini (822–87), and the *Sunan* of al-Nasai (830–915)—or as a collection (*jami*), such as *Jami al-Tirmidhi* (named after al-Tirmidhi, 824–92). Shiite Muslims consider the traditions of their imams (spiritual leaders descended directly from the Prophet Muhammad) to be equal in importance to those of the Prophet himself. The most significant collections of Shiite hadith are those of Abu Jafar Muhammad al-Kulayni (d. 940), Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Babuyah, also known as Shaykh Saduq (ca. 923–91) and al-Hasan al-Tusi (995–1067).

In *Sahih Muslim* is a tradition known as the Hadith of Gabriel (*Hadith Jibril*), which has long been regarded by Muslims as one of the most important statements on Islamic faith and practice. Like other traditions of its kind, it originates with Umar ibn al-Khattab (ca. 586–644), a close companion of the Prophet Muhammad and the second *khaliifa* (caliph or successor to Muhammad) of the Muslim community. For many Muslim scholars the Hadith of Gabriel constitutes the defining statement of the Islamic creed (*aqidah*), because it appears as a sort of catechism of Islamic dogma. Because it is not part of the Quran, this hadith is not fully equivalent to the word of God. It enjoys a particularly high status, however, because it depicts the Prophet as being tested on matters of doctrine by the angel Gabriel, God's messenger in the world of spirits and the main conduit of the Quranic revelation. Because of its importance to the definition of Islamic practice, the full text of this hadith is reproduced below, except for the last section (probably added at a later date), which discusses the signs and portents of the end of the world and the advent of the Day of Judgment:

[Umar ibn al-Khattab reported:] One day, while we were sitting with the Messenger of God (may God bless and preserve him), there came upon us a man whose clothes were exceedingly white and whose hair was exceedingly black. No dust of travel could be seen upon him, and none of us knew him. He sat down in front of the Prophet (may God bless and preserve him), rested his knees against [the Prophet's] knees and placed his palms on [the Prophet's] thighs. "Oh Muhammad, tell me about Islam," he said. The Messenger of God (may God bless and preserve him) replied: "Islam means to bear witness that there is no god but Allah, that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to maintain the [required] prayers, to pay the poor-tax, to fast [in the month of] Ramadan, and to perform the pilgrimage to the House [of God at Mecca] if you are able to do so."

"You are correct," [the man] said. We were amazed at his questioning [of the Prophet] and then saying that [the Prophet] had answered correctly. Then

he said, "Tell me about faith." [The Prophet] said: "It is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and to believe in Allah's determination of affairs, whether good comes of it or bad."

"You are correct," he said. "Now tell me about virtue (*ihsan*)." [The Prophet] said: "It is to worship Allah as if you see Him; for if you do not see Him, surely He sees you." . . . Then [the man] left. I remained for awhile, and [the Prophet] said to me: "Oh, Umar, do you know who the questioner was?" "Allah and His Messenger know best," I replied. He said: "It was [the angel] Gabriel, who came to you to teach you your religion."

An important aspect of the Hadith of Gabriel is that the expected polarity between faith and practice is reversed. Instead of faith being a prerequisite for practice, it is practice that defines faith. This reversed polarity is a reminder that Islam is defined not only as a set of beliefs but also as a body of actions that reveal the inner convictions of the believer. This practice-oriented view of Islam is typical of the hadith genre in general. Each normative prescription or explanatory statement that one finds in these traditions acts as a complement to one or more verses of the Quran. Another way to describe the relationship between the hadith and the Quran is to say that traditions such as the Hadith of Gabriel express a "nomocentric" or law-centered perspective on Islam, in which knowledge of spiritual realities is less important than the performance of appropriate behavior. This stands in contrast to the Quran's more "logocentric" or word-centered approach to Islam, in which the divine word arouses knowledge of God in the human consciousness.

This shift in emphasis from inner belief to outward practice is less surprising when nomocentric traditions such as the Hadith of Gabriel are viewed in their historical context. The Hadith of Gabriel was originally passed down by Abdallah ibn Umar, the son of Umar ibn al-Khattab, some time after his father's death. The caliph Umar is a central figure in Islamic history, because it was he who initiated the Muslim conquests of Palestine, Syria, and Iran. Just before these conquests, the Muslim community was forced to undergo the so-called Apostasy (*Ridda*) Wars, in which Arab tribes used the death of the Prophet Muhammad as an excuse to reassert their independence from the Islamic state. During this time of transition, when former apostates were being taken back into the Islamic fold and many non-Muslims sought to avoid the social and economic disadvantages of conquest by converting to the new religion, it was imperative for the Islamic state to define the minimum requirements for becoming a believer. Once identified as a Muslim, the convert became exempt from the *jizyah* (the poll-tax levied against non-Muslims) and could claim a share of the stipends that were paid on an annual basis to participants in the *jihād* or war of Islamic expansion.

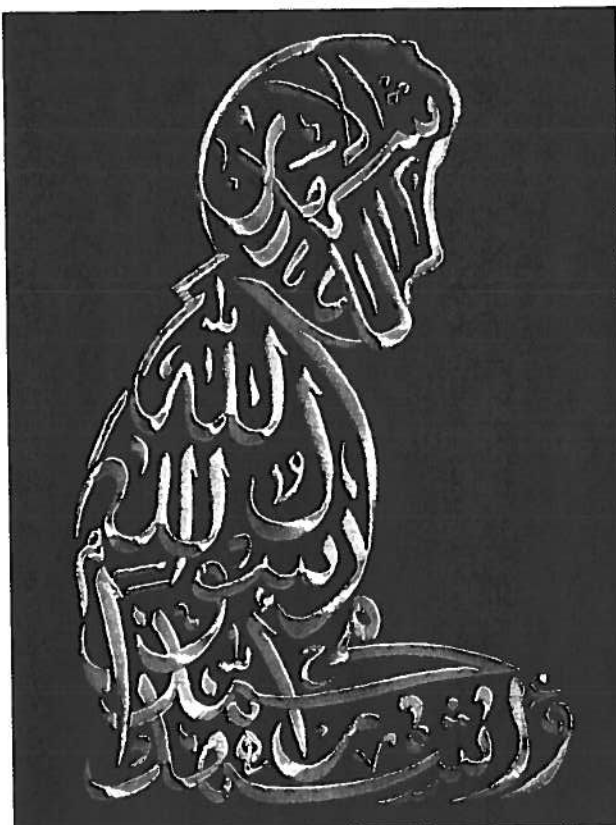
This need for a creedal definition of Islam is amply served by the Hadith of Gabriel, which defines Islam in three ways: (1) theologically, by asserting that Allah is the One God and not part of a pantheon; (2) historically, by asserting

that the Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of God, thus separating the nascent era of Islam from the previous era of theological ignorance (*Jahiliyyah*); and (3) doctrinally, by mandating five basic and fundamental pillars of Islamic practice that formally differentiate Islam from Christianity, Judaism, and the other religions of the Middle East.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The Five Pillars of Islam (*arkan al-Islam*), which are presented systematically for the first time in the Hadith of Gabriel, are relatively simple to carry out and can easily be learned by the person who wishes to convert to Islam. The first pillar of Islam is to openly proclaim and bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. This is known as the *Shahadah* (the act of bearing witness). It may also be called *al-Shahadatayn* (the two witnessings), because it consists of two separate acts of bearing witness. The first witnessing, "There is no god but Allah," affirms the acceptance of the divine reality by the human intellect. As a formal proclamation of divine singularity (*tawhid*), it is the creedal equivalent to the "knowledge of certainty" discussed earlier. The second witnessing, "Muhammad is the messenger of Allah," affirms one's submission to God, which is the meaning of the word *islam* itself. Here, the human being responds to the divine will by acknowledging the Prophet Muhammad as both the vehicle of the Quranic revelation and the paradigmatic muslim or "submitter" to God. By stressing the sources of both the theoretical and the practical knowledge of religion (i.e., Allah and the Prophet), the "two witnessings" of the *Shahadah* thus reaffirm the complementarity of faith and practice in Islam.

The second pillar of Islam is to make the required five prayers each day in the direction of the Great Mosque (*al-Masjid al-Haram*) in Mecca. These prayers, collectively known as *al-Salat*, are performed just before dawn, at noon, at mid-afternoon, just after sunset, and in the evening, from an hour after sunset to around midnight. In the hadith, prayer is depicted as the quintessential act of submission to God and the main proof of Islam. In *Jami al-Tirmidhi*, the Prophet is quoted as saying: "Prayer is the proof [of Islam]." The central importance given to prayer



Five fundamental tenets, often described as the pillars of Islam, distinguish Islam from other religions. The first is the *shahada*, or profession of faith, which attests that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's messenger. In this modern Moroccan calligraphic panel embroidered in gold thread, the words of the profession of faith have been given the form of a human figure at prayer.



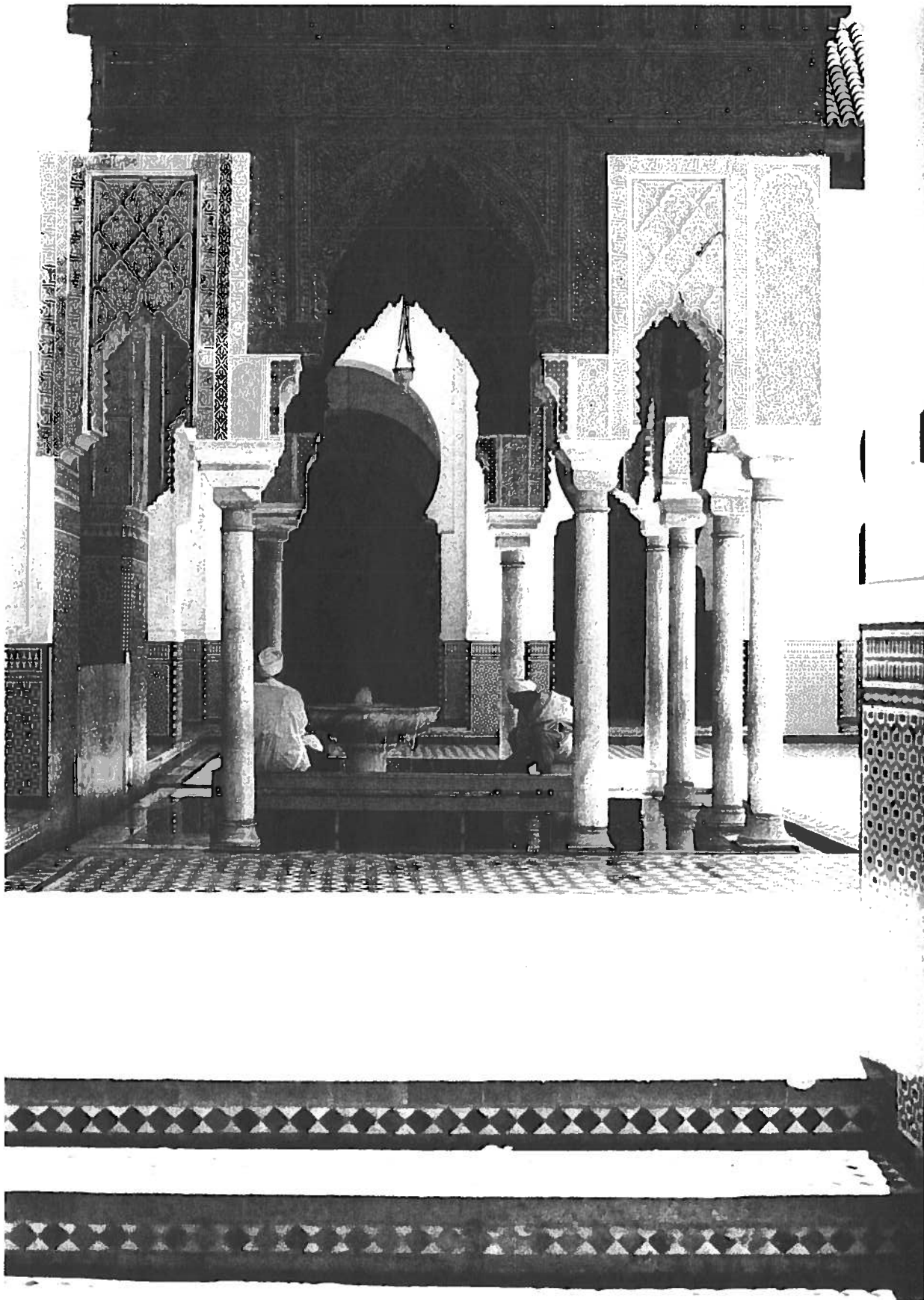
The second pillar of Islam is to worship God five times a day in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca. To determine the direction of Mecca, known as the *qibla*, Muslims developed the science of astronomy. Twentieth-century worshipers can use this qibla compass.

in Islam is due to the recognition that the performance of al-Salat forces the human body to respond to the reality that has first been acknowledged by the heart and the tongue in the Shahadah. In addition, the essential contrast between the absolute independence of God and the ontological dependency of the human being is reaffirmed in the actions and attitudes of the prayer.

To perform the prayer, the believer must first put herself in a state of purity by performing either a ritual ablution (*wudu*) or a bath (*ghusl*). The symbolic nature of the ablution is illustrated by the fact that either clean water or clean sand may be used to perform this ritual. The full bath, in which water is poured over both the body and the head, is needed only in cases of serious ritual pollution or after sexual intercourse. In general, the ablution should be seen as an expression of respect for God's majesty and as a means of preparing the believer for meeting and addressing the Lord and Creator.

The movements of the Muslim prayer are patterned after attitudes of obeisance that were associated in late antiquity with entering into the presence of a great ruler. To visualize how the prayer movements correspond to the act of greeting such a ruler, imagine a petitioner standing outside a king's throne room. The first thing that the petitioner is likely to do before entering the royal presence is to summon the resolve to enter the throne room. This corresponds to the act of affirming the intention (*niyyah*) that precedes not only the canonical prayer but all other ritual observances in Islam as well. Next the petitioner enters the throne room itself. After stepping over the threshold she stops, raises her hands to her ears, and proclaims the glory and majesty of the ruler for all to hear. This corresponds to the act of "magnification" (*takbir*), which begins the prayer. To perform the *takbir*, the Muslim worshipper raises her hands to her ears and proclaims in Arabic, "Allah is most great!" (*Allahu akbar!*).

The petitioner then bows before the king in an attitude of reverence and uses a ritual formula to address the king. This corresponds to the next stage of the prayer,



Before worship, Muslims must put themselves in a state of ritual purity, and many mosques, such as the Kairouiyin in Fez, Morocco, provide fountains for ablution.

in which the worshipper recites Surat al-Fatihah, the Quran's opening discourse. This surah, which is translated below, has often been described by Muslim theologians as summarizing in a few lines the essential message of the Quran:

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds; the Beneficent, the Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek aid. Show us the Straight Way, the way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your grace, not of those who have earned Your wrath or who go astray (Quran 1:1–6).

After reciting the Fatihah, the worshipper recites another verse from the Quran, which is chosen at her individual discretion. Although any verse from the Quran may be used, this second recitation is often used by Muslims to further magnify God by recounting some of the divine attributes. After greeting the king from the threshold of the throne room, the petitioner next approaches halfway to the throne itself. At this point, she stops, bows, and utters another ritual formula. This corresponds to the third part of the prayer, which is called the "bowing" (*ruku*). After again saying "Allah is most great!" the worshipper bows from the waist and proclaims three times, "Glory to the Greatest Lord!" After raising herself to an upright position, she next utters: "Allah hears the one who praises Him." After this the worshipper immediately adds, "Our Lord, all praise belongs to You!"

In the final act of approaching the king, the petitioner is summoned to the foot of the throne and falls prostrate before the ruler. This expression of submission—which the secular individualist often sees as both repellant and antithetical to the concept of personal dignity—was common practice in late antiquity. When Islam first appeared in the Middle East, petitioners were expected to prostrate themselves before both the Byzantine emperor (a Christian) and the Shah of Persia (a Zoroastrian). This was because these rulers performed the dual role of king and high priest, exercising political authority as heads of state and religious authority as heads of their respective religious institutions. In both cases as well, they were thought to be the vicegerents of God on earth: the Byzantine emperor ruled over the lands of "New Rome" (the only "Rome" known to Muslims) as both Caesar and Vicar of Christ, while the Shah of Persia ruled over his kingdom as the semidivine representative of the god Ahuramazda.

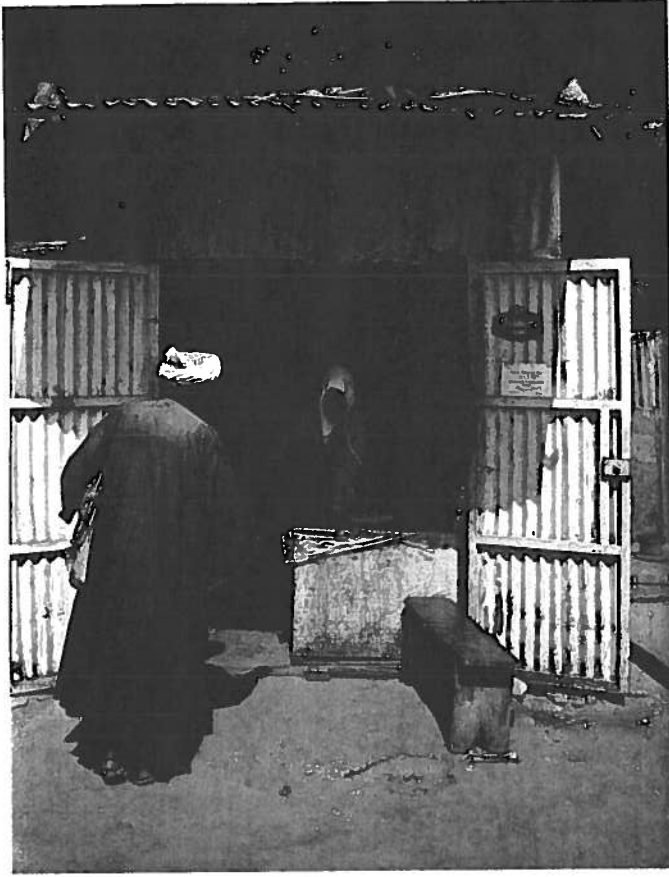
In Catholic Christianity it is still required for those joining monastic orders to prostrate themselves before the altar of Christ. This religious attitude of humility is in full agreement with the perspective of the Islamic prayer. If a person is willing to humble himself before the secular kings of the world, is it not more fitting to humble himself before God, who is the King of Kings? Because Muslims readily prostrate themselves before God, however, it does not mean that they are



After raising his hands in *takbir*, the petitioner bows his head in an attitude of reverence while reciting the *fatiha*, the opening chapter of the Quran. The final two steps are bowing (*ruku*) and prostration (*sajdah*).

similarly inclined to submit to worldly authority figures. In the first century of Islam, Muslims were notably stubborn in their refusal to prostrate before anyone or anything but Allah. The arrival in the mid-seventh century of a Muslim delegation to the emperor of China was recorded as a remarkable event in T'ang dynasty chronicles, because these Arab or Persian visitors (called Ta-Shih by Chinese historians) refused to prostrate themselves before the emperor, who was believed to be the "Son of Heaven."

Before commencing the act of prostration (*sajdah* or *sujud*), the worshipper must first repeat the *takbir*, "Allah is most Great!" At this point she falls to her knees and prostrates herself before God, placing both hands flat on the ground and touching her forehead between them. While in the bowing position she recites three times, "Glory to the Lord Most High!" After once again saying "Allah is most Great!", the worshipper sits back on her heels and asks for God's mercy, saying, "Oh God, forgive me and show me mercy." Repeating the formula "Allah is most Great!" one more time, she again resumes the attitude of prostration and recites three times, "Glory to the Lord Most High!" After this, she stands up and repeats the entire cycle of prayer, starting with another magnification of God.



The third pillar of Islam is to pay a yearly poor-tax (*zakah*) to a religious official or a representative of the Islamic state. Personal charity, such as almsgiving to this blind beggar in Gambia, is an important article of faith.

Each cycle of the Muslim prayer—from the initial *takbir* through the recitation of the Quran, the bowing, the prostration, the sitting, and the second prostration—is known as a *rakah* (pl. *rakat*). Every canonical prayer requires from two to four *rakat* to complete: two for the dawn (*fajr*) prayer, four for the noon (*zuhr*) prayer, four for the mid-afternoon (*asr*) prayer, three for the sunset (*maghrib*) prayer, and four for the evening (*isha*) prayer. In all, the total number of cycles performed for the prayers is seventeen. After every two cycles and after the third cycle of the sunset prayer, the worshipper sits back on her heels in an attitude known as the “sitting” (*jalsah*). While in this position, she addresses God with a formula known as the “greeting” (*tahiyyah*). At this time she also calls forth God’s blessings on the Prophet Muhammad. Although the actual words of this greeting vary slightly according to the different schools of Islamic law, the meaning is essentially the same in all cases.

After all of the cycles of the canonical prayer have been completed, the worshipper sits back on her heels once again and recites a formula known as the “witnessing” (*tashahhud*), because it contains the words of the “profession of faith” (*Shahadah*). Outwardly, this witnessing acts as a formal reaffirmation of the truth of Islam. Inwardly, it is the point at which the worshipper engages in her most direct communication with God. Muslim scholars consider this to be the most intimate part of the canonical prayer, where the worshipper privately petitions the favor of her lord, who responds by sending down divine mercy as a relief for her worldly cares.

The witnessing is followed by a formal supplication that asks God’s blessings for the Prophets Muhammad and Ibrahim (Abraham), the last and first of Allah’s messengers, whose purpose was to bring salvific truth to humanity through a revealed book. Finally, the prayer is ended with an invocation of peace (*salam*). To make this invocation, the worshipper turns her head first to the right and then to the left, uttering, “May the peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be upon you.” Although the most



The fourth pillar of Islam is to fast during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month according to the Islamic lunar calendar. Muslims abstain from food and drink during the daylight hours. Here a family in Bahrain breakfasts in the predawn darkness.

probable objects of this invocation are the fellow believers who sit at the worshipper's right and left during the congregational (*jamaa*) prayer, Muslims have long believed that with this formula they are also addressing their guardian angels, who hover over their shoulders as they pray.

The third pillar of Islam is to pay the yearly tithe to a religious official or a representative of the Islamic state. This tithe is known as *al-zakah* (the purification) and is levied on each individual believer. The official level of this tithe, which is set at one-fortieth (2.5 percent) of the value of all liquid assets and income-generating properties in the worshipper's possession, is based on a hadith text and was confirmed by Muslim scholars following the usage of the Prophet's Companions and their successors. According to the Quran, the tithe may be used to feed the poor, to encourage conversion to Islam, to ransom captives, to relieve debtors of their burden, to help wayfarers, and to support those who devote themselves to the cause of God (Quran 9:60). It may also be used in defense of the faith and for any other purpose deemed appropriate by the ruler of an Islamic state. In Shiite Islam another tithe, called "the fifth" (*khums*), is also required of believers. This consists of a 20 percent tithe on all new income for the year and is used to support the juridical and educational institutions of the Shiite community.

The fourth pillar of Islam is to observe the month-long fast of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. During the twenty-nine or thirty days



The fifth pillar of Islam is the pilgrimage to Mecca, which takes place during the first ten days of the twelfth month in the lunar year. In medieval times pilgrims traveled together to Mecca in caravans, as depicted in this illustration from a thirteenth-century manuscript of al-Hariri's *Maqamat*.

of the fasting period, the believer must abstain from food, drink, and sex during daylight hours. This pillar is known as *al-Sawm* or *Siyam* Ramadan and is seen by Muslims as both a purificatory act of sacrifice and an affirmation of ethical awareness. The sacrificial aspect of Ramadan is reflected in the *Sahih Muslim* hadith mentioned earlier. Just after stating that prayer is the proof of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad adds that "fasting is [the key to] heaven." The Ramadan fast is a key to heaven because it involves the sacrifice of a person's bodily desires and is performed for the sake of God alone. By also denying himself drink, the believer further ensures that the sacrifice will be felt by the body. The pain that is felt by the believer during the Ramadan fast acts as a bridge that links the sacrifice to a larger sense of social responsibility. Inwardly, the believer purifies the body by consecrating it to God.

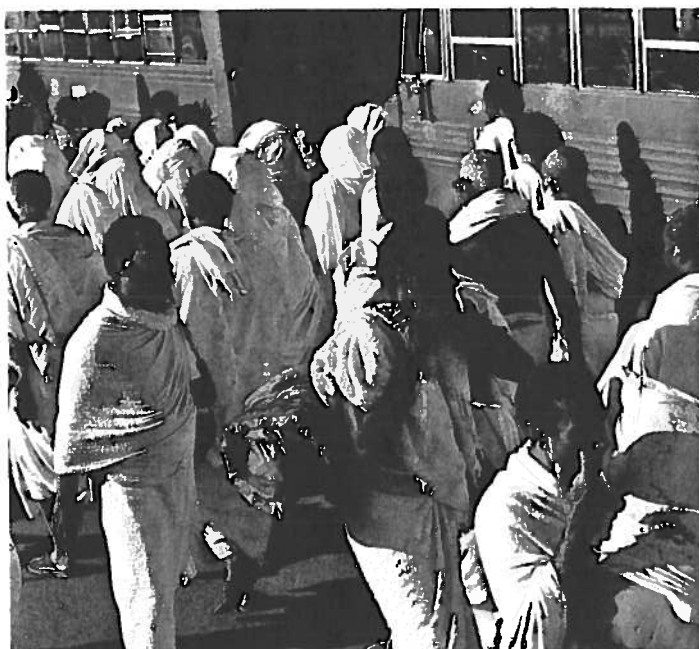
Outwardly, the believer uses the fast to recall the responsibility that must be felt toward his fellow human beings. By undergoing the pain of hunger and thirst for an extensive yet limited period of time, the believer recalls the pain of the person whose "fast" never ends because his stomach is never free from want.

The fifth pillar of Islam is the pilgrimage to Mecca. This takes place in the first ten days of the month of *Dhul-Hijjah* (the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar) and is obligatory for every believer who is physically and financially able to make the journey and perform the prescribed rites. This pillar of Islam is called *al-Hajj*. Its nine essential rites are as follows:

1. To put on the "garment of consecration" (*ihram*), which consists of two pieces of unsewn cloth for men and covers all parts of the body except the face, hands, and feet for women. While in the state of

ihram, it is not permissible to have sexual relations, to kill animals or insects, or to remove any hair from the body.

2. To circumambulate the Kaaba (literally, "cube"), also known as the House of God (*Bayt Allah*), at the center of the Grand Mosque of Mecca. This is done seven times in a counterclockwise direction. While circumambulating the Kaaba, many pilgrims also attempt to touch the "Black Stone" (*al-Hajar al-Aswad*), a meteorite considered to be sent from heaven and originally placed by the Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (Ishmael) in one of the corners of the Kaaba. Pilgrims may also perform the act of "running" (*say*) seven times along a corridor of the Grand Mosque, in commemoration of the Prophet Ibrahim's slave woman Hajar (Hagar), who searched for water for her infant son, the Prophet Ismail. Although these last two rites are performed by many if not all pilgrims, they are not official parts of the pilgrimage.
3. To stand at Arafat, a plain southeast of Mecca, on the ninth day of the month of Dhul-Hijjah, even if it is only for a short time. Those who have staked out a place for themselves and are able to remain for a longer period listen to a sermon delivered from the heights of Mount Arafat. This commemorates the final pilgrimage of the Prophet Muhammad, who delivered his farewell sermon from this site.
4. To spend the night at an encampment near Mecca called Muzdalifah.
5. To throw stones at the three places where, according to Muslim tradition, Satan tried to tempt the Prophet Ismail. This is to be done once before the sacrifice at Minah, and then again on the two days following the sacrifice.
6. To sacrifice an animal (usually a sheep or a goat, but sometimes a

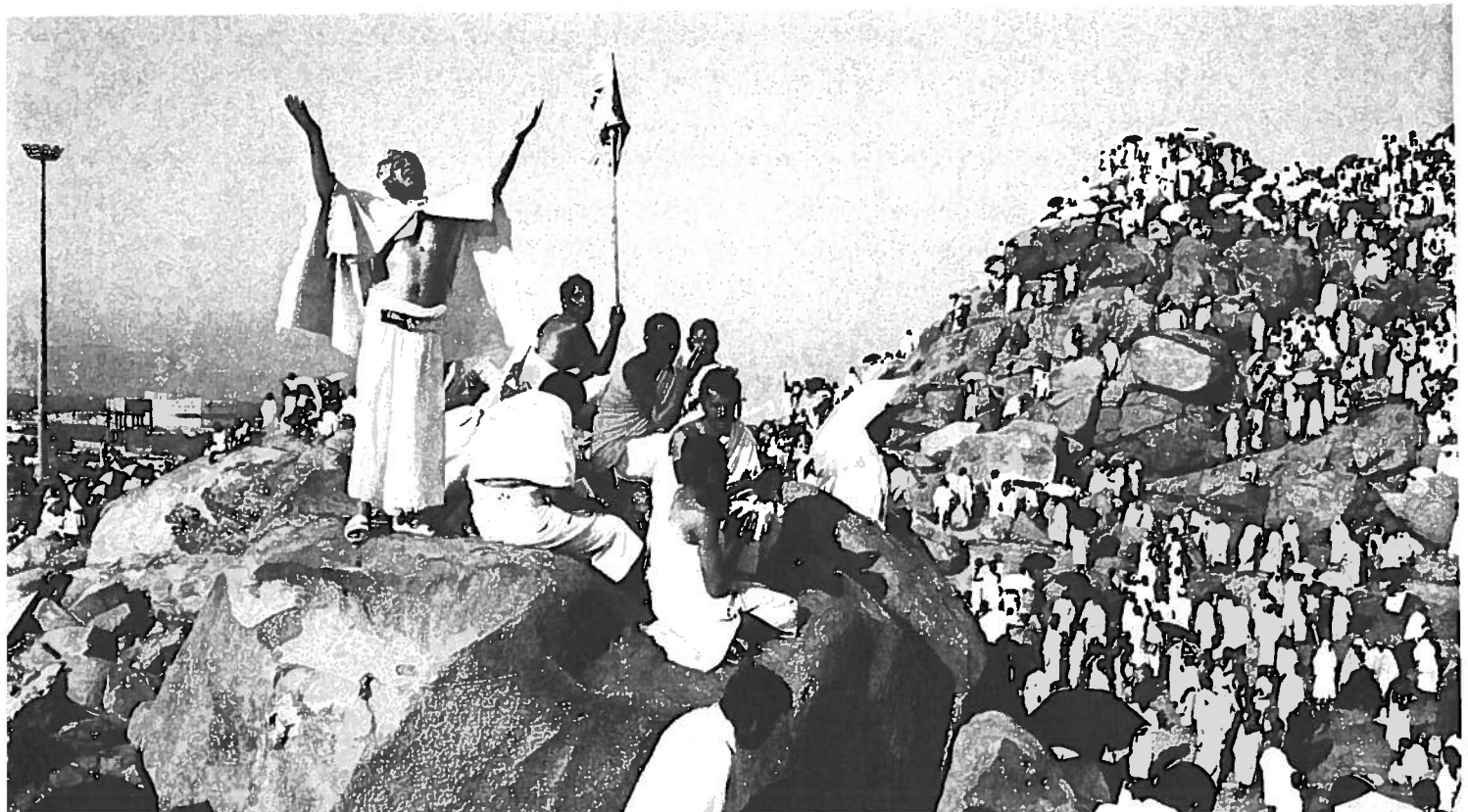


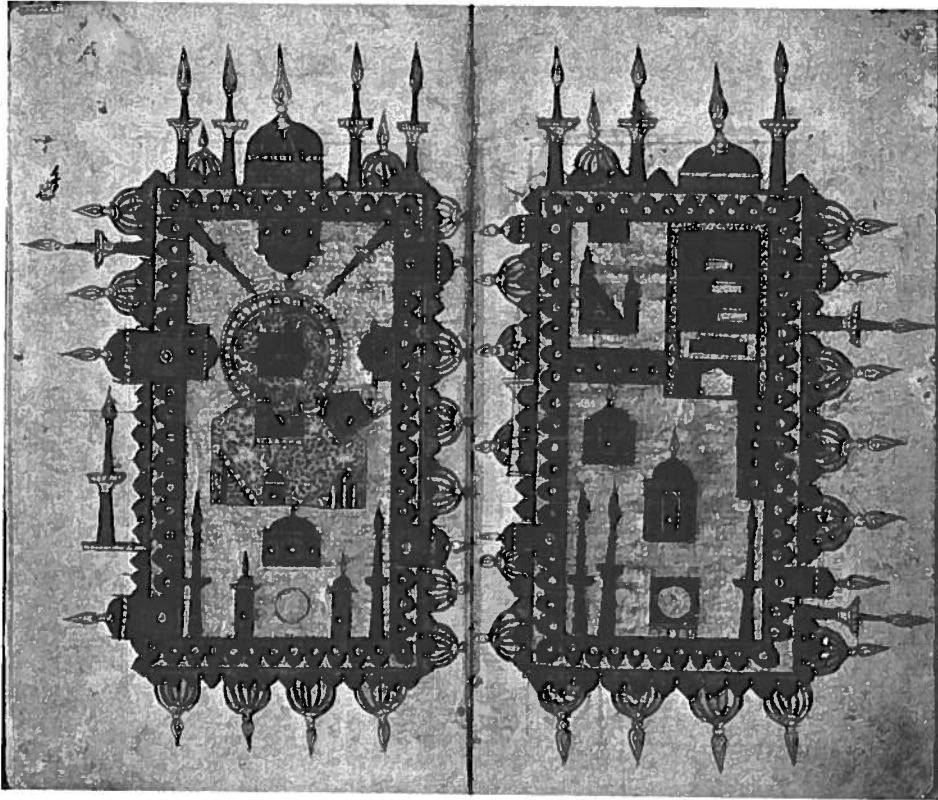
The pilgrim arriving in Mecca dons a special garment of consecration (*ihram*), worn throughout the pilgrimage. For men this comprises two seamless lengths of white cloth; women must cover the entire body except hands, face, and feet.

cow or a camel) at the place called Minah. This commemorates God's acceptance of a sheep as a sacrifice in place of the Prophet Ismail. Muslims disagree with Biblical traditions about Ismail, which assert that this ancestor of the Arabs could not have been the "first-born" son and heir of the Prophet Ibrahim because he was born from Hajar the slave rather than from Ibrahim's free wife Sarah. In Islam, unlike either Christianity or Judaism, the child of a female slave and the child of a free woman are equally legitimate and both can claim shares of their father's inheritance. For this reason Muslims believe that it was Ismail, the Prophet Ibrahim's first-born son, and not his second son Ishaq (Isaac), whom Ibrahim intended to consecrate to God as a sacrifice. They further believe that the Kaaba was a temple that Ibrahim and Ismail built for God in Mecca when Ismail had reached adulthood.

The rites of the pilgrimage take the pilgrim to several sites in and around Mecca. Here, on the stony slopes of Mount Rahma overlooking the plain of Arafat, where the Prophet gave his farewell sermon, an Iranian pilgrim beseeches God while others shelter from the blazing sun.

7. To repeat the circumambulation of the Kaaba seven more times.
8. To drink the water from the well called Zamzam (literally, "bubbling") in the precincts of the Great Mosque of Mecca, where Muslims believe God provided water for Hajar and her infant son Ismail during their wanderings in the desert.
9. To perform two cycles of the canonical prayer at a place known as the Station of Abraham (*Maqam Ibrahim*), where the Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail are believed to have prayed together after building the Kaaba.





While on the pilgrimage to Mecca, most pilgrims include a visit to the city of Medina, where Muhammad emigrated in 622. The most important spot there is the Prophet's mosque and tomb, represented here in a sixteenth-century religious text from Morocco.

The minimum requirements of the Hajj are the wearing of the ihram, the standing at Arafat, and the second circumambulation of the Kaaba. Although the Hajj may be completed without performing the remaining rites, the pilgrim is required to pay expiation (*kaffarah*) for his failure to complete them. During the entire Hajj the pilgrim must avoid thinking about anything other than the remembrance of God and the rites of the pilgrimage itself. This is because circumambulating the Kaaba, like the canonical prayer, symbolizes the believer's entry into the divine presence. The earthly House of God (*Bayt Allah*) that the pilgrim visits in Mecca is believed by many Muslims to replicate the cosmic House of God in the Seventh Heaven, which contains the divine throne and is circumambulated by the angels and all of the archetypes of creation.

The Six Pillars of Faith

The Five Pillars of Islam are followed in the Hadith of Gabriel by another group of creedal principles known as the Six Pillars of Faith (*arkan al-iman*). Despite the Quranic link between knowledge and faith, these pillars of faith are not associ-

ated with the highest levels of knowledge that were discussed earlier. Like the Pillars of Islam, they instead comprise a practice-oriented approach to religion because they are meant to be ritually affirmed at the time of conversion or whenever one's doctrinal orientation is called into question by the religious authorities of the Islamic state. Like the pillars of Islam, the pillars of faith are thus associated only with the most primary level of knowledge mentioned in the Quran—*ilm al-yaqin* (the rational or doctrinal knowledge of the truth)—and do not involve the most advanced states of knowledge (*ayn al-yaqin* and *haqq al-yaqin*). The Six Pillars of Faith in Islam are as follows:

1. To believe in God (Allah).
2. To believe in Allah's angels.
3. To believe in Allah's revealed books, which include the Quran, the New Testament, also known as the Evangel (*al-Injil*), the Psalms of David (*al-Zabur*), the Torah (*al-Tawrat*), and the Pages of Abraham (*Suhuf Ibrahim*).
4. To believe in Allah's messengers, which include many of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible as well as Jesus (*Isa*), John the Baptist (*Yahya*), and such previous Arab prophets as Hud and Salih.
5. To believe in the Last Day (*al-Yawm al-Akhir*, also known as *Yawm al-Qiyama*). Islamic eschatology is close to that of Christianity and even includes an intercessory role for Jesus. Many Muslims also believe in a quasi-prophetic figure called the Mahdi (Guided One), who will come after Jesus and usher in a period of peace and justice that will last until the Day of Judgment. This figure does not appear in the Quran but is a later addition from the hadith. Significantly, the Mahdi's first appearance in the hadith is to be found, like the Hadith of Gabriel, in *Sahih Muslim*.
6. To believe in Allah's determination of affairs, whether good or bad. This is a reaffirmation of the concepts of divine fore-knowledge (*qada*) and fate (*qadar*) discussed earlier.

Were it not for the details added to the Six Pillars of Faith in the hadith, it would be theoretically possible for most Christians or Jews to affirm the Islamic pillars of faith and still remain within their own religions. This is why the public affirmation of the pillars of faith is not accepted by most Muslim jurists as a sufficient proof of Islam without also being accompanied by the Five Pillars of Islam. The first of the five pillars, the witnessing or *Shahadah*, unequivocally

requires the believer to accept the prophet Muhammad as the messenger of Allah. In doing so, the prospective believer must also acknowledge the truth of the Quranic revelation as well as the normative nature of the Sunna. Whenever the teachings of the Quran or the Sunna differ from those of the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament, Muslims are required to favor the later Islamic interpretation over the earlier doctrines of Judaism or Christianity.

The primacy of practice over faith that is reflected in such traditions as the Hadith of Gabriel is so widely accepted in the Muslim world that some Western scholars have erroneously asserted that Islam has no orthodoxy. In their view, there is no single creed or body of doctrine—apart from the Shahadah—that all Muslims regard as normative. In the absence of such a doctrine, these scholars posit an orthopraxy, a form of Islam that is defined almost entirely in terms of ritual observance.

From a comparative perspective, however, this stance is difficult to justify. First, all Muslims do not pray in exactly the same way. The schools of Islamic jurisprudence differ on minor points of what is to be said or done in the canonical prayer. Second, no orthodoxy is static; all orthodoxies are “orthodoxies in the making.” Official interpretations of doctrine tend to fluctuate over time and may be transformed in response to changing social conditions or relations of power. This can even happen in a highly centralized institution such as the Catholic Church. It is no coincidence, for example, that the doctrine of papal infallibility was promulgated in the mid-nineteenth century, at the very time when the ideals of nationalism and participatory democracy were undermining the papacy’s influence. Likewise, it is no coincidence that the official doctrine of the Virgin Mary is currently undergoing a review process in the Catholic Church, at a time when feminism has revolutionized the status and role of women in Western society.

Islamic orthodoxies are no different. Doctrines have changed repeatedly in the fourteen hundred years of Islamic history. For example, the theological rationalism of the Mutazilite school of theology—a dogma that was officially imposed on Muslims by the caliph and enforced by an inquisition—was replaced as “orthodox” doctrine after less than a century by its antithesis, the tradition-based fideism of the Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaa (the people of the Sunna and the majority). One may also recall how the mystical interpretations of Sufism, once widely accepted as an alternative approach to Islamic theology, have recently been replaced and even anathematized by the hadith-driven scripturalism of Wahhabism (a practice-oriented sect from Saudi Arabia that advocates a literal interpretation of the Quran and hadith) and other movements of Islamic reform. Today, the more innovative aspects of Sufism have been driven so far off the historical stage that even many Sufis themselves now differ little from their reformist opponents in adhering to a hadith-based approach to theology and Quranic exegesis.

Yet to give the advocates of orthopraxy their due, it must be admitted that the outcome of both of these doctrinal disputes depended to a large extent on the belief, implied in the Hadith of Gabriel, that practice is the criterion of faith and not the other way around. Despite the Quran's emphasis on the primacy of knowledge, the Sunna's emphasis on the primacy of practice has clearly prevailed among most Muslims. Today, "orthodox" Islam is more than anything else a "nomocentric" or law-centered religion. As the Hadith of Gabriel illustrates, this trend began quite early in Islamic history. Another early example can be found in the thousand-year-old creed of the Tunisian jurist Abu Muhammad ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani (922–96). This creed, which appears in the introductory section of ibn Abi Zayd's *Risalah*, or treatise on Islamic law, is now regarded as dogma by the adherents of the Maliki school of jurisprudence in North and West Africa. If a Maliki Muslim from this region is asked to discuss the subject of faith and practice in Islam, he or she is likely to respond by reciting one or more passages from the *Risalah*. In the passage reproduced below, a strong echo of the Hadith of Gabriel can be found in ibn Abi Zayd's contention that faith is subject to increase and decrease according to the level of a person's practice:

Faith consists of a declaration by the tongue, sincerity in the heart, and practice through the limbs. It increases through an increase in practice and decreases through its decrease. Thus, both decrease and increase pertain to it. The declaration of faith is not completed except through practice. Also, neither the declaration [of faith] nor practice [is sufficient] except through the mediation of intention, and neither declaration, practice, nor intention [is sufficient] unless it is in agreement with the Sunna.

The Institutionalization of Islamic Practice in the Shariah

In creeds such as that of ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani, the concept of practice becomes more than just a matter of doctrine; it also becomes a matter of law. The notion of the law in Islam is expressed by two different but semantically related terms: *shariah* (the "way" or method set out by God) and *fiqh* (the "understanding" or application of this method in specific cases). In theory, all Islamic law is divine in origin because it is rooted in God's commandments in the Quran. In practice, however, most of the precedents for Islamic legal decisions are found not in the Quran but in the Sunna—particularly in that portion of the hadith that reflects the prophet Muhammad's interpretations of Quranic rulings. Despite this apparent discrepancy, it is not correct to assume that Islamic law is extrascriptural like the Western system of secular laws. Although not all of the content of Islamic law comes directly from the Quran, the Quran still retains its scriptural nature for Muslims because the Prophet's precedent-setting judgments are believed to be divinely inspired.

When speaking about Islamic law, informed Muslims use the term *shariah* to connote the sacred law as a global concept or ideal, while *fiqh* is used to connote the ongoing interpretation of the law through the schools (four Sunni and one Shiite) of juridical practice (*madhhab*, pl. *madhahib*). From the earliest days of Islamic history, knowledge of the law was regarded by Muslims as essential knowledge, the very epitome of “science” (*ilm*) itself. But the science of the law, like any other science, does not stand still. Ideal principles are useless unless they are put into practice, and the changing conditions of Islamic society demanded new interpretations and applications of the way set forth by God and the Prophet Muhammad. For this reason the interpretive science of *fiqh* was developed in the first Islamic century. From an historical perspective the relationship between *shariah* and *fiqh* can be summarized by saying that the *shariah* developed as the paradigm or model of the Islamic way of life, whereas *fiqh*, the application of the *shariah* to specific cases, developed as the paradigm of Islamic reasoning. In these two concepts, one normative and ideal and the other hermeneutical and practical, a true complementarity between theory and practice is achieved. Without the open-ended interpretive process of *fiqh*, the *shariah* is no more than an immobile edifice, unresponsive to changing times. Without the anchor of tradition embodied in the *shariah*, the interpretive process of *fiqh* is liable to cut itself off from its scriptural roots and reduce Islamic law to a system of situational ethics.

As an institution, Islamic law has been weakened considerably over the past century. A combination of debilitating factors, including the substitution of Western notions for Islamic conceptions of justice under colonialism, attempts by authoritarian regimes to bypass the judicial process, the rise of Islamic populism under various forms of Islamic modernism, and the trivialization of religious training in modern secular education have conspired to undermine the status of the four Sunni schools of *fiqh*. Today, few Muslims can claim to be true scholars of the law (*fuqaha*, sg. *faqih*), and most believers are confused about what the *shariah* really means. A common belief fostered by modern political Islamists is that only the *shariah*—but not *fiqh*—constitutes the true law of God. According to this perspective, the content of the *shariah* is to be found in the Quran, the Sunna, and in cases in which consensus has been reached among the four Sunni schools of *fiqh*. However, the interpretive methodologies of these schools—their very reason for being—are to be eliminated as sources of dissension that undermine Muslim unity. This negative view of Islamic jurisprudence—which is advocated by such groups as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan, and the Taliban of Afghanistan—ignores the essential complementarity of *shariah* and *fiqh* and threatens to deny Islamic law the ability to adapt to changing conditions. Even worse, the refutation of *fiqh* has often led to a travesty of the Islamic practice of justice by opening the process of legal reasoning to the influence of political demagoguery.

Partisans of hadith and other scriptural literalists see *fiqh* as an extrascriptural (and hence, invalid) form of law because it entails the extension of rulings from the Quran and Sunna into new domains on the basis of analogical reasoning. Some rulings in Islamic law come directly from the Quran; these are seldom disputed. Others come from the hadith and are usually held to be binding if they are transmitted from reliable sources. Still other rulings, however, are found neither in the Quran nor in the hadith but are analogically derived from similar or comparable cases found in these primary texts. This last category of rulings provides most of the differences of opinion that separate the schools of Islamic jurisprudence from one another. This is also where culture and hermeneutical methods play their most significant roles in the process of interpretation.

The methodology of each school of *fiqh* is founded on the concept of living tradition, which consists of a combination of the Sunna of the Prophet and the practice (*amal*) of a particular legal school. The methodological perspective of each school has been refined over centuries of legal research and dialectical disputation and holds the status of a canon to which all jurists in a particular school adhere. This canon, or “imitation” (*taqlid*) of the decisions and interpretive methodology of a particular legal school, should not, however, be thought of as a formal law code. Very few decisions of Islamic jurists attain the status of binding consensus (*ijma*). Instead, juridical opinion (*ijtihad*) is likely to coalesce around a majority interpretation or ruling, while minority positions continue to exist as alternative interpretations. Although the opinion of the majority may attain the status of *de facto* consensus in certain regions, the *fiqh* system, as traditionally applied, remained open to differences of opinion and even allowed later revisions of the majority opinion. Cases even exist in which practices permitted by the Quran or the Sunna were abandoned by Muslims in later generations, according to the needs of equity (*istihsan*) or legitimate public interest (*maslahah mursalah*). Such is the case, for example, with the practice of slavery. Although the effects of slavery are clearly mitigated in the Quran, the practice itself was never abolished in Islam. Slavery has become so abhorrent to modern sensibilities, however, that no Muslim country officially allows it within its borders. To justify this change of opinion, Muslim jurists used the concept of gradualism to argue that the mitigation of slavery’s cruelty in the Quran implied God’s intention that the practice be ultimately abolished.

The actions of individuals in Islamic law are judged on the basis of five valuations, which rate each act according to its permissibility in a specific context. Most religious obligations, such as the Five Pillars of Islam, are regarded as obligatory (*fard* or *wajib*). These are acts whose commission is rewarded by God and whose omission may be punished by God, the Islamic state, or both. In many Muslim countries, for example, willful neglect of the fast of Ramadan may result

in fines or even imprisonment. In some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, parajudicial organizations exist whose purpose is to ensure that people make their five daily prayers at the proper times and adhere to consensual standards of decency. Most acts in Islamic law, however, although still ethically valued, are not considered obligatory. Instead, they fall under the three central categories of moral valuation: approved (*mandub* or *mustahabb*), morally neutral (*mubah*), and morally reprehensible (*makruh* or *mahzur*). Although the omission of obligatory acts may bring about punishment from the state, this is not the case for acts that are merely approved; conversely, the commission of acts that are disapproved is not likely to bring about punishment. In such cases, whatever reward or punishment accrues from the act is a matter for God to decide, while the commission or omission of an act is a matter for each person's conscience. The neutrality or permissibility (*ibaha*) of an act means exactly what it says: neither reward nor punishment accrues to the perpetrator.

At times, members of the public may seek an opinion (*fatwa*) about the permissibility of an act from a specialist in Islamic law (*faqih* or *mufti*). In coming up with his opinion, the legal expert is likely to collapse the three middle categories of moral valuation into two: permissible (*jaiz*) for acts that are either approved or neutral, and impermissible (*ghayr jaiz*) for acts that are either disapproved or forbidden (*haram*). For the most part, acts that are clearly forbidden are mentioned in the Quran and include such vices as murder, sexual license, cheating, gambling, eating pork, consuming alcohol, and taking usury. In such cases the opposite of the rule applied to obligatory acts pertains: the commission of a forbidden act is likely to be punished by both God and the state, while its omission is rewarded by God. Forbidden acts of a particularly severe nature, which threaten the social and moral order of the Muslim community, are seen as transgressing the limits (*hudud*, sg. *hadd*) set by God Himself and thus have punishments that are mandated in the Quran. In such cases, which include the crimes of murder, theft, and (by analogy) adultery, not only the rights of the victim but also the "rights of God" (*huquq Allah*) are violated.

The "five values" of Islamic law were never meant to be abstract ideals, totally divorced from the contexts in which they occurred. This point is often forgotten by contemporary Muslim politicians, who seek to create legal mandates for moral or ethical ideals without the benefit of juridical training or experience. In earlier, more judicious times a number of important questions were asked about human actions before they were assigned a specific status in the hierarchy of values. Such questions included: Which is the primary valuation to be used when judging an act: permissibility or prohibition? If an act is not explicitly prohibited in the Quran or the Sunna, is it automatically permissible? Or should it be deemed forbidden until proven otherwise? Which actions are obligatory for every Muslim (*fard ayn*) and

which are obligatory only for the community in general (*fard kifayah*)? If an act is *fard kifayah*, what is the minimum number of people required to perform it? Questions such as these were often asked about Islamic rituals. For example, the five canonical prayers are required for every Muslim and thus are considered *fard ayn*. But the two festival (*Id*) prayers, which are performed in commemoration of the end of Ramadan and the sacrifice made by the hajj pilgrims after the "standing" at Arafat, are *fard kifayah*. Although both prayers are to be held congregationally, it is not required that every Muslim attend them. Similarly, while attendance at the Friday congregational prayer (*salat al-jumu'ah*) is *fard ayn* for all Sunni men, for women it is *fard kifayah*. For Shiite Muslims the Friday prayer is *fard ayn* for men only when the Imam is present. In the absence of the Imam (who is presently believed to be in a state of occultation), it is *fard kifayah*. This is why in a Shiite country such as Iran the Friday prayer is often held in only a single location in each city.

Furthermore, is *forbidden* the opposite of *lawful*? Does a rule apply in all cases or must the jurist first investigate the merits of each case before making a decision? Is it possible to forbid an act because of its consequences, even if it is not forbidden *per se*? What makes a thing forbidden? Is it forbidden intrinsically, in that it is bad in and of itself, or is it forbidden extrinsically, in that it is bad only because of the way in which it is used? Such questions are often asked about such forbidden substances as pork or alcoholic beverages. Many Indian and Pakistani Muslims, who still preserve the notions of intrinsic purity and impurity held by the Hindu religion, consider not only the flesh but all other parts of the swine to be forbidden. Thus, they forbid the use of such products as pig-bristle hairbrushes or pigskin footballs. In the Middle East and North Africa, however, it was usually not the pig itself that was deemed forbidden but only the act of eating its flesh. In these regions grafts made of pig skin might even be used to treat head wounds. At what point do circumstances change the valuation of an act? Although the flesh of swine and carrion are forbidden for Muslims, it is permissible to eat them if the alternative is starvation. But what about the Quranic order to "command the good and forbid evil?" (Quran 3: 104). When should this be applied? And might the imperative to enforce the good cause an even greater evil than the original sin itself if this leads to social unrest, terrorism, or revolution? Such questions are all too pertinent today in such countries as Algeria and Egypt, where this injunction has been applied by Muslim insurgents in an especially severe and uncritical manner.

The answers to such questions lie at the heart of the differences between Islamic schools of law. Other differences are methodological in nature and revolve around the assessment of tradition. The Hanafi school of jurisprudence, for example, founded by the Iraqi jurist Abu Hanifa (699–767), tends to be somewhat distrustful of the hadith as a source of law and gives greater weight to the analogical

reasoning (*ray* or *qiyas*) of jurists in the formation of legal opinions. This stance has led to both a greater flexibility in decision making and a potential for political abuse. The Maliki school of jurisprudence, founded by the Medinan scholar Malik ibn Anas (ca. 715–795), is also somewhat critical of the hadith but still prefers to ground its decisions in tradition. Malik chose to take the collective tradition of the Prophet's city of Medina as his main source of precedent, while later Maliki scholars saw this tradition continued in the decisions made by Maliki jurists in North Africa and Muslim Spain. Although it was respected for its consensual approach to tradition, the Maliki school of law was often criticized for going its own way in the Muslim West and ignoring a wider consensus that may have formed in other parts of the Muslim world.

The Shafii school of law—founded by the successors of Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafii (767–820), the first systematic legal theorist in Islam—sought to balance reason and tradition by prioritizing sources of knowledge. For al-Shafii the primary source of legal decisions is the Quran, followed by the Sunna of the Prophet, analogical reasoning, and binding consensus. This model is now accepted by all schools of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam. The Hanbali school, founded by al-Shafii's student Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855), also adheres to this method, but it depends more on tradition and uses analogical reasoning only as a last resort. The dominant Shiite school of jurisprudence, the Jafari, named after the sixth Shiite imam Jafar al-Sadiq (ca. 699–765), adheres for the most part to the methodology associated with the Hanbali school of law, but it includes traditions of the twelve Shiite imams among its corpus of hadith. Each of these last three schools of law can be criticized for reifying and idealizing tradition to such a degree that the corpus of hadith is not subjected to rational analysis or content criticism. Individual ahadith are accepted as true by these schools even if only one transmitter links these traditions to either the Prophet or an imam and regardless of whether they agree or disagree with an apparent ruling in the Quran.

From Shariah to Taqwa: Islam and Ethics

The Islamic notion of human responsibility is epitomized in the Quran by a covenant struck between God and humanity before their placement on earth. In this Quranic covenant the archetypal (or “Adamic”) human being—prideful of human superiority over all other creatures but unmindful of human limitations as a created being—assumes the responsibility of the heavens and the earth and all that they contain: “We offered the trust of the heavens, the earth, and the mountains [to the jinn and angels], but they refused to undertake it, being afraid [of the responsibility thereof]; but the human being undertook it; however, he was unjust and foolish” (Quran 33:72).

The state of moral responsibility that is implied in this primordial covenant is referred to in the Quran as the vicegerency (*khilafah*) (Quran 2:30–33). Those who uphold the requirements of the covenant are known as God's vicegerents (*khulafa*, sing. *khalifah*) on earth. In the Quran they are described as those who must "Fear Allah [*ittaqu Allah*] and speak the appropriate words, so that He may make your conduct sound and forgive your sins" (Quran 33:70–71). The society that is made up of such God-fearing people (*muttaqin*) constitutes a "middle nation" or "axial community" (*ummah wasat*), whose collective responsibility is to bear witness to the truth and act as an example for the rest of humanity (Quran 2:143). This community maintains itself in a permanent state of surrender to God (*ummah muslimah*) and is exemplified historically by the polity founded by the prophet Muhammad and his companions in Medina between 622 and 632 C.E.

Evident in the previous discussion of the Sunna, the relationship between faith and practice in Islam is exemplified by the judgments, interpretations, and personal behavior of the prophet Muhammad. This example is canonized in the Sunna and codified in the shariah. Yet despite the often obsessive attention that is paid to the outer form of the Prophet's behavior by contemporary Muslims, the inner state that influences this behavior is often overlooked. This subtle but crucial aspect of the Sunna warrants further examination. This aspect is epitomized in what the Prophet's wife Aishah once said when summing up her husband's character. "His nature was the Quran [*khuluquhu al-Quran*]; he approved what it approved and he hated what it hated."

In this famous hadith the idea of practice in Islam intersects with the concepts of God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and ethics. All ethical systems, whether religious or philosophical in nature, must start by explaining what is meant by "the good." As with so much else in Islam, the ultimate definition of the good is seen to reside in the Quran. Although the Quran refers to the good in many ways, only a few Quranic terms, such as *al-khayr* (the good) and *al-haqq* (the truth), deal with what might be called philosophical principles. For the most part the Quran does not so much define the good as illustrate it with repeated examples of virtuous behavior. This indicates that from the Quranic perspective, ethics is more a matter of practice than of philosophy.

One of the most important terms used to describe the practice of "good" in the Quran is *maruf* (virtue). This is expressed most significantly in a Quranic verse that was previously alluded to in the discussion on Islamic law: "Let there be among you a community that calls to the good (*al-khayr*), commanding virtue (*yamuruna bi-l-maruf*) and forbidding vice (*yanhawna an al-munkar*); these are the ones who have attained felicity" (Quran 3:104). In Arabic, the meaning of *maruf* is essentially social in nature. It derives from the root *arafa* (to know) and literally means "that which is known." As an ethical term, it signifies "known" or virtu-

ous acts that are performed in the full light of day and thus do not need to be hidden away from a neighbor's sight. This socially contextualized definition of the good comes quite close to a practice that can be found in Mexico and parts of Central America, where the doors to village houses are left open so that neighbors can see that nothing shameful is going on inside. The antithesis of *maruf*, the semantic domain of secrecy and hypocrisy, is expressed by the Quranic term *munkar* (vice). Literally meaning "that which is hated or despised," *munkar* connotes those behaviors that would ruin a person's reputation if they were performed in the open.

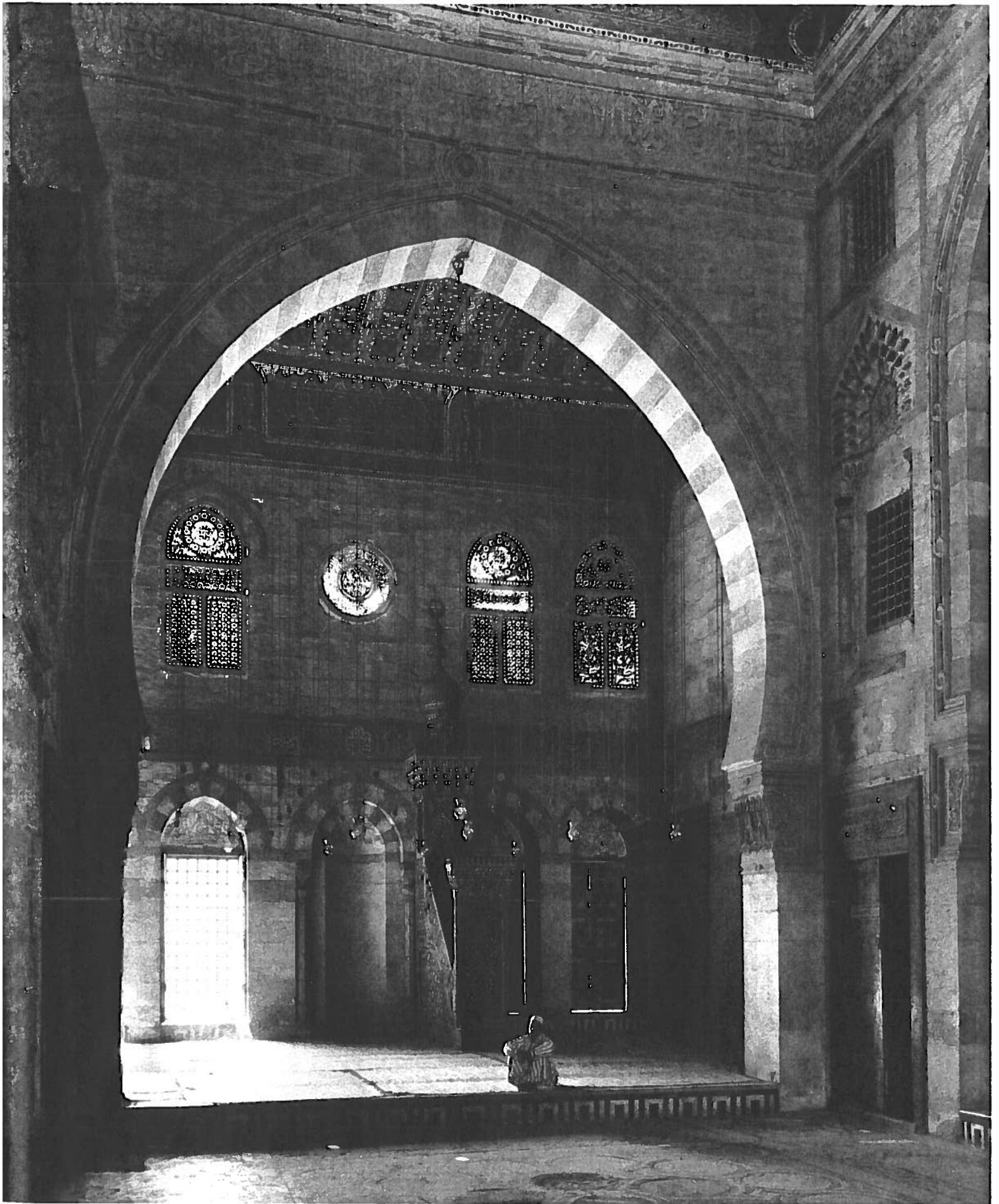
Another important ethical term in Islam is *salah* (social virtue). Although the word itself does not appear in the Quran, there are numerous references to this concept, as in the verse that depicts morally upright Muslims as residing "in the company of those whom Allah has favored: the prophets, the truthful [*siddiqin*], the martyrs, and the virtuous [*salihin*]" (Quran 4:69). The practitioner of *salah* is referred to in the Quran as a *salih* (fem. *salihah*) or a *muslih*, a morally upstanding individual who works for the betterment (*islah*) of himself and his fellow Muslims. By upholding the Sunna, he stands in opposition to the *fasid* (the "ruiner") or selfish individualist, who jeopardizes the moral integrity of the Muslim community by undermining the standards of virtue that the *salih* seeks to establish. In Islam this moral distinction between socially conscious virtue and asocial individualism replicates the dichotomy between faith and unbelief that separates the social environment of Islam from that of non-Muslims. Although most Muslims would hesitate to repudiate the faith of a fellow believer simply because he or she has sinned, the venal sinner or social deviant might well be ostracized from the community as a "ruiner." The sinner would still theoretically retain the option of returning to the fold, however, once he or she had stopped sinning and had sincerely resolved never to sin again.

Much of the appeal of contemporary reformist movements in Islam is a result of their advocacy of social virtue. Indeed, the Arabic term for "reformist" (*islahi*) is related to the concept of *salah*. Throughout the Muslim world reformist organizations, such as the Muhammadiyah of Indonesia, devote a considerable percentage of their budgets to social welfare projects, such as building hospitals and medical centers and providing various kinds of family and social services. In Egypt the Mustapha Mahmoud Society, founded by a reformist physician, provides some of the best medical care in Cairo; the fee charged is based on the patient's ability to pay. In countries in which state-supplied services are either lacking or inadequate, the honesty, selflessness, and dedication to the common people displayed by such reformist activists count for much more than the theological or philosophical deficiencies that may exist in their doctrines.

Ethical terms such as *maruf* and *salah* recall the third dimension of Islamic practice that was mentioned earlier in the discussion of the Hadith of Gabriel: the doing of good or active virtue (*ihsan*). Although this term has been interpreted in many different ways, in the Quran the concept of active virtue is specifically linked to the concept of justice (*adl*). This connection between virtuous and just forms of action is clearly expressed in one of the most famous ethical verses of the Quran: "Verily Allah commands justice [*adl*], the doing of good [*ihsan*], and giving to one's near relatives; He forbids acts of wickedness, vice [*munkar*], and lust [*bagha*]" (Quran 16:90). In a later verse of the Quran, the concept of justice is expanded to include the notion of epistemological truth. This occurs in a discussion of the ends for which God created the universe: "Not but for just ends [*illa bi-l-haqq*] did Allah create the heavens and the earth and all that is between them" (Quran 30:8). In this verse *al-haqq* not only expresses the idea of truth in an abstract sense, but it also implies the notion of collective and individual rights (*huquq*), as in "human rights" (*huquq al-insan*) or even "divine rights" (*huquq Allah*). Therefore, when the Hadith of Gabriel defines active virtue as worshiping God "as if you see Him; for if you do not see Him, surely He sees you," it is clear that this involves much more than mere perfection in the ritual observances of Islam. In this statement the epistemological and behavioral complementarity of faith and practice coincides with the moral complementarity of truth and justice. This is one of the main reasons why both Sufis and politically active Islamic reformists have taken the term *ihsan* to connote the highest degree of Islamic practice.

One Sufi social critic was so impressed by the complementarity of truth and justice that he chose to conceptualize nearly all of Islam around it. This was Abul-Abbas al-Sabti (d. 1204), the patron saint of Marrakesh and the North African equivalent of Mother Theresa or St. Francis of Assisi. In a hagiographic work that was written by one of his disciples, al-Sabti discusses the social meaning of *ihsan* and its importance to the spiritual life of Muslims:

I found a verse in the Book of God that had a great effect on both my heart and my tongue. It was, "Verily, God commands justice and *ihsan*." I pondered this and said [to myself], "Perhaps [finding] this is no coincidence and I am the one who is meant by this verse." I continued to examine its meaning in the books of exegesis until I found [a work] which stated that [the verse] was revealed when the Prophet established brotherhood between the Emigrants and the Helpers [upon moving to Medina]. They had asked the Prophet to establish a pact of brotherhood between them, so he commanded them to share proportionately among themselves. In this way, they learned that the justice commanded [by God] was to be found through sharing . . . I understood that what [the Prophet] and his Companions adhered to were the practices of sharing in proportionate measure (*mushatara*) and selfless devotion to others [*ithar*]. So I vowed to God Most High that when anything



Islamic law was initially taught in mosques, but with time a new institution, known as a *madrasa*, or theological college, developed. This madrasa built in late fifteenth-century Cairo combined spaces for teaching with a small mosque where students and teachers could perform daily prayers.

came to me, I would share it with my believing brethren among the poor. I followed this practice for twenty years, and this rule affected my ideas to the point where nothing dominated my thoughts more than [the concept of] absolute sincerity [sidq].

After reaching forty years of age, another idea occurred to me, so I returned to this verse and [again] meditated upon it, and discovered that justice was [indeed] in sharing but that *ihsan* went beyond that. I thought about it a third time and vowed to God that if anything, small or large, came to me, I would keep one-third of it and expend two-thirds for the sake of God Most High. I followed this practice for twenty years, and the result of that decision among humankind was [both] respect and repudiation; I was respected by some but repudiated by others.

After twenty [more] years, I meditated on the first requirement of the station of *ihsan* required by God Most High for His servants, and found it to be gratitude for His bounty. This is proven by the emergence of the instinct toward good at birth, before the acquisition of either understanding or intellect. I then found that eight grades of behavior were required for charity and that seven other grades [were required] for *ihsan* in addition to [what was required for] justice. This is because there is a right for oneself, a right for the wife, a right for what is in the womb, a right for the orphan, and a right for the guest [these rights are detailed in the Sunna]. . . . Once I arrived at [the station of *ihsan*], I vowed to God that whatever came to me, whether it be little or much, I would keep two-sevenths of it for myself and my wife and [give up] five-sevenths to the one for whom it was due [i.e., the poor].

Toward the end of his life, after al-Sabti had become a widely revered advocate for the poor and enjoyed the patronage of the ruler of Marrakesh, he refined his practice of *ihsan* even further.

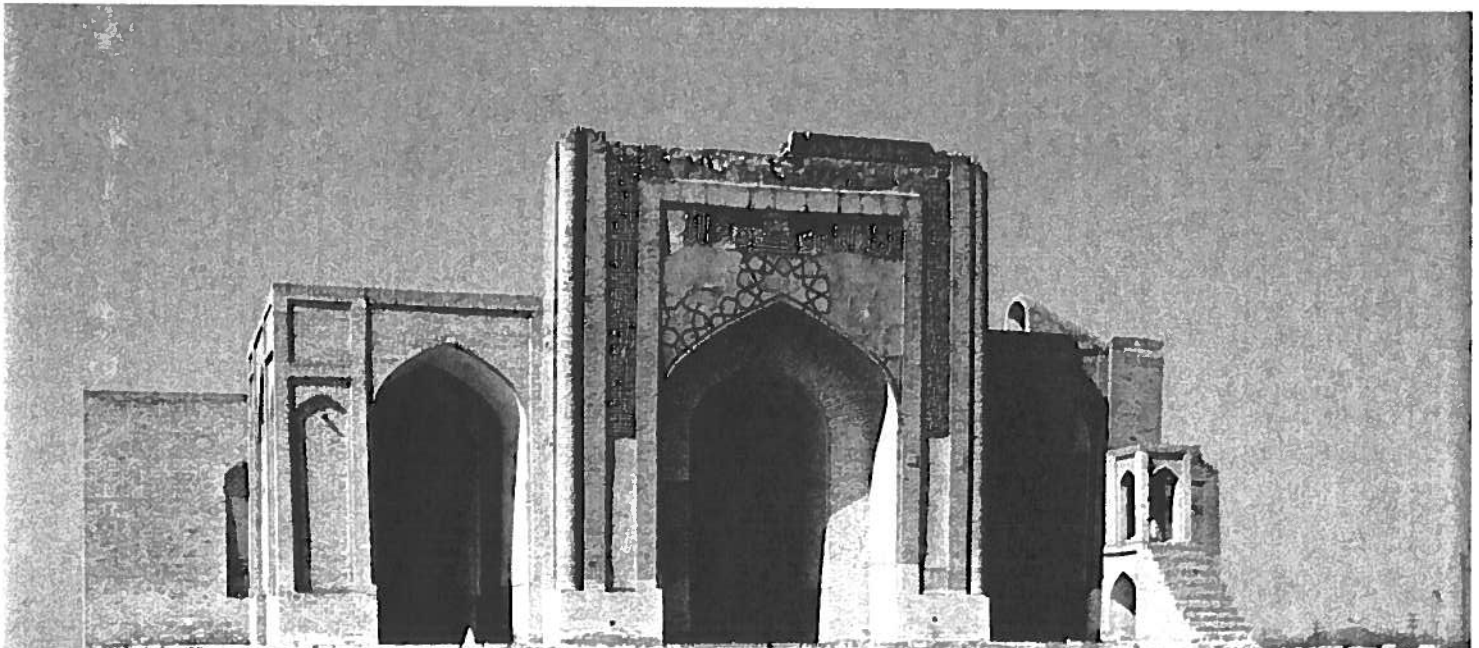
I divide everything that comes to me into seven portions. I take one seventh for myself and the second seventh for that which I am required to spend on my wife and the small children under her care, as well as the slaves and slave girls [in our household], all of whom number thirty-two individuals. Then I look after those who have lost their sustenance; they are the neglected orphans who have neither mother nor father. I take them in as my own family and see to it that not one of them lacks a [proper] marriage or a burial, unless someone else provides it for them. Then I look after my kinfolk, who number eighty-four individuals. They have two rights: their right as family members and their right as residents [in my household]. Then come those who have been deprived of their support as mentioned in the Book of God Most High. They are the poor who have fallen into hardship on the Way of God—those who are unable to work the land

and are thought of as ignorant but who are rich in patience and restraint; they are the ones unable to manage their own affairs . . . I take them in as if they are my own relatives, and when one of them dies, I replace him with another. I carried out these obligations for fourteen years without respite.

It is important to reproduce al-Sabti's comments in detail because his discussion of *ihsan* so clearly illustrates the interrelationship in Islam between truth and knowledge on the one hand and justice and practice on the other. Although many other Muslims, both Sufi and non-Sufi, also discussed the Quranic notions of truth and knowledge and how they related to both inward and outward practices, few were as single-minded as this Sufi of Marrakesh in following the relationship between knowledge and practice to its logical conclusion in the domain of social action. In this regard, the trivialization by many Sufis of the social aspect of Islam comes as something of a surprise, because Islamic law clearly recognizes that religious practice involves both acts that are ritual in nature (*ibadat*) and those that have a bearing on social life (*muamalat*). For al-Sabti, ritual acts could never be performed correctly if they were divorced from their larger ethical and social contexts. Therefore, he set out to reestablish the connection between the ritual aspects of the five Pillars of Islam and their ethical implications.

When dealing with the first pillar of Islam, al-Sabti passes over the ritualized aspect of the *Shahadah* in favor of the main point of the declaration of faith—the concept of the oneness of God (*tawhid*). As the witnessing of the *Shahadah* is seen as the formal means of entry into Islam and the prerequisite for each of the four other pillars, a full understanding of *tawhid* is seen by al-Sabti as the essential prerequisite for *ihsan*. For al-Sabti, *tawhid* as an ethical concept involves more than anything else the relinquishing of all sense of personal ownership or possession. This is because the affirmation of divine reality that is expressed in the declaration of God's oneness implies the negation of all forms of contingent exist-

Prayers held to commemorate the end of Ramadan and the sacrifice made by hajj pilgrims are traditionally celebrated in an outdoor praying place known as a *musalla* or *idgah*. Like this twelfth-century example from Bukhara, these were normally located on the outskirts of cities in order to hold all the men who were old enough to engage in prayer.



tence. If the goods of the material world become the goals of a person's life, they are functionally equivalent to idols. The material world thus becomes an object of worship whose mastery of the human being increases in direct proportion to the importance it is given. "Everything that masters a person is his god," says al-Sabti. For this reason to be a true *muwāhhid* or affirmer of God's oneness, the human being must divest himself of everything but Allah—the One God, Absolute and Unique.

Al-Sabti gives a similarly ethical interpretation of the concept of prayer. Like the *Shahadah* (the act of bearing witness), the performance of al-Salat (the required five prayers) is more than a mere ritual. It is also a symbolic act of divestment in which a worshiper renounces before the Creator everything that he or she has vainly acquired and presumes to own. "He who does not understand the [ethical] meaning of prayer has not prayed," says al-Sabti. "The beginning of prayer is the 'Magnification of Consecration,' which involves raising your hands and saying, 'God is Most Great.' The meaning of 'God is Most Great' is that you do not begrudge God anything. When the person considers a certain aspect of the material world to be most important for him, he has not consecrated himself and thus has not magnified God in his prayers. The meaning of raising one's hands to magnify God is that you have been emptied of everything and are saying, 'I possess neither much nor a little.'" "Such a person, who knows with certainty that the human being in reality possesses nothing of one's own, is the true "slave of God."

What is true for the canonical prayer is even more true for the Ramadan fast: "The secret of fasting is that you are hungry," says al-Sabti. "When you are hungry you remember the one who is always hungry and know the strength of the fire of hunger that afflicts him, so that you become charitable toward him. Thus, if you deny yourself food but have no compassion for the hungry and your fasting does not cause this idea to occur to you, you have not [truly] fasted and have not understood the intended meaning of the fast." The same is the case for the poor-tax (*al-Zakah*), a pillar of Islam that is ethical by its very definition. Here, al-Sabti agrees with the majority of Muslim scholars, who hold that the poor-tax is made obligatory for Muslims every year so that they become accustomed to spending on others instead of themselves. Also pertinent are al-Sabti's interpretations of the pilgrimage to Mecca and what Islamic activists often call the sixth pillar of Islam: the concept of struggle or *jihad*. For al-Sabti the point of the hajj pilgrimage is not the circumambulation of the Kaaba. Instead, it is that the pilgrim "appear in the dress of the poor, with a shaved head, unkempt, and wearing sandals, [after] having divested himself of fine clothing, expending his efforts for the sake of God Most High, and showing worshipfulness [toward Him]." As for the term *jihad*, its real meaning is not holy war against the unbelievers, as

Muslim exoterists believe, but rather, as al-Sabti says, "the expenditure of oneself for the pleasure of God Most High, emptying oneself of everything for His sake, and divesting oneself of reliance on the material world."

Al-Sabti's interpretation of the Five Pillars of Islam through the conceptual lens of ethics was meant to restore a sense of balance to what scholar Charles Eaton has termed the "human paradox." Although the human being was created as the



In addition to upholding the Five Pillars of Islam, Muslims are exhorted to go beyond the minimum. For example, they should practice good deeds or active virtue (*ihsan*) to enrich their spiritual lives. In 1905 beggars gathered near the tomb of the great Persian poet Saadi in Shiraz in the expectation of receiving munificence from their brethren.

vicegerent of God on earth, more often than not she fails to live up to the responsibilities of the vicegerency because of heedlessness or vice: "And when your Lord said to the angels, 'Verily I shall place on the earth a vicegerent,' they said, 'Will You place upon it one who will make mischief therein and shed blood while we praise You and glorify You?'" (Quran 2:30). Al-Sabti reminded his audience through his teachings that by ignoring the ethical dimension of Islamic practice, the salvation of both society and the individual may be lost and its antithesis, social discord or perdition, may be found. In addition, through his selfless devotion to the poor, he shamed those who neglected their responsibility to their fellow Muslims and reminded them through his acts of charity that the greatest losers by their works are "those whose effort is wasted on the life of the world, although they believe that they are doing good" (Quran 18:104). For those who did not heed his warning, al-Sabti reiterated the Quran's stern admonition: "Those who desire the life of the world and its glitter will pay the price of their deeds in [this world] without any alleviation" (Quran 11:15).

One can therefore conclude—from the discourses of the Quran to the Sunna of the Prophet, the laws of the shariah, and the ethical teachings of al-Sabti and other Islamic reformers—that the truest means to happiness is to be found in the proper balance between knowledge (*ilm*) and practice (*amal*). This applies equally to acts that are purely religious in nature and to those that are essentially social. Faith, like speech, is both social and individual. Acts of faith always involve a dialogue—either between the worshiper and the object of her worship, or between the actor and his fellows in a religious community. This is why, for both the Sufi Abu-l-Abbas al-Sabti and the non-Sufi jurist ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani, a faith that is not expressed in the context of structured social relationships is no faith at all.

According to the noted Muslim theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111), moral character (*khuluq*) is not to be found in the knowledge of good or evil or even in the capacity for good or evil; rather, it is a state of the human spirit (*nafs*). Character thus precedes action for al-Ghazali and is a sort of gestalt that enables morally valued acts to occur immediately, without the need for reflection or deliberation. This gestalt of the soul reflects the vision of the heart and is good or bad to the extent that the heart "sees" with the Quranic "eye of certainty."

Herein lies the importance of Aishah's statement that the prophet Muhammad's character "was the Quran." If character refers to an inner state or condition of the human being, then each person inclines toward good or evil to the extent that his inner self has assimilated the moral outlook of the Quranic concept of vicegerency. To say that a Muslim's character "is the Quran" is to say

that he is a complete vicegerent of God: his intellect understands reality through the "knowledge of certainty," his eyes comprehend both himself and God's creation through the "eye of certainty," and his spirit finds its center through the "truth of certainty." This assimilation of the Quranic perspective is the practical essence of the prophetic Sunna and the basis of Islamic ethics. Because it is rooted in God's own "knowledge from the divine presence," it is the tree of knowledge out of which all ritual and ethical practices grow.