Seven Doors to Islam

Spirituality and the Religious Life of Muslims

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To Oleg Grabar for sharing his love of the arts of Islam

2 Devotion

Ritual and Personal Prayer

By the term *devotion* I mean all the elements of personal investment—energy, feeling, time, substance—that characterize Muslim communal and individual response to the experience of God's revelation and involvement in human affairs as described in the first chapter. I use the term *ritual* to denote a range of religious actions with which Muslims express their response in faith to what they believe are God's ways of dealing with them. These actions include those prescribed by the rubrics of Islamic communal practice and those left to the discretion of the participants or canonized by local custom, or both.

In Islam there are two large categories of religious practice, one comprising regular observances programmed by its liturgical calendar. Each major observance has its times and seasons through the lunar year. The literature of the Five Pillars and of the Friday sermon, as well as some arts and architecture, is directly related to regular religious observance.

Various kinds of additional devotion include forms of communal and individual prayer not regulated by religious law, as well as the full range of rites of passage and popular practice associated with matters of everyday life and special occasions particularly important within specific segments of the world's Muslim population. Sermons for every occasion are a variety of pulpit literature, and some aspects of architecture and the arts are associated with popular or devotional preaching. Many textual and visual sources are related to ritual and devotional activities that, while often regulated by a calendar or season, are optional in that Islamic law does not strictly require them. In a given cultural context these activities may indeed be expected of everyone as though they were juridically obligatory, but they fall in the category of custom rather than that of divinely revealed duties.

Rituals help members of social and religious communities negotiate moments of special significance. These may be times of grief or of joyous cel-

Figure 6. (*Opposite*) Indian calendar poster with caption "Du'a'Boy" (1994), showing the Ka'ba and Muhammad's tomb; 786 is the numerical value of the Arabic letters in the phrase "in the name of God." Qur'an is open to 33:33, a reference to ritual purity. Courtesy of Carl Ernst.

ebration, of intense struggle or of liberation from spiritual or psychic enslavement. As rites of passage, religious rituals give structure to the otherwise threatening and often chaotic experience of change. Acts of devotion mark a temporary excursion from the ordinary into the extraordinary, whether they are prescribed in religious law or are merely what people "have always done" in a particular cultural setting.

The notions of sacred time, sacred space, and the state called liminality are useful in describing the goal of these excursions. (Derived from the Latin word *limen*, "threshold," the term *liminality* suggests a dramatic change in one's condition.) When religious persons mark off and intentionally enter upon a ritual undertaking, they must commit themselves to a change of mind and heart. They signify this commitment by certain physical and behavioral changes, such as donning special garb, leaving daily tasks aside for a time, and performing specific bodily actions prescribed by the ritual in question. Such controlled change (sometimes called separation) introduces the participant into a state of liminality. In that state the individual is cut loose from the accustomed moorings of everyday life—relationships, job, status—to drift for a while in sacred time and space. The devotee thus enters into a condition of heightened receptivity to the powerful symbolism of the ritual. Liminality is a vulnerable state, but the participants' realization that others have also chosen to take the risk makes the prospect less forbidding. Supported by a mutual sense of community, devotees can give each other permission to express feelings they might otherwise keep controlled or safely hidden.

Various kinds of ritual differ in both content and emotional tone. Some provide catharsis through tears born of sympathy with the suffering of some spiritually potent figure; others offer release through ecstasy or trancelike states. Some suggest an emphasis on the need to attain and maintain a state of purity; others focus on the task of cleansing an individual or community from the curse of some ritual impurity. Whatever the specific tenor of the experience, the participant must at the end make the transition from liminality back to the ordinary. To this "reaggregation" the individual, ideally, brings a self slightly different from the self that had earlier willingly submitted to the potential danger and power of the ritual.[1]

ON THE LITURGICAL CALENDAR

About the Five Pillars

The Islamic tradition has specific ways of communicating to believers the appropriate ways to express their faith by means of ritual actions. The most familiar summary characterization of Islamic religious belief and practice

is that they rest upon the Five Pillars. The five are: profession of faith (shahada), "I confess that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God"; pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca during the prescribed days of the twelfth lunar month, given sufficient health and means; ritual prayer (salat) five times daily toward Mecca; almsgiving (zakat); and fasting (*sawm*) between sunrise and sunset during the ninth lunar month, Ramadan. One cannot reduce the spirit and life of a complex global community to a cluster of religious practices. Still the metaphor of the Five Pillars is more than a mnemonic convenience, so long as one remembers that it is merely a summary. Through these rituals the tradition has communicated to its adherents the importance not only of basic practical observance but also of the spirit that must breathe life into that practice.

Some casual observers dismiss Islam's ritual and devotional life as dry and mechanical, hardly worthy of the name "religion" because it seems little more than a collection of external actions performed robotically. In reality, Muslims are no more or less likely than anyone else to participate sincerely and vitally in the religious life of their tradition. One of the most important concerns governing the performance of the basic Islamic rituals is the intention of the worshiper. Islamic sources accord great importance to individual attentiveness and heartfelt presence in religious observances generally.

Written sources describe intention on at least two levels. First and minimally, one must actually pronounce one's intent to perform each specific ritual action, including ablution, prostration, and the oral profession of faith. But prior to the enunciation of intention one must cultivate a more basic interior attitude of receptivity or "presence of the heart." Once classic text describes the attitude more fully:

> The "intention" involves place and time and method and ideal. We ask Thee for the purity of those places, the observance of those times, for faultlessness in that method, and for full realization of that ideal. We ask Thee for due fulfillment of the obligation and for right purpose, and for a desire for the Countenance of God Most High. Now the place of "intention" is the heart; its time is at the beginning of the actions of the prayer-rite, its method is a binding control of the heart and of the members. It is built up of four elements, purpose, determination, desire, and act of will, all of these united in one idea. And the "intention" has two aspects, first the direction of the heart in the rite with full awareness, and secondly single-heartedness towards God out of longing for the reward that He has to give and desire for His Countenance.[2]

One of the most influential works dealing with these matters is *Revivification of the Sciences of the Faith* (*Ihya' 'ulum ad-din*), by Abu Hamid

al-Ghazali (1058–1111). A four-volume work organized into forty books, *Revivification* is a compendium of Islamic spirituality ranging from the most elementary to the most advanced mystical pedagogy. Even when he is proceeding through fairly detailed descriptions of how to perform a ritual action such as the daily prayer, Ghazali never fails to attend to the requisite underlying attitudes. He cites the Qur'anic prohibition against approaching the ritual prayer while intoxicated (Q 4:43): "O you who believe, do not approach the ritual prayer while you are intoxicated; [wait] until you can comprehend what you are saying." Ghazali interprets the text by observing, "Some say that 'intoxicated' means inebriated by many anxieties, while others say it means drunk on the love of this world. According to Wahb [a famous traditionist], the meaning is obviously a caution against worldly attachment, since the words 'until you know what you are saying' explain the underlying reason. Many are those who pray without having drunk wine, yet do not know what they are saying in their Prayers!"[3]

Among the most widely disseminated and least consulted textual sources for the study of Islamic spirituality are the unpretentious manuals of religious education one finds on the shelves of mosque bookstores the world over. At the most basic level, they instruct the believer in the fundamentals of ordinary ritual. They offer directions on how to perform the ablution before prayer, where to place the hands during salat, what invocations to say while circumambulating the Ka'ba (a roughly cube-shaped structure traditionally said to have been built by Abraham) during pilgrimage to Mecca, and how to tell when sunset occurs during Ramadan. These concerns come under the heading of basic catechesis, the sort of instruction given to children or to new converts or to Muslims who wish to return to active observance after years on the periphery of the community.

In their function of religious education, these sources stand on a continuum with a larger body of literature. At one end, the texts are written for as diverse a public as possible. Close to the midpoint of the continuum are works whose range narrows to include, for example, individuals training to become professional Qur'an reciters or to fulfill other functions whose responsibilities require specific instruction. At the other end are works addressed to a still more selective constituency, members of religious fraternities and mystical adepts.

Even the most rudimentary religious education invariably addresses issues far deeper than the superficial rubrics of ritual performance. There are, of course, manuals dedicated almost exclusively to teaching believers the raw structure of ritual practice, but they presume that one already brings at least the inchoate stirrings of a genuine desire to seek God. Muslims call the whole complex of ritual and devotional acts deeds of worshipfulness (*'ibadat*, which could also be translated as "signs of servanthood"). All acts that describe or acknowledge the human posture of a servant before a divine master are thus distinguished, in Islamic religious law, from those that regulate relationships between and among human beings (*mu'amalat*).

The manuals ground every required or recommended practice in the Sunna, Muhammad's example. Even when an individual can find no profound personal significance in, say, kissing the Black Stone (a bowling-ball-sized object, possibly of meteoric origin, set in a silver collar in a corner of the Ka'ba) or placing the hands in a particular position during salat, the action nevertheless rests on solid authority and precedent. It is not merely that an unnamed someone at some unknown date began a practice that stuck. Each practice draws its sacralizing power from the custom of the Prophet himself. For example, tradition ascribes to Muhammad dozens of the intermittent prayers worshipers might say while performing the various movements of the salat (standing, inclining, sitting on the heels, prostration, etc.). One manual observes that when Muhammad performed the prostration he used to say, "Before Thee I prostrate myself, in Thee I believe, to Thee I am surrendered. My face is prostrate before Him who created it and moulded it and pierced for it (the openings of) hearing and sight. Blessed be God the Best of Creators."[4]

William Chittick has translated three thirteenth-century Persian instructional texts that likewise evidence the centrality of right intention.[5] Their probable author, a certain Nasir ad-Din, lived in the central Anatolian city of Konya and was a fellow townsman and contemporary of the original "whirling" dervish, Jalal ad-Din Rumi (d. 1273). All three short and charming works lay out the fundamentals of Islamic faith and practice from slightly different angles and with varying levels of subtlety and sophistication. One is a gem dedicated to conveying "command of a few preliminaries of the intellectual and practical pillars of Islam, the knowing of which is mandatory for the seeker."[6] Nasir ad-Din wrote *The Easy Roads of Sayf ad-Din* (*Manahij-i sayfi*) for a Turkish convert who had asked for guidance through the fundamentals. Leading his supplicant down five "roads," Nasir ad-Din begins with the rudiments of faith and then moves on to the particulars of practice (purification, ritual prayer, fasting, and the personal prayer of supplication). The work is remarkably similar in content to Ghazali's *Beginning of Guidance* (*Bidayat al-hidaya*), an Arabic introduction to the faith written some two centuries earlier.[7] Nasir ad-Din explains the spiritual meaning of the ablution prior to ritual prayer:

> When the person finishes the ablution and aims to say the ritual prayer, he should turn away from all things to the extent possible. He should make his heart present and be aware of the tremendousness and majesty of God. He should understand that he will be talking intimately with the Sultan of sultans. Since he has purified the parts of himself where creatures look with outward water, he should also purify the place where God looks—which is called the "heart"—with the water of turning toward God, repenting, and asking forgiveness. If he does not do this, he is like someone who wants to bring the sultan into his home. He cleans the outside of the house, but he leaves the inside of the house—the place where the sultan will sit—full of filth. We seek refuge in God from that! "God looks not at your forms, nor at your works, but He looks at your hearts."[8]

While the instructional manuals prepare worshipers to participate more fully in the community's canonical rituals, other materials record some of the kinds of religious communication that occur within those rituals themselves. One such genre preserves the preaching associated with the Friday salat.

From the Pulpit

Literature of the pulpit (*adab al-minbar*) refers specifically to collections of sermons delivered in a mosque by famous preachers (*khutaba'*; sg., *khatib*). I divide the literature into two categories, liturgical preaching and popular preaching. In the case of the sermon the principal difference between the two is functional rather than formal. The shape and content of a sermon preached during the Friday midday congregational prayer may be virtually identical to that of a sermon delivered on the occasion of a holy person's birthday or in commemoration of some signal historical event. The ritual context of the Friday sermon sets it apart by virtue of its obligatory status in religious law.

The literature of the pulpit also functions as a bridge between Qur'an and Hadith, and institutional texts (see chapter 5). The Friday sermon always takes place in a mosque. Through its mandatory mention of the name of the legitimate political authority, the sermon has historically often been an expression of formal institutional allegiance. Throughout Islamic history, however, liturgical oratory has also been a prime vehicle for disseminating revolutionary sentiments. In either case, the Friday sermon has been potent both as a symbol and as a form of discourse.

Liturgical oratory is called *khutba* in Arabic. In its broadest meaning, however, khutba refers to any sort of public address. Typically, Islamic tradition has not distinguished neatly between sacred and secular activities in general; nor does Arabic preserve a distinction parallel to that between generic speech and religious sermon. Nevertheless, the oratory that has come to be associated most of all with the Friday midday congregational prayer has taken on a number of distinctive formal features.

After the call to prayer, timed to mark the sun's passing its zenith, the khatib rises from his place on the steps of the pulpit (*minbar*) and faces the assembled worshipers. The classic form includes four distinct segments: an introduction; the body of the address, divided into two separate sections; and a conclusion. An initial thanksgiving (the anaphoric exordium) opens with praise and thanks to God, followed by a first-person profession of faith and recollection of Muhammad's prophetic mission, and a prayer for blessings upon Muhammad and for the well-being of the congregation. A brief moral exhortation (*maw'iza*), sometimes in the form of a litany, closes the exordium.

The main section of the khutba typically develops a distinctive central theme often related to a religious observance or some important event, although some addresses merely continue in a general vein of moral exhortation. Islamic liturgical oratory differs from the classic Christian homily, in that the mosque preacher does not set out principally to elucidate a passage of scripture, though the Qur'an does play an important role. The preacher will quote the Qur'an often, as proof text or as rhetorical device, and sometimes uses a text as his theme. Only on rare occasions does the speaker set about an exegetical elaboration of a text, which typically occurs in gatherings dedicated to the study and discussion of a particular text.

In the body of the address, the mosque preacher seeks to persuade his listeners of the need to change, to point to which areas of life might need changing, and to instruct them in distinguishing between desirable and reprehensible options. With an invocation to God, the first movement closes, and the preacher sits down for a minute or two. The second part returns to the main theme but more briefly, as if to reinforce the message. Finally, the address concludes with a reference to God's glory, sometimes in litany form. After the preacher comes down from the pulpit steps, the congregation performs the regular liturgical prayer (salat), engaging in only two cycles of prostration rather than the more usual four. For major observances, such as the breaking of the Ramadan fast ('Id al-fitr) and the Feast of Sacrifice during Hajj season ('Id al-adha), the ritual prayer comes before, rather than after, the address.[9]

Pilgrimage is a good example of a theme of great importance to preachers on Fridays that fall during the formal pilgrimage season (days 8–13 of Dhu'l-hijja, the twelfth lunar month). Symbolically taking on the role of Muhammad, who delivered the inaugural pilgrimage sermon in 632, the

preacher virtually reenacts the journey for his congregation. As he leads his listeners through the various ritual locations in and around Mecca, the preacher describes the inner experience of the pilgrim. Texts of sermons clearly reveal a sense of deep insight into the spiritual significance of pilgrimage, not only for those actively participating in it but for those sharing in its benefits from afar as well.

The major themes of the sermon are duty, community, several important matters of economic justice, and the transformation following a feeling of liminality that the pilgrim experiences. The preacher begins with Qur'anic reminders that the pilgrimage is a divinely ordained duty for all able-bodied adults who have the funds and a safe means of transportation (Q 3:97). God never burdens people with more than they can carry (Q 2:286); and if times are hard now, God will surely provide the appropriate circumstances for pilgrimage at some later time.

Muslims who do make the pilgrimage have the responsibility of bringing back blessings and charity for their community. One of the great benefits the preacher describes is the feeling of coming together in harmony and equality with other Muslims from all over the world. In a sermon originally preached in Arabic, pilgrims are exhorted to become aware of the expanse of Islam and to feel supported in their faith, "saying [to God] with one voice that softens hearts and seeking the favor of the knower of the hidden: Here I am, at your service; all felicity and blessing are in your hands." The opportunity to visit the sacred sites associated with Muhammad helps believers become more grounded in their faith. And the benefits of learning the customs of other people while traveling also expand the pilgrim's sense of wider community.

Issues of economic justice enter into the experience as well. When pilgrims go to the holy land, whatever money they spend there improves the lot of the poor of the land: "he who spends on the Pilgrimage a dirham, it is as if he has spent a thousand dirhams." On the other hand, a pilgrimage accomplished with ill-gotten gains is worthless. To any person who lavishly spends money made from theft or plunder, God says, "You are not here. You are not at my service. Yours is not felicity and your Pilgrimage is thrown back on yourself."

This typical sermon closes with the theme of personal transformation. Of those who have undertaken the struggle of pilgrimage, God says to his angels:

> "you are seeing [none] except my worshippers. They left the comfort of their homes and they came to me whether riding or on foot. They filled the land with, 'There is no god but God,' and 'God is great.' . . . Bear witness I shall smooth the way for them with a hospitable reception [on Judgment Day]; I shall entrench their successors [on earth] and I shall place them in paradise." Oh ye who have neglected the Pilgrimage and carry a heavy burden of sins, hurry to the Pilgrimage of the sacred house of God. . . . There is a people on whose hearts is written faith and on whose works [is written] mercy and [God's] favor. While they were paying their last respects by circumambulations [of the Ka'ba] and resolving on a return, they were impelled by yearning [to visit Medina] [as seen] by the rapidity of their walking to the [home of the] chosen Prophet. There [in Medina on Judgment Day] they will be encompassed by the light (grace) of Muhammad and they will be included in the prophetic blessing. The Messenger of God said: "He who makes the Pilgrimage and does not speak obscene speech and does not commit obscene acts, his sins are taken away and he emerges as he did on the day his mother gave him birth." And he, may God's prayers and salutations be upon him, said: "The Pilgrimage of good faith, there can be no reward for it but paradise."[10]

Predictably Muslim preachers find the ultimate model in the sermons of Muhammad. Next in importance are those of the Prophet's immediate successors, the four Rightly Guided Caliphs. A sermon from the first caliph, Muhammad's aged father-in-law, Abu Bakr, demonstrates several other prominent themes that reveal important emotional dimensions of Islamic spirituality. This selection emphasizes the need to live this life with an eye on the next:

> I enjoin on you the fear of God in His unity, and that you praise Him as He deserves, and that you mix desire with fear, and importuning with requesting, for God praised Zachariah and his family, when He said . . . "They used to vie in good deeds and call upon Us, out of longing and fear." Then know that God has bound your souls with His truth, and therefore has taken your oaths, and has purchased from you what is small and transient for what is large and eternal. This is the Book of God, given to you, whose wonders do not pass away and whose light is not extinguished: so believe it, and accept the advice it gives, and draw enlightenment from it against the day of darkness. Then know that your comings and goings in the morning and evening are in a fixed term, knowledge of which has been hidden from you, and if you are able to do something that may not be accomplished unless you are doing it for God, then do it, for you will certainly not be able to do it except for God. Strive in gentleness, and [beware of being] a people who fixed their terms for others and forgot their own souls: and how many of you will be like them. So make haste and be saved. Verily, behind you is a questioner whose course is swift, so make haste.[11]

Sermons and pilgrimage, along with all the other central ritual deeds that help Muslims organize and interpret their religious lives, do not occur in a vacuum. They presuppose a world of spaces in which the actions take place

and a host of objects that facilitate their performance. Architecture and the arts provide that physical context.

Art and Architecture

Two broad distinctions are useful in a discussion of the visual expressions of required religious rituals. First, one can distinguish between the more formal, elite, or "official" arts associated directly with the performance of ordinary observances, and the more popular arts through which people associate themselves, publicly or privately, with the performance of those actions. A good deal of the more popular art might also be called folk art; it often functions in a magical-protective fashion. Second, a distinction between religious and sacred can help clarify further the nature of the material in this and in subsequent chapters. Religious art is so identified by its content or subject matter, whereas sacred art is identified by its function in the context of worship. In other words, an image of an angel (in an illustrated manuscript, for example) is religious, but not sacred. A tile mosaic created to adorn the niche of a mosque, on the other hand, belongs to the sacred arts because of its immediate connection with liturgical worship.[12]

Mosque architecture is the primary sacred art in that its chief function is to create a space for prayer. There have been important examples of mosque architecture funded by local patronage or even grass-roots financing. But historically the finest works have been built, out of economic necessity, by royal or government commission. Various distinctive architectural styles developed across the Islamic world, so one can make only a few useful generalizations about formal features. The typical mosque has a minaret, a cylindrical or polygonal tower from which the call to prayer emanates. Interior space is generally left as open and unobstructed as possible to accommodate uninterrupted rows of worshipers lined up elbow to elbow. Many mosques, especially those known as Friday or congregational mosques, have some sort of minbar from which the preacher addresses the congregation; the minbar is usually located to the right of the mihrab. (See Fig. 7.) Ascending its steps with back to the congregation, the preacher then turns to face the assembled worshipers either on a step or on the upper level, which is often covered by a small cupola.

Another of the mosque's principal functions is to communicate fundamental spiritual values in a unique way. Anyone who has ever taken a careful look at a Gothic church has likely been impressed by the various ways in which the building communicates, telling stories in stained glass and sculpture. The more elaborate Gothic creations, such as those of Chartres and Notre Dame, exhibit extraordinarily sophisticated coordination among

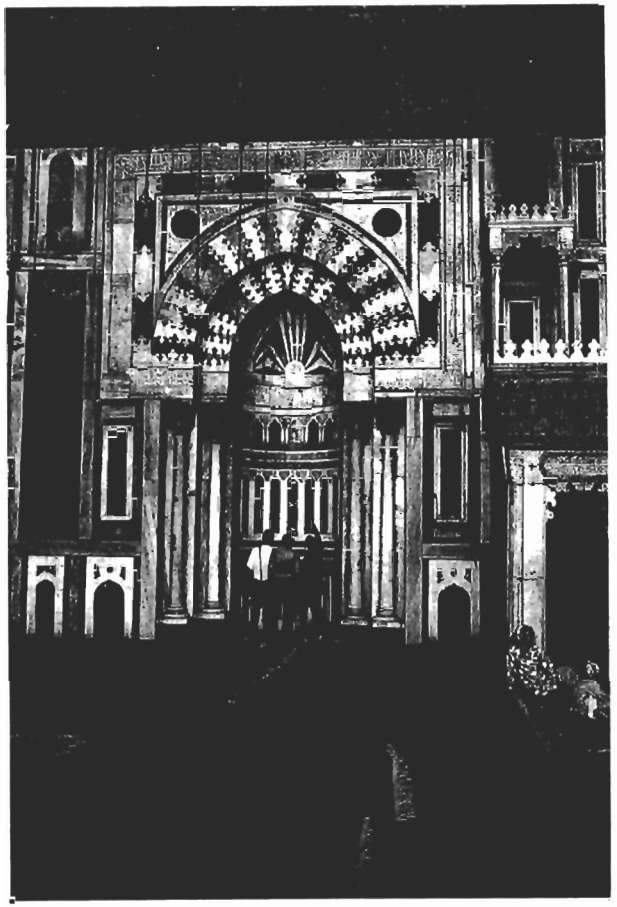

Figure 7. Mihrab and minbar of the Sultan Hasan madrasa (1356–1363) in Cairo. A text about the proper direction for prayer (Q 2:144) is inscribed on the wall above.

their rose windows, lancet windows, and portal sculptures. Seen as a whole, the physical arrangement and decorative program of the cathedral presents a coherent theological interpretation of history and human life. It offers the viewer a cross section of the history of Christian spirituality. Visitors to a cathedral know immediately that the building is saying something, even if the precise content of the message is not immediately apparent.

A Mosque's visual message is more subtle and complex precisely because mosque architecture does not communicate in the narrative style of stained glass or in the more blatantly symbolic mode of programmatic sculpture.

Still, the mosque does speak grammatically and in a distinctive idiom, especially through its Qur'anic inscriptions. But how does one learn this language without pictures? By learning the vocabulary and syntax of architectural space. Although the concept of architectural semiotics—the way a building communicates nonverbally and by its very spatial quality—is too vast to delve into in any detail here, the field can provide some important insights. The external features of orientation and siting, and the internal features of spatial composition and ornamentation—all contribute to the mosque's message.

Orientation is the most distinctive feature of the mosque. All mosques face Mecca, a sacred center of the universe, whereas the cathedral ideally looks toward the rising sun. In the traditional Christian church, all worshipers everywhere face in the same direction, rather than toward a fixed geographical point. Unlike the cathedral, the mosque, with its mihrab and qibla wall, focuses the congregation's visual attention, not on a sacred action occurring within the structure, but on a spiritual center beyond the qibla wall. Perhaps more than any other Islamic institution the mosque embodies the tradition's emphasis on forming community. For sheer scope, of course, no ritual practice matches the annual pilgrimage to Mecca as a celebration of shared humanity; but on a more modest scale, the mosque also fosters community.

Siting is an important external consideration as well. Naturally the practical matter of what sort of property is available at a given time has often limited a builder's options. There are many examples of mosques whose facades are aligned with an existing street or other public space, but whose courtyard and prayer hall is built at an angle, rotated from the axis slightly, in order to be oriented to Mecca (such as the Mosque of al-Aqmar in Cairo or the Royal Mosque in Isfahan). The Sulaymaniye Mosque in Istanbul stands, as do several other important imperial foundations there, on one of the seven hills of that Rome of the East. In this case the choice of site not only makes the building complex stand out on the city's skyline but clearly makes a statement of power as well.

A number of Islam's greatest mosques have been located not merely out of concern for accessibility, visibility or availability of real estate. Some, such as the great mosques of Cordova and Damascus, are located on the sites of earlier structures belonging to other religious traditions. Both sites were formerly occupied by Christian churches and Roman temples. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, located over what was once Solomon's Temple, is a special case since it is not technically a mosque. In some instances the siting clearly makes a statement about the supersession of Islam over the earlier religious and political dispensations. Such a statement seems to override any concern that an observer might take it as a validation of the earlier tradition's identification of a particular site as holy.

Among the mosque's internal features, spatial organization and the use of calligraphic inscriptions are particularly significant. Good mosque architecture sets a mood—as does all successful architecture—and creates a space conducive to the noncompetitive, coordinated effort of one people surrendering in unison to the one God in whom they believe. Most important in this context are the interrelationships among the various functional spaces within the larger compositional design of the mosque. Since Islamicate architecture has developed in many regions over many centuries, of course, one needs to exercise caution in making generalizations. Every cultural setting puts its own distinctive stamp on religious expression, no matter how powerful the sense of belonging to a global community of belief and practice.

Larger mosques normally include facilities and space for ritual purification; a vestibule area or perhaps a courtyard that can serve as overflow prayer space if the crowd is very large; and the prayer hall proper, with the niche and pulpit its only truly essential visual and functional elements. Roger Joseph mentions several key features to consider when assessing the semiotics of a mosque. They include "codes establishing relationships based on spatial designs, geometric patterning, rhythmic sequences, oppositions between high and low, the structuring of polygons, and other systematically assembled elements." Interpretation of nonverbal codes in an architectural space is tricky, but it is an important and much-neglected source of cross-cultural understanding. Joseph theorizes, for example, that a mosque's "repetitive fragmentation" has the effect of "deemphasizing any single item which might draw attention to its uniqueness. Space within the mosque is unpunctuated; it is like the *dhikr* chants of occult recollection—repeated over and over in an effort to shut out the external world of distractions and tunnel into the singular world of unity with God."[13]

Most important, however, is the role of inscriptions as part of the decorative and interpretative program. Among the connections between Qur'anic calligraphy and architecture, I underscore two features of architectural calligraphy: the content of the text and its placement within the architectural space in relation to specific formal (such as facade, courtyard, and dome) and functional features (such as the mihrab and minbar). But beyond that, calligraphy constitutes the single most significant iconic communicator in the visual repertoire of the mosque designer. Even if an inscription is not legible, its mere presence delivers a powerful message.[14]

A madrasa is a second major functional type of religious architecture. The

madrasa has traditionally provided advanced instruction in the religious sciences of theology and jurisprudence. Major foundations across the Islamic world have often combined mosque and madrasa in architectural complexes along with other educational and social functions, such as medical facilities, lower-level schools (of Qur'an and Hadith), public kitchens, and social service agencies.[15]

Smaller, decorative objects include a host of items associated with regular liturgical observances. Prayer carpets reproduce, in two dimensions and on a small scale, the sense of the sacred space of the mosque as well as its cosmic orientation toward Mecca. Carpets and mosques alike are places of prostration (*masjid*), and the niche shape that is the prayer carpet's central design element recalls the mihrab in the wall facing Mecca of every mosque.[16] (See Fig. 8.) Among the finest products of the glazer's art, graceful enameled mosque lamps are often inscribed with the Verse of Light. (See Fig. 9.) Brass candlesticks, engraved and sometimes inlaid, flank the niches of major mosques across the Islamic world. To these one can also add articles such as illuminated manuscripts, book covers, Qur'an stands, and pen boxes in connection with the Qur'an.

Religious in content but no longer sacred in function, the illustrated handbook for pilgrims is an example of elite art. Manuscripts like the *Openings of the Two Sanctuaries*, that is, Mecca and Medina (*Futuh al-haramayn*) and *Guidebook to Blessings* (*Dala'il al-khayrat*) often include exquisite pictures of the holy places. Texts of this sort enjoyed continued popularity until well into the nineteenth century. Their images offer the equivalent of aerial views of the sacred sites' topography and internal features, often showing the interrelationships of a site's secondary features, such as the place near the Ka'ba from which the Prophet is said to have been taken on his Night Journey. Many depict a combination of ground plan and elevation of each place—that is, one sees the site as though simultaneously from above and from ground level. Particular features within each site appear in stylized drawings, often with an identifying caption. A picture of the sanctuary of the Ka'ba in Mecca, for example, usually shows the Station of Abraham and the Well of Zamzam in addition to the black cubic-shaped Ka'ba. Images of Medina typically indicate the tomb of Muhammad's daughter Fatima as well as that of the Prophet.

Sacred sites depicted include, first of all, those associated with the greater and lesser pilgrimages (hajj and *'umra*, respectively). In addition to the sanctuary of the Ka'ba in Mecca, artists often depict the various ritual stations in the valley of 'Arafat outside Mecca, which are all associated with either Abraham or Muhammad. There is the Mount of Mercy, where Muhammad

Figure 8. An early seventeenth-century Mughal prayer rug in which the original imagery of the lamp within the niche has given way to a stylized floral design, India. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Joseph V. McMullan.

Figure 9. An enameled glass mosque lamp of the kind that appears in early prayer rugs and in decorative niches (c. 1350), Syria. The upper section bears words from the Verse of Light: "like a niche in which there is a lamp." The goblet shape within the three circular blazons indicates that the donor held the rank of cupbearer to the Mamluk sultan. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore.

delivered his farewell sermon in 632, and the three Satanic pillars at which pilgrims toss stones to commemorate Abraham's rejection of the Devil's suggestion that he avoid God's command to sacrifice his son. A beautiful sixteenth-century Turkish scroll shows fifteen topographical scenes of the holy places, including a number of sites in Jerusalem but without extended text, like an ancient filmstrip travelogue of the pilgrimage route. Production of such scrolls began at least as early as the thirteenth century.[17]

Several variations on this theme occur in south Asian pilgrimage accounts produced as recently as the 1970s. With regard to their literary qualities, Barbara D. Metcalf observes that "[t]he *hajj* accounts turn out not to be an isolated genre, a continuation of a static medieval form, but rather a genre that develops in ways broadly similar to the modern novel and autobiography . . . [and] biographies of the Prophet Muhammad. . . . The accounts should be read as part of an enduring yet shifting constellation of three poles: changes in society generally, changes in concepts of individuality, and changes in the interpretation of central religious symbols."[18] Although the literature is worthy of attention on its own merits, a number of these works also include visual illustrations. Thanks to changes in book production, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century images no longer belong to the category of elite arts, but they do retain the medieval works' use of stylized plans and elevations of the sacred sites.[19]

Wall tiles showing the plan of the Ka'ba sanctuary depict the same central subject but serve a different function, in a different medium and on a larger scale. These may have provided a meditative focus or visual recollection of the goal of pilgrimage and the orientation of prayer.[20] Popular art of pilgrimage includes both two- and three-dimensional souvenirs of the journey to Mecca. Small models of the Ka'ba reportedly sold as mementos to departing pilgrims by street vendors in Mecca are mentioned in travelers' memoirs of the late seventeenth century.[21] Islam, like virtually every major religious tradition, has also made ritual use of miniaturized architecture. (See Fig. 13.)

On the walls of ordinary houses all over Egypt, one can still see colorful two-dimensional mementos of the sacred journey to Mecca. A lively tradition of domestic mural painting has preserved a formulaic combination of inscriptions and images of the Ka'ba and of the Prophet's mosque. Images usually show the various modes of travel to the holy places, typically including planes, trains, ships, camels, and often depict the pilgrim on a prayer carpet. These murals serve a protective purpose in addition to certifying publicly and proudly that the house's inhabitants are due the special status and prestige accorded to those who have accomplished the hajj and received the honorific title of *hajji*. It is especially significant that family and friends of the pilgrims execute the paintings while the travelers are away, so that the dwelling undergoes its ritual transformation even as its inhabitants do. Paintings often include the text of Qur'an 3:97: "God enjoins upon people a hajj to the House [i.e., Ka'ba], if they are able to do it."[22]

Finally, sacred pilgrimage sites are a frequent theme in calendar art. The picture entitled *Du'a' Boy* (Fig. 6) shows both the Ka'ba in Mecca and the green dome of Muhammad's tomb in Medina. The Qur'an on the kursi is open to Sura 33:33, which reads: "God desires to remove from you defilement, People of the House [i.e., the family of Muhammad], and to make you entirely pure." This text was originally addressed to the Prophet's wives, enjoining them to be faithful not only to their larger religious obli-

gations but also to their more quiet and hidden prayer and recollection of God. In Islam sincerity and pure intention must always have priority over ostentation.