Islamic Spirituality - The Forgotten Revolution

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THE POVERTY OF FANATICISM

'**Blood is no argument**', as Shakespeare observed. Sadly, Muslim ranks are today swollen with those who disagree. The World Trade Centre, yesterday's symbol of global finance, has today become a monument to the failure of global Islam to control those who believe that the West can be bullied into changing its wayward ways towards the East. There is no real excuse to hand. It is simply not enough to clamour, as many have done, about 'chickens coming home to roost', and to protest that Washington's acquiescence in Israeli policies of ethnic cleansing is the inevitable generator of such hate. It is of course true - as Shabbir Akhtar has noted - that powerlessness can corrupt as insistently as does power. But to comprehend is not to sanction or even to empathize. To take innocent life to achieve a goal is the hallmark of the most extreme secular utilitarian ethic, and stands at the opposite pole of the absolute moral constraints required by religion.

There was a time, not long ago, when the 'ultras' were few, forming only a tiny wart on the face of the worldwide attempt to revivify Islam. Sadly, we can no longer enjoy the luxury of ignoring them. The extreme has broadened, and the middle ground, giving way, is everywhere dislocated and confused. And this enfeeblement of the middle ground, was what was enjoined by the Prophetic example, is in turn accelerated by the opprobrium which the extremists bring not simply upon themselves, but upon committed Muslims everywhere. For here, as elsewhere, the preferences of the media work firmly against us. David Koresh could broadcast his fringe Biblical message from Ranch Apocalypse without the image of Christianity, or even its Adventist wing, being in any way besmirched. But when a fringe Islamic group bombs Swedish tourists in Cairo, the muck is instantly spread over 'militant Muslims' everywhere.

If these things go on, the Islamic movement will cease to form an authentic summons to cultural and spiritual renewal, and will exist as little more than a splintered array of maniacal factions. The prospect of such an appalling and humiliating end to the story of a religion which once surpassed all others in its capacity for tolerating debate and dissent is now a real possibility. The entire experience of Islamic work over the past fifteen years has been one of increasing radicalization, driven by the perceived failure of the traditional Islamic institutions and the older Muslim movements to lead the Muslim peoples into the worthy but so far chimerical promised land of the 'Islamic State.'

If this final catastrophe is to be averted, the mainstream will have to regain the initiative. But for this to happen, it must begin by confessing that the radical critique of moderation has its force. The Islamic movement has so far been remarkably unsuccessful. We must ask ourselves how it is that a man like Nasser, a butcher, a failed soldier and a cynical demagogue, could have taken over a country as pivotal as Egypt, despite the vacuity of his beliefs, while the Muslim Brotherhood, with its pullulating millions of members, should have failed, and failed continuously, for six decades. The radical accusation of a failure in methodology cannot fail to strike home in such a context of dismal and prolonged inadequacy.

It is in this context - startlingly, perhaps, but inescapably - that we must present our case for the revival of the spiritual life within Islam. If it is ever to prosper, the 'Islamic revival' must be made to see that it is in crisis, and that its mental resources are proving insufficient to meet contemporary needs. The response to this must be grounded in an act of collective *muhasaba*, of self-examination, in terms that

transcend the ideologised neo-Islam of the revivalists, and return to a more classical and indigenously Muslim dialectic.

Symptomatic of the disease is the fact that among all the explanations offered for the crisis of the Islamic movement, the only authentically Muslim interpretation, namely, that God should not be lending it His support, is conspicuously absent. It is true that we frequently hear the Quranic verse which states that "God does not change the condition of a people until they change the condition of their own selves." [1. Al-Qur'an 13:11.] But never, it seems, is this principle intelligently grasped. It is assumed that the sacred text is here doing no more than to enjoin individual moral reform as a precondition for collective societal success. Nothing could be more hazardous, however, than to measure such moral reform against the yardstick of the *fiqh* without giving concern to whether the virtues gained have been acquired through conformity (a relatively simple task), or proceed spontaneously from a genuine realignment of the soul. The verse is speaking of a spiritual change, specifically, a transformation of the *nafs* of the believers - not a moral one. And as the Blessed Prophet never tired of reminding us, there is little value in outward conformity to the rules unless this conformity is mirrored and engendered by an authentically righteous disposition of the heart. 'No-one shall enter the Garden by his works,' as he expressed it. Meanwhile, the profoundly judgemental and works - oriented tenor of modern revivalist Islam (we must shun the problematic buzz-word 'fundamentalism'), fixated on visible manifestations of morality, has failed to address the underlying question of what revelation is for. For it is theological nonsense to suggest that God's final concern is with our ability to conform to a complex set of rules. His concern is rather that we should be restored, through our labours and His grace, to that state of purity and equilibrium with which we were born. The rules are a vital means to that end, and are facilitated by it. But they do not take its place.

To make this point, the Holy Quran deploys a striking metaphor. In ***Sura Ibrahim***, verses 24 to 26, we read:

Have you not seen how God coineth a likeness: a goodly word like a goodly tree, the root whereof is set firm, its branch in the heaven? It bringeth forth its fruit at every time, by the leave of its Lord. Thus doth God coin likenesses for men, that perhaps they may reflect. And the likeness of an evil word is that of an evil tree that hath been torn up by the root from upon the earth, possessed of no stability.

According to the scholars of *tafsir* (exegesis), the reference here is to the 'words' (*kalima*) of faith and unfaith. The former is illustrated as a natural growth, whose florescence of moral and intellectual achievement is nourished by firm roots, which in turn denote the basis of faith: the quality of the proofs one has received, and the certainty and sound awareness of God which alone signify that one is firmly grounded in the reality of existence. The fruits thus yielded - the palpable benefits of the religious life - are permanent ('at every time'), and are not man's own accomplishment, for they only come 'by the leave of its Lord'. Thus is the sound life of faith. The contrast is then drawn with the only alternative: *kufr*, which is not grounded in reality but in illusion, and is hence 'possessed of no stability'. id="notes">[2. For a further analysis of this passage, see Habib Ahmad Mashhur al-Haddad, *Key to the Garden* (Quilliam Press, London 1990 CE), 78-81.]

This passage, reminiscent of some of the binary categorisations of human types presented early on in ***Surat al-Baqara***, precisely encapsulates the relationship between faith and works, the hierarchy which exists between them, and the sustainable balance between nourishment and fructition, between taking and giving, which true faith must maintain.

It is against this criterion that we must judge the quality of contemporary 'activist' styles of faith. Is the young 'ultra', with his intense rage which can sometimes render him liable to nervous disorders, and his fixation on a relatively narrow range of issues and concerns, really firmly rooted, and fruitful, in the sense described by this Quranic image?

Let me point to the answer with an example drawn from my own experience.

I used to know, quite well, a leader of the radical 'Islamic' group, the *Jama'at Islamiya*, at the Egyptian university of Assiut. His name was Hamdi. He grew a luxuriant beard, was constantly scrubbing his teeth with his miswak, and spent his time preaching hatred of the Coptic Christians, a number of whom were actually attacked and beaten up as a result of his *khutbas*. He had hundreds of followers; in fact, Assiut today remains a citadel of hardline, Wahhabi-style activism.

The moral of the story is that some five years after this acquaintance, providence again brought me face to face with Shaikh Hamdi. This time, chancing to see him on a Cairo street, I almost failed to recognise him. The beard was gone. He was in trousers and a sweater. More astonishing still was that he was walking with a young Western girl who turned out to be an Australian, whom, as he sheepishly explained to me, he was intending to marry. I talked to him, and it became clear that he was no longer even a minimally observant Muslim, no longer prayed, and that his ambition in life was to leave Egypt, live in Australia, and make money. What was extraordinary was that his experiences in Islamic activism had made no impression on him - he was once again the same distracted, ordinary Egyptian youth he had been before his conversion to 'radical Islam'.

This phenomenon, which we might label '*salafi burnout*', is a recognised feature of many modern Muslim cultures. An initial enthusiasm, gained usually in one's early twenties, loses steam some seven to ten years later. Prison and torture - the frequent lot of the Islamic radical - may serve to prolong commitment, but ultimately, a majority of these neo-Muslims relapse, seemingly no better or worse for their experience in the cult-like universe of the salafi mindset.

This ephemerality of extremist activism should be as suspicious as its content. Authentic Muslim faith is simply not supposed to be this fragile; as the Qur'an says, its root is meant to be 'set firm'. One has to conclude that of the two trees depicted in the Quranic image, salafi extremism resembles the second rather than the first. After all, the Sahaba were not known for a transient commitment: their devotion and piety remained incomparably pure until they died.

What attracts young Muslims to this type of ephemeral but ferocious activism? One does not have to subscribe to determinist social theories to realise the importance of the almost universal condition of insecurity which Muslim societies are now experiencing. The Islamic world is passing through a most devastating period of transition. A history of economic and scientific change which in Europe took five hundred years, is, in the Muslim world, being squeezed into a couple of generations. For instance, only thirty-five years ago the capital of Saudi Arabia was a cluster of mud huts, as it had been for thousands of years. Today's Riyadh is a hi-tech megacity of glass towers, Coke machines, and gliding Cadillacs. This is an extreme case, but to some extent the dislocations of modernity are common to every Muslim society, excepting, perhaps, a handful of the most remote tribal peoples.

Such a transition period, with its centrifugal forces which allow nothing to remain constant, makes human beings very insecure. They look around for something to hold onto, that will give them an identity. In our case, that something is usually Islam. And because they are being propelled into it by this psychic sense of insecurity, rather than by the more normal processes of conversion and faith, they lack some of the natural religious virtues, which are acquired by contact with a continuous tradition, and can never be learnt from a book.

One easily visualises how this works. A young Arab, part of an oversized family, competing for scarce jobs, unable to marry because he is poor, perhaps a migrant to a rapidly expanding city, feels like a man lost in a desert without signposts. One morning he picks up a copy of Sayyid Qutb from a newsstand,

and is 'born-again' on the spot. This is what he needed: instant certainty, a framework in which to interpret the landscape before him, to resolve the problems and tensions of his life, and, even more deliciously, a way of feeling superior and in control. He joins a group, and, anxious to retain his newfound certainty, accepts the usual proposition that all the other groups are mistaken.

This, of course, is not how Muslim religious conversion is supposed to work. It is meant to be a process of intellectual maturation, triggered by the presence of a very holy person or place. Tawba, in its traditional form, yields an outlook of joy, contentment, and a deep affection for others. The modern type of *tawba*, however, born of insecurity, often makes Muslims narrow, intolerant, and exclusivist. Even more noticeably, it produces people whose faith is, despite its apparent intensity, liable to vanish as suddenly as it came. Deprived of real nourishment, the activist's soul can only grow hungry and emaciated, until at last it dies.

THE ACTIVISM WITHIN

How should we respond to this disorder? We must begin by remembering what Islam is for. As we noted earlier, our din is not, ultimately, a manual of rules which, when meticulously followed, becomes a passport to paradise. Instead, it is a package of social, intellectual and spiritual technology whose purpose is to cleanse the human heart. In the Qur'an, the Lord says that on the Day of Judgement, nothing will be of any use to us, except a sound heart (*qalbun salim*). [3. Sura 26:89. The archetype is Abrahamic: see Sura 37:84.] And in a famous hadith, the Prophet, upon whom be blessings and peace, says that

"Verily in the body there is a piece of flesh. If it is sound, the body is all sound. If it is corrupt, the body is all corrupt. Verily, it is the heart.

Mindful of this commandment, under which all the other commandments of Islam are subsumed, and which alone gives them meaning, the Islamic scholars have worked out a science, an *ilm* (science), of analysing the 'states' of the heart, and the methods of bringing it into this condition of soundness. In the fullness of time, this science acquired the name *tasawwuf*, in English 'Sufism' - a traditional label for what we might nowadays more intelligibly call 'Islamic psychology.'

At this point, many hackles are raised and well-rehearsed objections voiced. It is vital to understand that mainstream Sufism is not, and never has been, a doctrinal system, or a school of thought - a *madhhab*. It is, instead, a set of insights and practices which operate within the various Islamic *madhhabs*; in other words, it is not a *madhhab*, it is an ilm. And like most of the other Islamic *ulum*, it was not known by name, or in its later developed form, in the age of the Prophet (upon him be blessings and peace) or his Companions. This does not make it less legitimate. There are many Islamic sciences which only took shape many years after the Prophetic age: *usul al-fiqh*, for instance, or the innumerable technical disciplines of hadith.

Now this, of course, leads us into the often misunderstood area of sunna and *bid'a*, two notions which are wielded as blunt instruments by many contemporary activists, but which are often grossly misunderstood. The classic Orientalist thesis is of course that Islam, as an 'arid Semitic religion', failed to incorporate mechanisms for its own development, and that it petrified upon the death of its founder. This, however, is a nonsense rooted in the ethnic determinism of the nineteenth century historians who had shaped the views of the early Orientalist synthesizers (Muir, Le Bon, Renan, Caetani). Islam, as the religion designed for the end of time, has in fact proved itself eminently adaptable to the rapidly changing conditions which characterise this final and most 'entropic' stage of history.

What is a *bid'a*, according to the classical definitions of Islamic law? We all know the famous hadith:

Beware of matters newly begun, for every matter newly begun is innovation, every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance is in Hell. [4. This hadith is in fact an instance of *takhsis al-amm*: a frequent procedure of *usul al-fiqh* by which an apparently unqualified statement is qualified to avoid the contradiction of another necessary principle. See Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*, tr. Nuh Ha Mim Keller (Abu Dhabi, 1991 CE), 907-8 for some further examples.]

Does this mean that everything introduced into Islam that was not known to the first generation of Muslims is to be rejected? The classical ulema do not accept such a literalistic interpretation.

Let us take a definition from Imam al-Shafi'i, an authority universally accepted in Sunni Islam. Imam al-Shafi'i writes:

There are two kinds of introduced matters (***muhdathat***). One is that which contradicts a text of the Qur'an, or the Sunna, or a report from the early Muslims (***athar***), or the consensus (***ijma'***) of the Muslims: this is an 'innovation of misguidance' (***bid'at dalala***). The second kind is that which is in itself good and entails no contradiction of any of these authorities: this is a 'non-reprehensible innovation' (***bid'a ghayr madhmuma***). [5. Ibn Asakir, *Tabyin Kadhib al-Muftari* (Damascus, 1347), 97.]

This basic distinction between acceptable and unacceptable forms of *bid'a* is recognised by the overwhelming majority of classical ulema. Among some, for instance al-Izz ibn Abd al-Salam (one of the half-dozen or so great mujtahids of Islamic history), innovations fall under the five axiological headings of the Shari'a: the obligatory (*wajib*), the recommended (*mandub*), the permissible (*mubah*), the offensive (*makruh*), and the forbidden (*haram*).[6. Cited in Muhammad al-Jurdani, *al-Jawahir al-lu'lu'iyya fi sharh al-Arba'in al-Nawawiya* (Damascus, 1328), 220-1.]

Under the category of 'obligatory innovation', Ibn Abd al-Salam gives the following examples: recording the Qur'an and the laws of Islam in writing at a time when it was feared that they would be lost, studying Arabic grammar in order to resolve controversies over the Qur'an, and developing philosophical theology (*kalam*) to refute the claims of the Mu'tazilites.

Category two is 'recommended innovation'. Under this heading the ulema list such activities as building madrasas, writing books on beneficial Islamic subjects, and in-depth studies of Arabic linguistics.

Category three is 'permissible', or 'neutral innovation', including worldly activities such as sifting flour, and constructing houses in various styles not known in Medina.

Category four is the 'reprehensible innovation'. This includes such misdemeanours as overdecorating mosques or the Qur'an.

Category five is the 'forbidden innovation'. This includes unlawful taxes, giving judgeships to those unqualified to hold them, and sectarian beliefs and practices that explicitly contravene the known principles of the Qur'an and the Sunna.

The above classification of *bid'a* types is normal in classical Shari'a literature, being accepted by the four schools of orthodox *fiqh*. There have been only two significant exceptions to this understanding in the history of Islamic thought: the Zahiri school as articulated by Ibn Hazm, and one wing of the Hanbali madhhab, represented by Ibn Taymiya, who goes against the classical *ijma'* on this issue, and claims that all forms of innovation, good or bad, are un-Islamic.

Why is it, then, that so many Muslims now believe that innovation in any form is unacceptable in Islam? One factor has already been touched on: the mental complexes thrown up by insecurity, which incline people to find comfort in absolutist and literalist interpretations. Another lies in the influence of the well-financed neo-Hanbali madhhab called Wahhabism, whose leaders are famous for their rejection of all possibility of development.

In any case, armed with this more sophisticated and classical awareness of Islam's ability to acknowledge and assimilate novelty, we can understand how Muslim civilisation was able so quickly to produce novel academic disciplines to deal with new problems as these arose.

Islamic psychology is characteristic of the new *ulum* which, although present in latent and implicit form in the Quran, were first systematized in Islamic culture during the early Abbasid period. Given the importance that the Quran attaches to obtaining a 'sound heart', we are not surprised to find that the influence of Islamic psychology has been massive and all-pervasive. In the formative first four centuries of Islam, the time when the great works of tafsir, hadith, grammar, and so forth were laid down, the ulema also applied their minds to this problem of *al-qalb al-salim*. This was first visible when, following the example of the Tabi'in, many of the early ascetics, such as Sufyan ibn Uyayna, Sufyan al-Thawri, and Abdallah ibn al-Mubarak, had focussed their concerns explicitly on the art of purifying the heart. The methods they recommended were frequent fasting and night prayer, periodic retreats, and a preoccupation with *murabata*: service as volunteer fighters in the border castles of Asia Minor.

This type of pietist orientation was not in the least systematic during this period. It was a loose category embracing all Muslims who sought salvation through the Prophetic virtues of renunciation, sincerity, and deep devotion to the revelation. These men and women were variously referred to as *al-bakka'un*: 'the weepers', because of their fear of the Day of Judgement, or as *zuhhad*, ascetics, or *ubbad*, 'unceasing worshippers'.

By the third century, however, we start to find writings which can be understood as belonging to a distinct devotional school. The increasing luxury and materialism of Abbasid urban society spurred many Muslims to campaign for a restoration of the simplicity of the Prophetic age. Purity of heart, compassion for others, and a constant recollection of God were the defining features of this trend. We find references to the method of *muhasaba*: self-examination to detect impurities of intention. Also stressed was *riyada*: self-discipline.

By this time, too, the main outlines of Quranic psychology had been worked out. The human creature, it was realised, was made up of four constituent parts: the body (*jism*), the mind (*aql*), the spirit (*ruh*), and the self (*nafs*). The first two need little comment. Less familiar (at least to people of a modern education) are the third and fourth categories.

The spirit is the *ruh*, that underlying essence of the human individual which survives death. It is hard to comprehend rationally, being in part of Divine inspiration, as the Quran says:

"And they ask you about the spirit; say, the spirit is of the command of my Lord. And you have been given of knowledge only a little." [7. Al-Qur'an 17:85.

According to the early Islamic psychologists, the ruh is a non-material reality which pervades the entire human body, but is centred on the heart, the *qalb*. It represents that part of man which is not of this world, and which connects him with his Creator, and which, if he is fortunate, enables him to see God in the next world. When we are born, this *ruh* is intact and pure. As we are initiated into the distractions of the world, however, it is covered over with the 'rust' (*ran*) of which the Quran speaks. This rust is made

up of two things: sin and distraction. When, through the process of self-discipline, these are banished, so that the worshipper is preserved from sin and is focussing entirely on the immediate presence and reality of God, the rust is dissolved, and the *ruh* once again is free. The heart is sound; and salvation, and closeness to God, are achieved.

This sounds simple enough. However, the early Muslims taught that such precious things come only at an appropriate price. Cleaning up the Augean stables of the heart is a most excruciating challenge. Outward conformity to the rules of religion is simple enough; but it is only the first step. Much more demanding is the policy known as *mujahada*: the daily combat against the lower self, the *nafs*. As the Quran says:

'As for him that fears the standing before his Lord, and forbids his *nafs* its desires, for him, Heaven shall be his place of resort.'[8. Al-Qur'an 79:40.]

Hence the Sufi commandment:

'Slaughter your ego with the knives of ***mujahada***.' [9. al-Qushayri, *al-Risala* (Cairo, n.d.), I, 393.]

Once the *nafs* is controlled, then the heart is clear, and the virtues proceed from it easily and naturally.

Because its objective is nothing less than salvation, this vital Islamic science has been consistently expounded by the great scholars of classical Islam. While today there are many Muslims, influenced by either Wahhabi or Orientalist agendas, who believe that Sufism has always led a somewhat marginal existence in Islam, the reality is that the overwhelming majority of the classical scholars were actively involved in Sufism.

The early Shafi'i scholars of Khurasan: al-Hakim al-Nisaburi, Ibn Furak, al-Qushayri and al-Bayhaqi, were all Sufis who formed links in the richest academic tradition of Abbasid Islam, which culminated in the achievement of Imam Hujjat al-Islam al-Ghazali. Ghazali himself, author of some three hundred books, including the definitive rebuttals of Arab philosophy and the Ismailis, three large textbooks of Shafi'i *fiqh*, the best-known tract of *usul al-fiqh*, two works on logic, and several theological treatises, also left us with the classic statement of orthodox Sufism: the *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, a book of which Imam Nawawi remarked:

"Were the books of Islam all to be lost, excepting only the *Ihya'*, it would suffice to replace them all." [10. al-Zabidi, *Ithaf al-sada al-muttaqin* (Cairo, 1311), I, 27.

Imam Nawawi himself wrote two books which record his debt to Sufism, one called the *Bustan al-Arifin* ('Garden of the Gnostics', and another called the *al-Maqasid* (recently published in English translation, Sunna Books, Evanston Il. trans. Nuh Ha Mim Keller).

Among the Malikis, too, Sufism was popular. Al-Sawi, al-Dardir, al-Laqqani and Abd al-Wahhab al-Baghdadi were all exponents of Sufism. The Maliki jurist of Cairo, Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani defines Sufism as follows:

'The path of the Sufis is built on the Quran and the Sunna, and is based on living according to the morals of the prophets and the purified ones. It may not be blamed, unless it violates an explicit statement from the Quran, sunna, or *ijma*. If it does not contravene any of these sources, then no pretext remains for condemning it, except one's own low opinion of others, or interpreting what they do as ostentation,

which is unlawful. No-one denies the states of the Sufis except someone ignorant of the way they are.'[11. Sha'rani, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* (Cairo, 1374), I, 4.]

For Hanbali Sufism one has to look no further than the revered figures of Abdallah Ansari, Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Ibn al-Jawzi, and Ibn Rajab.

In fact, virtually all the great luminaries of medieval Islam: al-Suyuti, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, al-Ayni, Ibn Khaldun, al-Subki, Ibn Hajar al-Haytami; tafsir writers like Baydawi, al-Sawi, Abu'l-Su'ud, al-Baghawi, and Ibn Kathir [12. It is true that Ibn Kathir in his *Bidaya* is critical of some later Sufis. Nonetheless, in his *Mawlid*, which he asked his pupils to recite on the occasion of the Blessed Prophet's birthday each year, he makes his personal debt to a conservative and sober Sufism quite clear.] ; *aqida* writers such as Taftazani, al-Nasafi, al-Razi: all wrote in support of Sufism. Many, indeed, composed independent works of Sufi inspiration. The ulema of the great dynasties of Islamic history, including the Ottomans and the Moghuls, were deeply infused with the Sufi outlook, regarding it as one of the most central and indispensable of Islamic sciences.

Further confirmation of the Islamic legitimacy of Sufism is supplied by the enthusiasm of its exponents for carrying Islam beyond the boundaries of the Islamic world. The Islamization process in India, Black Africa, and South-East Asia was carried out largely at the hands of wandering Sufi teachers. Likewise, the Islamic obligation of jihad has been borne with especial zeal by the Sufi orders. All the great nineteenth century jihadists: Uthman dan Fodio (Hausaland), al-Sanousi (Libya), Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri (Algeria), Imam Shamil (Daghestan) and the leaders of the Padre Rebellion (Sumatra) were active practitioners of Sufism, writing extensively on it while on their campaigns. Nothing is further from reality, in fact, than the claim that Sufism represents a quietist and non-militant form of Islam.

With all this, we confront a paradox. Why is it, if Sufism has been so respected a part of Muslim intellectual and political life throughout our history, that there are, nowadays, angry voices raised against it? There are two fundamental reasons here.

Firstly, there is again the pervasive influence of Orientalist scholarship, which, at least before 1922 when Massignon wrote his *Essai sur les origines de la lexique technique*, was of the opinion that something so fertile and profound as Sufism could never have grown from the essentially 'barren and legalistic' soil of Islam. Orientalist works translated into Muslim languages were influential upon key Muslim modernists - such as Muhammad Abduh in his later writings - who began to question the centrality, or even the legitimacy, of Sufi discourse in Islam.

Secondly, there is the emergence of the Wahhabi *da'wa*. When Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, some two hundred years ago, teamed up with the Saudi tribe and attacked the neighbouring clans, he was doing so under the sign of an essentially neo-Kharijite version of Islam. Although he invoked Ibn Taymiya, he had reservations even about him. For Ibn Taymiya himself, although critical of the excesses of certain Sufi groups, had been committed to a branch of mainstream Sufism. This is clear, for instance, in Ibn Taymiya's work *Sharh Futuh al-Ghayb*, a commentary on some technical points in the *Revelations of the Unseen*, a key work by the sixth-century saint of Baghdad, Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani. Throughout the work Ibn Taymiya shows himself to be a loyal disciple of al-Jilani, whom he always refers to as *shaykhuna* ('our teacher'). This Qadiri affiliation is confirmed in the later literature of the Qadiri tariqa, which records Ibn Taymiya as a key link in the *silsila*, the chain of transmission of Qadiri teachings.[13. See G. Makdisi's article *'Ibn Taymiyya: A Sufi of the Qadiriya Order'* in the American Journal of Arabic Studies, 1973.]

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, however, went far beyond this. Raised in the wastelands of Najd in Central Arabia, he had little access to mainstream Muslim scholarship. In fact, when his da'wa appeared and became notorious, the scholars and muftis of the day applied to it the famous Hadith of Najd:

Ibn Umar reported the Prophet (upon whom be blessings and peace) as saying: "Oh God, bless us in our Syria; O God, bless us in our Yemen." Those present said: "And in our Najd, O Messenger of God!" but he said, "O God, bless us in our Syria; O God, bless us in our Yemen." Those present said, "And in our Najd, O Messenger of God!". Ibn Umar said that he thought that he said on the third occasion: "Earthquakes and dissensions (*fitna*) are there, and there shall arise the horn of the devil." [14. Narrated by Bukhari. The translation is from J. Robson, *Mishkat al-Masabih* (Lahore, 1970), II, 1380.

And it is significant that almost uniquely among the lands of Islam, Najd has never produced scholars of any repute.

The Najd-based *da'wa* of the Wahhabis, however, began to be heard more loudly following the explosion of Saudi oil wealth. Many, even most, Islamic publishing houses in Cairo and Beirut are now subsidised by Wahhabi organisations, which prevent them from publishing traditional works on Sufism, and remove passages in other works considered unacceptable to Wahhabist doctrine.

The neo-Kharijite nature of Wahhabism makes it intolerant of all other forms of Islamic expression. However, because it has no coherent *fiqh* of its own - it rejects the orthodox madhhabs - and has only the most basic and primitively anthropomorphic *aqida*, it has a fluid, amoebalike tendency to produce divisions and subdivisions among those who profess it. No longer are the Islamic groups essentially united by a consistent *madhhab* and the Ash'ari [or Maturidi] *aqida*. Instead, they are all trying to derive the *shari'a* and the *aqida* from the Quran and the Sunna by themselves. The result is the appalling state of division and conflict which disfigures the modern salafi condition.

At this critical moment in our history, the umma has only one realistic hope for survival, and that is to restore the 'middle way', defined by that sophisticated classical consensus which was worked out over painful centuries of debate and scholarship. That consensus alone has the demonstrable ability to provide a basis for unity. But it can only be retrieved when we improve the state of our hearts, and fill them with the Islamic virtues of affection, respect, tolerance and reconciliation. This inner reform, which is the traditional competence of Sufism, is a precondition for the restoration of unity in the Islamic movement. The alternative is likely to be continued, and agonising, failure.