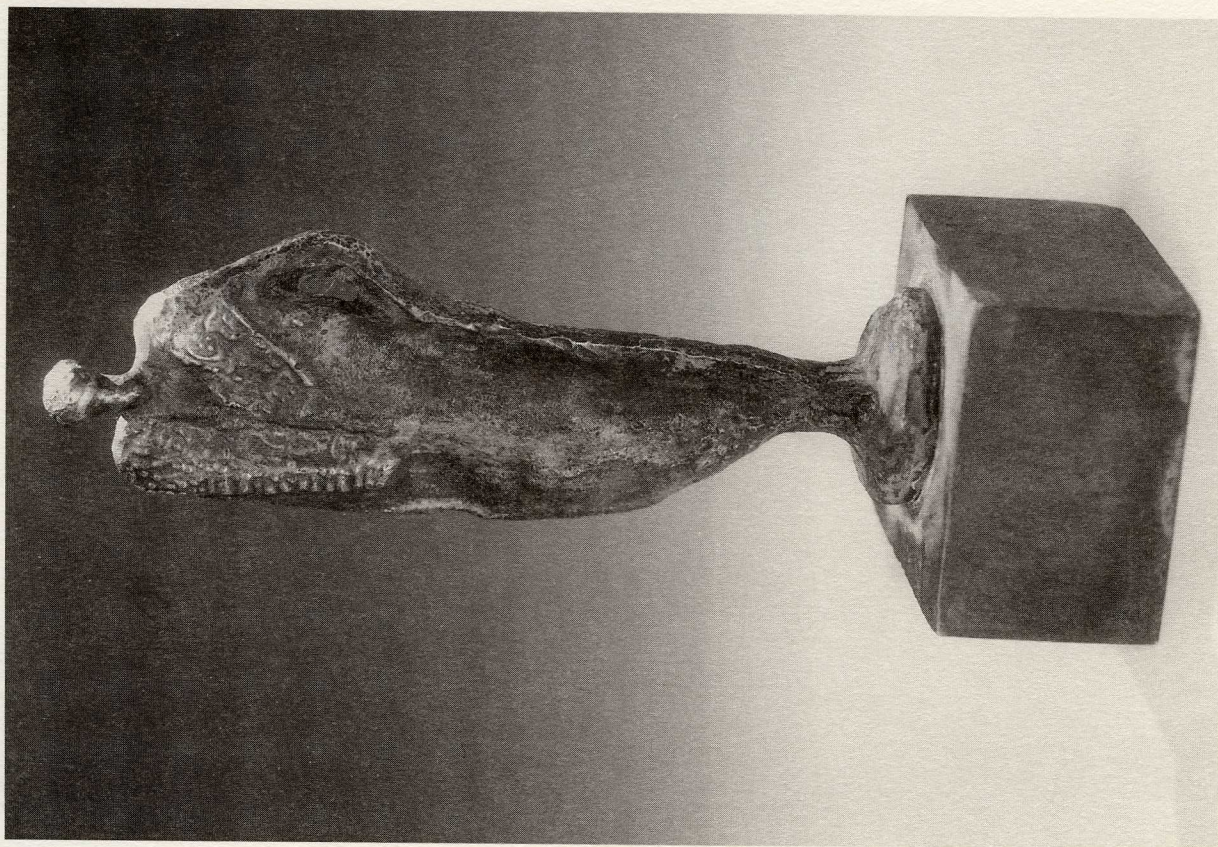




Ibn 'Arabi, a Sufi for All Ages.

5

The Sufi Orders

Mastery, Discipleship, and Initiation

One who has no master has Satan for a leader.

—BAYAZID BISTAMI

WHAT WAS AT FIRST a fairly private movement of like-minded people in the early Islamic centuries eventually grew into a major social force that permeated most Muslim societies. The self-articulation of Sufism in the theoretical manuals of the tenth century was followed by the growth of many circles of teaching, initially in the central areas of the old caliphate in Iraq and Persia, but soon reaching to the frontiers of Spain, East Africa, Central Asia, and India. Residential institutions were founded by eminent Sufi teachers, and they rapidly attracted the support of local rulers. Through the orders, Sufism became much more widely known and practiced throughout different levels of society. Distinctive rituals of initiation and special practices were adopted among the many lineages that proliferated in Muslim lands. As Marshall Hodgson observed regarding the growth of medieval Sufi orders, "a tradition of intensive interiorization re exteriorized its results and was finally able to provide an important basis for social order."¹

The expression "Sufi orders" adapts a term originally used for the

great Christian monastic orders such as the Franciscans and the Benedictines. To the extent that order implies a group of people living together under a common discipline, this term can be usefully employed to describe the various teaching ways (*tariqas*) or chains (*silsilas*) of masters and disciples typical of later Sufism. The analogy cannot be pressed too far, however. While Sufi orders employ ritual initiations and often follow rules that have been codified by founder figures, they do not take the vows of celibacy typical of Christian monks and nuns, nor are they legally authorized by a central authority such as the pope. The authority of Sufi teachers is based on that of the Prophet Muhammad, who is viewed as the source of all Sufi lineages. Although many Sufi lineages have maintained lodges where members could reside under the instruction of a master, there were various levels and degrees of involvement with Sufi orders by merchants, rulers, and ordinary people on a less than full-time basis. While entering a Christian monastic order established an exclusive loyalty to a single order, it has been common for many Sufis to obtain multiple initiations into the practices of several Sufi orders, though the primary orientation would remain in a single order.

When one attempts to describe the Sufi orders, it is necessary to observe once again the difference between the sociological approach of Western Orientalists and the practical engagement of Sufis with particular teachings. That is, Orientalists have tended to see the Sufi orders as social phenomena with clear historical and geographical boundaries. The colorful parades of officially recognized Sufi orders in Cairo, for example, provide the opportunity to identify a particular group of people who are attached to specific lineages and masters. In this sense one could speak of adherents of a particular branch of the Shadhili order in Cairo as a body of people whom one could presumably describe and quantify on the basis of interviews and other research. No doubt part of the description would be a historical account of the lineage of masters and the branching that took place over the years as particular Sufis established distinctive suborders.

Furthermore, the strong sociological and political interests of Western scholars have led to a fascination with Sufi orders as authoritarian structures, and there has been an automatic tendency to view the orders as something like political parties with distinctive ideological characteristics. While this social and historical reality is not ignored by Sufi theorists, they tend to take a different approach when describing the orders. Each chain is of course embodied by the linkage of master to disciple going back through the years all the way to the Prophet. This is seen, however, not as a social institution but as a mystical transmission that makes possible the entry of the individual into the spiritual life. The different ways are not regarded as strictly corporate entities but as spiritual methods or techniques that are maintained and passed on by the community that participates in them.

To reiterate a distinction made at the beginning of this study, the difference between scholarly and personal approaches to the Sufi orders could also be phrased in terms of descriptive and prescriptive viewpoints. When colonial French officials in North Africa wanted to produce a description of Sufi orders with a view to predicting their political behavior, the results were embodied in works like Depont and Coppolani's comprehensive work on "Musulman confraternities," which appeared just a century ago.² The account of Sufi orders included in that book was an attempt to articulate the relationships between corporate groups that played powerful roles in society. The descriptive technique of Orientalist scholarship could have practical implications, however. The underlying attitude of colonial officials towards their subject was similar to that of current Western political analysts who attempt to predict the behavior of "fundamentalists" in order to safeguard international policy goals. While most modern scholars of Islamic studies are not involved directly with policy, they also hold the outsider's descriptive position, and the highly politicized character of any discussion of Islam today makes their studies potentially political.

In contrast, if one looks at a compilation such as *The Clear Foundation on the Forty Paths*, written by the North African scholar Muhammad al-Sanusi al-Idrisi (d. 1859), one sees a highly personalized account of the Sufi orders. The book provides examples of *dhikr* practices from forty different Sufi orders from different regions, but they are not selected at random, nor do they claim to describe every existing order. The principle of selection is based on the fact that the author happened to be initiated into all of these practices. He also evidently adjusted the number in order to reach the desirable round figure of forty, since the notion of describing one's forty initiations was already an established literary genre. As a list of the forty orders described in his book indicates (see figure 9, page 112), Sanusi included twelve methods of *dhikr* that were not embodied in actual Sufi orders; these "theoretical" orders are essentially separate meditative practices and psychological emphases, which could be loosely linked to known Sufi masters but which were preserved for transmission by masters who sought multiple initiations. Sanusi's work also served the purpose of showing how his own teaching subsumed and comprehended all the available spiritual methods. As he put it, "The ways to God most high are many—the Shadhiliyya, the Suhrawardiyya, the Qadiriyya, and so forth—so that some say that they are as numerous as the souls of human beings. Nevertheless, although they have many branches, they are in reality one, since the goal of all is one."³ Similar collections of *dhikr* methods from different orders made by Naqshbandi and Chishti masters in eighteenth-century India likewise worked to establish authoritative personalized teachings based on multiple sources; they were in no way intended as sociological descriptions of the observable activities of large social groups.

The experiential origin of the social institutions of Sufism was the master-disciple relationship. While the Protestant image of Islam visualized a religion without priests, for much of Muslim society the role of intermediaries was of great importance, whether this role was

assumed by the Prophet, the Shi'i imams, or the Sufi saints. The Sufi master was known by the Arabic word for an elder (*shaykh*; Persian *pir*), a title also assumed by religious scholars, but the master assumed an extraordinary role as intermediary linked to the Prophet and God. Abu Hafis al-Suhrawardi (d. 1234) described the effect of the master on the disciple as follows:

When the sincere disciple enters under obedience of the master, keeping his company and learning his manners, a spiritual state flows from within the master to within the disciple, like one lamp lighting another. The speech of the master inspires the interior of the disciple, so that the master's words become the treasury of spiritual states. The state is transferred from the master to the disciple by keeping company and by hearing speech. This only applies to the disciple who restricts himself to the master, who sheds the desire of his soul, and who is annihilated in the master by giving up his own will.⁴

In the most extreme formulation, the disciple was to be to the master like a corpse in the hands of a corpse-washer. It is hard to overestimate the importance of the master-disciple relation in Sufism. Manuals of practice and discipline contain extensive discussions of how the disciple is to behave with respect to the master. Obedience to a master was understood psychologically as renouncing the lower self and replacing it with a purified self made possible by the annihilation of the master's ego. The relationship between the two was indicated by the term *irada*, meaning longing or desire. The disciple is called the *murid*, or one who desires, while the master is the *murad*, or the one who is desired.

From a historical point of view, the first nuclei from which Sufi social institutions began to emerge were the lodges or hospices that were created as residential centers for Sufis, mostly beginning in the eleventh century. It may be that other residential communities were

looked to as models by the founders of early Sufi lodges; possible examples of earlier spiritual communities include the Christian monasteries of the Near East and the hospices of the Muslim ascetic movement of the Karramis in tenth-century Central Asia. Sufi writings instead look to the early model of Muslim community as exemplified by groups such as the People of the Bench. As early as the eighth century, a religious community was founded on the island of Bahrein by the ascetic 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd. But the first enduring residential institutions for Sufis emerged in Iran, Syria, and Egypt during the eleventh century and later. These lodges would later be known by a variety of names (Arabic *ribat*, *zawiya*; Persian *khanqah*, *jama'at-khana*; Turkish *tekke*), and they could assume several forms, ranging from a large structure for several hundred residents to a simple dwelling connected to the private home of a master. Some of the most important of these early centers were those established by Abu Sa'id (d. 1049) in eastern Iran and the Sa'id al-Su'ada' hospice founded in Cairo by Saladin in 1174.

The social extensions of Sufism did not occur in a vacuum, indeed they may be said to have emerged in order to fill one. Many commentators have observed that the earliest Sufi circles came into existence at the time when the early Arab empire of the caliphate was at the peak of its wealth and power; the asceticism and condemnation of the world expressed by Hasan al-Basri was to some extent a response to the luxury and corruption that went with political power. Yet by the tenth century the caliphate had run its course as a viable political entity, as the caliphs were effectively stripped of power by ambitious soldiers and rebellious governors. This upheaval created a crisis of political legitimacy. Despite the religious shortcomings of the caliphate, which was widely criticized as a worldly royal dynasty, it was the only successful political institution that claimed to perpetuate the sociopolitical order established by Muhammad. But when the Persian armies of the Buyid princes took Baghdad in 945 and made the caliphs into puppets, the ground rules for political legitimacy

changed. By the following century, large areas of the eastern former provinces of the empire were under the control of the nomadic Turkish troops of the Seljuks, whose religious credentials were dubious to say the least. The new rulers of Persia and Central Asia quickly adapted to the new situation, taking on both the court culture and the Muslim faith. They soon became patrons of religion by establishing two parallel kinds of institutions to demonstrate their legitimacy: academies for training Muslim scholars, and residential hospices for Sufi devotees. The legitimating role of Sufis became even more pronounced after the destruction of the caliphate by the Mongols in 1258. From that time until European conquest began five centuries later, support of Sufism was an integral part of any regime that invoked the Islamic heritage.

From the start, the relationship between Sufis and rulers created ambiguities. Sufi theorists warned against accepting funds acquired by methods contrary to Islamic law. Critics pointed out contradictions between the ideal of Sufi poverty and the comfortable or even luxurious way of life possible to a "faqir" living in a sumptuously maintained lodge. These contrasts sharpened the traditional distinction between real and imitation Sufis as found in prescriptive Sufi literature. But if Sufis were not to be isolated hermits, they had to interact with the affairs of society; adopting poverty became an internal attitude of detachment rather than a purely external deprivation of possessions. Some Sufi leaders saw the advantages of having the ear of rulers, who could thus be influenced to make decisions based on ethical and religious considerations. They could in this way intercede on behalf of the pious, the poor, and the rejected members of society. Rulers in turn respected Sufi saints as individuals who were connected to an even higher level of authority. After overthrowing the Shi'i Fatimid dynasty, Saladin endowed a number of Sufi lodges in Cairo in the twelfth century, and from that time onward Sufis played leading roles in Egyptian society. One of the first leaders of what became the Suhrawardi Sufi order, Abu Hafs al-Suhrawardi es-

tablished a close relationship with the contemporary caliph al-Nasir and even acted as an ambassador to Egyptian, Turkish, and Persian kings. His disciple Baha' al-Din Zakariyya (d. 1267), after moving to northwest India, set up a Sufi lodge where he and his successors lived more like kings than dervishes, supported by considerable land revenue. Naqshbandi masters, such as Khwaja Ahrar (d. 1490), owned vast stretches of land and played pivotal roles in the politics of the day. The sometimes uneasy but necessary relationship between kings and dervishes was nicely summarized by the poet Sa'di in his picaresque *Rose Garden*, written in 1258:

One of the pious saw in a dream a king in heaven and an ascetic in hell. He asked, "What is the cause of the elevation of the one and the debasement of the other, contrary to the people's expectations?"

A voice came saying, "This king is in heaven from following dervishes, and this ascetic is in hell from being near to kings."⁵

The paradoxical ideal was thus to be inwardly a dervish even if wearing the crown of a king.

The organization of the Sufi orders as societies based on teaching lineages seems to have been largely the work of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Most Sufi orders are named after a famous figure, who is viewed in effect as the founder (see figure 9, page 112). In this way the Suhrawardiyya order is named after Abu Hafs al-Suhrawardi, the Ahmadiyya after Ahmad al-Badawi, and the Shadhiliyya after Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili.⁶ The founders are generally those masters who have codified and institutionalized the distinctive teachings and practices of the orders, although in many cases their reputations as saints go far beyond the circle of initiates. Most orders were localized to particular regions, though a few such as the Qadiriyya and the Naqshbandiyya are found widely distributed across

many Muslim countries. The orders expanded as teaching networks based on initiatic genealogy; each master's authority derived from that of his predecessor in a chain going back to the Prophet Muhammad. Within each main order there are frequently suborders, sometimes designated by composite names with two, three, or more elements to indicate how many levels of branching have occurred. In this way one sees the Ma'rufi-Rifa'i order, the Jarrahi-Khalvati (or Jarrahi-Halveti) order, and the Sulaymani-Nizami-Chishti order. Some of the main sub-branches were formed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries or even later.

The institutional support of Sufism inevitably linked teaching circles to centers of political power. The means by which this was carried out established the basis for future relations with the court. Some groups, such as the Chishtiyya, recommended avoiding formal ties through endowments, although accepting donations in cash or kind was permissible with the stipulation that they be spent quickly for appropriate purposes such as food, living expenses, and ritual necessities. When Burhan al-Din Gharib was authorized as a Sufi master, his master Nizam al-Din told him, "Take worthy people as disciples, and on the subject of donations, 'no rejecting, no asking, no saving.' If anyone brings you something, do not reject it, and do not ask for anything, but if they bring a little of something good, do not reject it to get it increased, and do not accept by specifying anything [that you need]." As might be imagined, visitors to Sufi lodges were from all classes, and ordinary people and merchants would make pious donations according to their means. The lodge of Ruzbihan Baqli was constructed by followers belonging to the stoneasons' guild, without support from the ruler of Shiraz.

Despite the desire to remain outside royal control, the significant resources that medieval rulers directed towards the support of Sufi establishments created a constant pressure to accept patronage. When Burhan al-Din Gharib's lodge ceased to have active direction after the death of his successor, the trustees and attendants sought

donations and eventually land endowments from the sultans of the Deccan. Ultimately, by the eighteenth century, the shrines of Burhan al-Din and his disciples became extensions of the authority of the court, with royal music balconies built into the shrines themselves for the performance of court ceremonies. This is just one example of the way in which Sufi institutions became integrated into the economic structure of society. The pagan Mongols soon grasped the benefits of associating with Sufis, and they accelerated the pace of patronage of Sufi shrines; the first land revenue for the shrine of Ruzbihan was awarded by a Mongol governor in 1282, at the same time that he converted to Islam. By the sixteenth century, the Ottoman and Mughal empires had established elaborate bureaucratic hierarchies that dispensed royal funds and land revenue to Sufi shrines, often appointing the trustees and regulating the internal affairs of the shrines as well. Shrines were exempted from ordinary taxes on the condition that the attendants pray for the welfare of the ruling dynasty. Descendants of Sufis frequently had opportunities to enter the ranks of the nobility. Probably the bulk of royal support of Sufism was nevertheless directed at the shrines of deceased masters rather than the circles of living teachers. There were fewer opportunities for conflict and controversy with dead saints.

Another, much more radical interpretation of dervish poverty unleashed a very different form of Sufism in the Qalandar movements.⁸ With a certain amount of scorn for the comfortable Sufi establishments that had official support, these deliberately deviant wanderers adopted lifestyles that challenged society as directly as the Cynics of the ancient world. The modes of rejection espoused by these ascetics were so varied that they are known in different regions by many different names: Haydaris, Qalandars, Torlaks, Babas, Abdals, Jamis, Madaris, Malangs, and Jalalis. Begging while rejecting property, these wanderers were celibate and practiced severe bodily mortification. They were careless at best about the fulfillment of Islamic ritual duties, and they frequently went naked or wore rough dark wool,

with a bizarre assortment of hats and other paraphernalia, including on chains. In rejection of standard grooming codes, they shaved the hair, eyebrows, mustache, and beard, and many of the groups were unknown for use of hallucinogens and intoxicants. As a symbol, the Qalandar still stands for utter detachment from the world, and the same has been adopted by more conventional Sufi groups such as the Indian Qalandari order at Kakori near Lucknow. But the radical and literal enactment of this idea led to sometimes severe social conflicts, including attacks on more established Sufis, and even full-scale peasant revolts in the Ottoman empire. The legacy of this aggressive kind of renunciation has partly survived in some of the practices of formal orders such as the Bektashis (shaving) and the Rifa'i (unusual mortifications). One can still observe what one scholar dismisses as "spiritual delinquents"⁹⁰ at traditional Sufi festivals in different parts of the world today, such as the tomb of La'1 Shahbaz Qalandar in Sind, most recently made popular in song by the Pakistani *qawwali* singer Nusrat Fateh 'Ali Khan. Here we have a category that strains any fixed prescriptive definition of Sufism.

The historical development of the Sufi orders is still imperfectly understood, since so many sources remain unstudied. This has not prevented some scholars from attempting to describe a historical pattern to the Sufi orders taken as a whole. The most ambitious attempt to provide a historiographical interpretation was provided by J. Spencer Trimingham, a specialist in the history of Islam in Africa, in his book *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. Trimingham enunciated three-fold theory of the development of Sufism, which has more than a passing resemblance to the tripartite schemes that litter the landscape of Western historiography (ancient-medieval-modern, and so on). The valuable information collected in this sympathetic and learned compendium is marred by a theory of classicism and decline, divided into three periods. Trimingham called the first period of early Sufism "a natural expression of personal religion . . . over against institutionalized religion based on authority." This stage was suc-

ceeded by a second period, of the formation of *tariqas*, or ways, in groups based on chains of masters and disciples, around the twelfth century. The full institutionalization of Sufism into *ta'rifas*, or organizations, was the third and final period, beginning about the fifteenth century. While the association of the orders with saints' tombs as state-sponsored centers of devotion ensured their popular success, Trimingham argues, this institutionalization led to a decline of Sufism from its original pure mysticism. After this point he sees no originality, but sterile repetition of the past, and an unfortunate tendency to hereditary succession of authority. The result of this "deeper spiritual malaise" was the transformation of the orders into hierarchical structures that, to him, were uncomfortably similar to the Christian church and its clergy.¹⁰

Trimingham's observations contain a modern and strongly Protestant attitude that champions personal religion over institutionalized religion, and his theory of decline logically derives from his assumption that mysticism must be a personal and individual phenomenon. The notion of historical decline is basically a rhetorical strategy for evaluating and classifying history, according to what one considers to be of real value and what constitutes a departure from that. Most theories of the rise and fall of civilizations (from Gibbon to Toynbee) are very selective in the time frames used for comparison, and their assumptions about the relationship between moral status and the success of political power are basically unprovable. The "classicism and decline" model has long exercised a fascination over students of Islamic culture. It is especially odd to notice that the "decline" of Islamic civilization has been unquestioned axiom, accepted until recently by most Orientalists and still maintained by fundamentalists but for different reasons. In both these cases, the colonization of much of the Muslim world and the consequent loss of political power by Muslims were interpreted moralistically as the judgment of either history or God upon a civilization that had become inadequate. The notion of the decline of Muslim nations was especially

attractive to the self-image of Europeans in the colonial period, since it provided a noble justification for conquest and empire on the basis of the "civilizing mission" of the West (also known as "the white man's burden"). If we do not intend to support, however, the agendas of either colonialism or fundamentalism, then the notion of classicism and decline is distinctly unhelpful in the study of a tradition such as Sufism.¹¹ I would like to suggest instead that we need to enlarge our concept of mysticism to include wider social and institutional contexts, if we are to use this word usefully to describe Sufism. Unlike the individualistic notion of originality found in romantic modernism, the expression of mysticism in a vast cumulative tradition such as Sufism rests upon multiple contributions to a common idiom deployed over generations.

Within the Sufi tradition, after the formation of the orders, their articulation in the form of an initiatic lineage was to some extent a retrospective reconstruction. There are few examples of complete lineages going back to the Prophet prior to the eleventh century, and critics were suspicious of their historical authenticity.¹² Yet the symbolic importance of these lineages was immense; they provided a channel to divine authority through the horizontal medium of tradition. Regardless of their verifiability in external historical terms, the chains of masters and disciples were necessary for the transmission of spiritual power and blessings. In a case that I have analyzed separately, Ruzbihan Baqli in his own writings makes no reference to any standard Sufi lineage, nor does he even mention as a teacher any contemporary figure known from other sources. His two great-grandsons, writing a century after his death in 1209, went ahead and supplied him with fully detailed genealogies in the Kazaruni Sufi order. It is as if his mystical experiences in the vertical dimension of spiritual ascension could not be effectively translated into the institutional mode without the guarantees offered by a historical genealogy of previous Sufi masters.¹³

In another respect, the transhistorical character of Sufi initiation seriously undermines the conventional understanding of tradition. The model for this kind of relationship was Uways al-Qarani, a contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad who never met him, but was nevertheless an adept saint, deeply devoted to the Prophet. This kind of internal relationship, called Uwaysi initiation, shows up in a number of well-known Sufi lineages. In this way Abu al-Hasan Kharraqani (d. 1034) was initiated by the spirit of Bayazid Bistami, and this is accepted as a standard link in the Naqshbandi chain of masters. There are in addition a number of famous Sufis who have been initiated by the deathless prophet Khidr. The power of this kind of transhistorical transmission was so great that at certain periods, one finds mention of an Uwaysi (or Uveysi) order as if it were another standard lineage. What is remarkable about this formulation is that it pre-serves the historical form of the initiatic genealogy while completely somersaulting over the need for external physical contact. The Sufi order, then, as a historical construction has greatest meaning for the person who is being initiated. It creates the line of spiritual transmission and authority to the initiated individual through the central figures of Sufism. It should also be emphasized that the formal orders by no means include all the important figures of Sufism. The names of a number of early Sufi authorities simply do not occur in the principal genealogies. On a more practical level, a rough check of the Department of Charitable Trusts in Pakistan has revealed that about half the shrines of Sufi saints in the Punjab province do not clearly belong to any major Sufi lineage.¹⁴

So important was the symbolism of the lineage that it was embodied in a ritual of writing out the names of the masters of the order, to construct what was called a tree (*shajara*; see figure 10). A nineteenth-century Indian Sufi author explains how memorizing the chain of masters formed an essential part of the process of meditation, precisely because it made direct access to the Prophet possible:

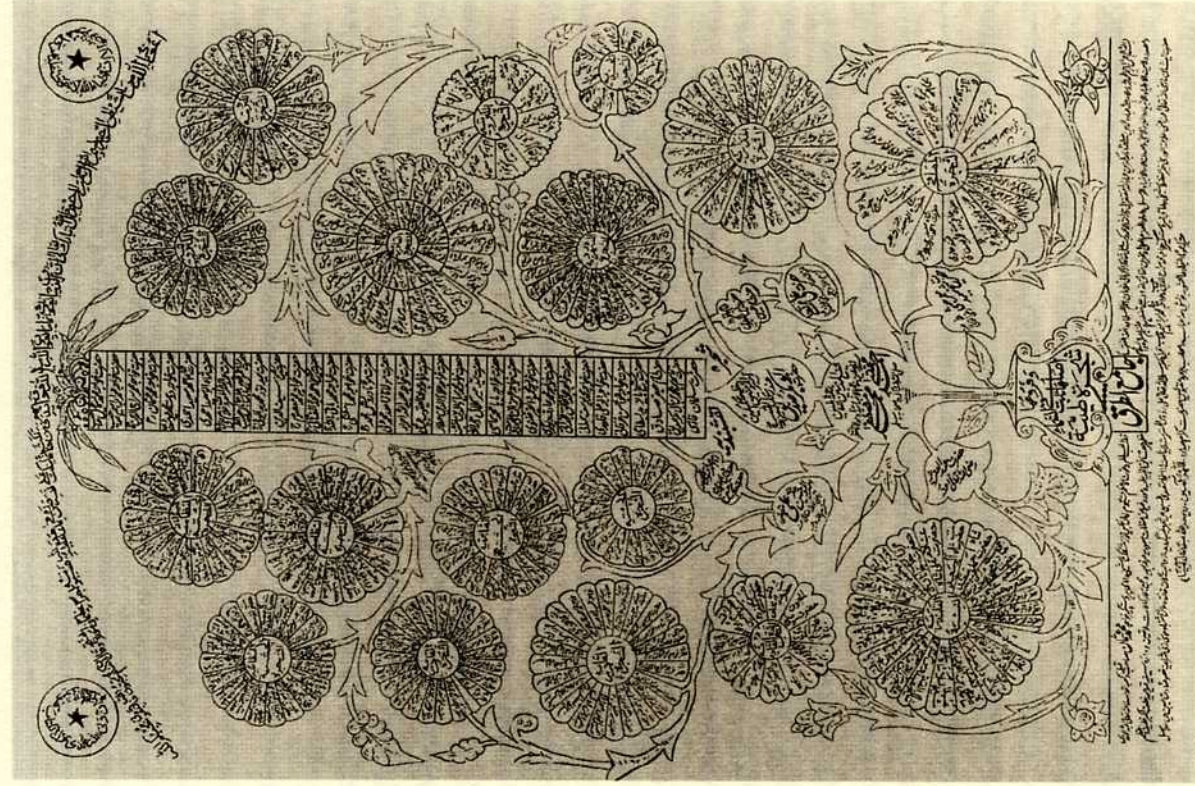


FIGURE 10. Initiatic Genealogy or "Tree" (*shajara*) of the Indian Naqshbandi Order.

It is necessary for the disciple, after receiving from his own master the names of the [preceding] masters, that he memorize them up to the revered exemplar of prophecy (blessings and peace be upon him). This is one of the requirements of the seeker on this path. For the one practicing spiritual exercises it is necessary to bring the master to mind during *dhikr* and meditation. If he is not successfully present [in the meditation,] at first he thinks of the master. If he still does not attain presence, [he thinks of] the master of the master. If he still does not attain presence, [he thinks of] the master of the master of the master, all the way up to the Prophet (God bless him and his family and give them peace). While recalling each of these saints to whom the revered [Prophet] has given the hand [of initiation,] he begins the *dhikr* with that one [that is, the Prophet], and visualizes him in the form of the master. Then he asks for assistance and practices the *dhikr*.¹⁵

Knowing the names of previous masters has a virtue comparable to the recitation of the names of God; the spiritual qualities of those saints will communicate themselves to those who write or recite their names. Writing out a genealogical tree is said to have become necessary in later times, when the number of intermediaries multiplied. This distance in time from the Prophet is not necessarily a diminution of spiritual power. Since the chains are attested by trustworthy masters, those with more links have greater merit—just as additional lamps contribute more light. Authorities differ on the question of where to start writing the tree. Some prefer to begin with the Prophet, but others start with their own names and ascend up through the masters, to fulfill the manners of respect to each in order.

While the genealogical tree is probably the most elemental representation of a Sufi order, there are much more detailed constructions

of the historical relations of masters and disciples. Some tree documents contain brief biographical notes, and they represent not only the principal masters but also the circles of minor disciples that surrounded them. While a simple tree document can be contained on one page, there are shrines in India where genealogical scrolls hundreds of feet long are preserved. The precise meaning of these more complicated diagrams is elusive in the absence of oral commentary. Eminent masters of other orders are juxtaposed alongside the chief representatives of a chain in a relationship that is suggestive but enigmatic. It is clear that each document represents a principal line of transmission that eventually reaches the disciple whose name is inscribed at the bottom.

The apparently simple statement of authority contained in these graphic representations conceals significant differences of opinion about legitimate succession. As was the case with the Shi'i imams, Sufi shaykhs did not always leave a single successor whose authority was unambiguously recognized by all. The branching off of sublineages is an implicit acknowledgement of multiple authority in a Sufi order. Each individual representation of the order will, however, consider itself as a single uncontested chain of mastery. A case in point is the Indian Chishtiyya, among whom an archaic formulation referred to "the twenty-two masters" as forming the ancient cycle of authority in the order. Members of the order in northern India, who begin by counting the angel Gabriel as first in the sequence, still regard the last figure in this chain of twenty-two to be the principal disciple of Nizam al-Din Awliya in Delhi, Nasir al-Din Mahmud Chiragh-i Dihli (d. 1356). The branch of the Chishtiyya that settled in southern India thinks differently; starting with the Prophet as first, they count Nizam al-Din Awliya's disciple Burhan al-Din Gharib (d. 1337) as twenty-first and his successor Zayn al-Din Shirazi (d. 1369) as twenty-second.¹⁶ The same structure can in this way support conflicting identifications of the standard-bearers of the tradition.

The structures of authority revealed in tree documents took on

much more complicated dimensions in biographical dictionaries of Sufi saints. While the early hagiographies broke down their subject into generations, following the model of biographies of *hadith* scholars, the proliferation of Sufi orders as distinct lineages encouraged the production of collections of lives of Sufis belonging to particular orders. A Sufi order thus tended to be locally defined in biography, through narrative texts that stood midway between the simple genealogy and the comprehensive hagiographies that strove for inclusiveness rather than definition. It is surprising how widely two accounts of a single Sufi order could differ; as Bruce Lawrence has shown, the Indian scholar 'Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith (d. 1642) and the Mughal prince Dara Shikuh (d. 1659) both produced histories of the Qadiri order during the early seventeenth century, but their visions of the nature of the order and its leading figures were quite dissimilar.¹⁷ It was also not uncommon for hagiographies of particular orders to include significant reference to local political authorities who supported (or resisted) the authority of the order; this political tendency even included dedications to royal patrons, placing these hagiographies at least partly in the courtly and dynastic tradition.

The larger biographical dictionaries made some attempt to describe relations between the different Sufi orders. Some relied on the classification of twelve Sufi schools proposed by Hujwiri in the eleventh century, despite the fact that these were theoretical tendencies that Hujwiri admitted were not for the most part preserved by living traditions. He designated these twelve schools by the names of famous early Sufis, but they do not correspond to any of the well-known Sufi orders of later times. Still, many later authors writing in Persian employed the same technique of using leading early Sufis as the basis for their own classifications, frequently in a classification system of "the fourteen families." Much work remains to be done in order to get a clear picture of the way Sufi orders were represented in such texts.

Another variable in Sufi orders has been the adoption of Shi'ism.

While most Sufis revere the family of the Prophet and in particular the twelve Imams beginning with 'Ali, some Sufi groups carried this farther than others. Among the Kubrawis reverence for the house of the Prophet was particularly strong. Other groups—such as the Nurbakhshis, the Dhahabis, the Khaksar, and the Ni'matallahis (Ni'matullahis)—have explicitly adopted the norms of Twelver Shi'ism, the form of Shi'ism prevalent in Iran. The overall relationship between Sufism and Shi'ism is difficult to formulate, because neither term has hard-and-fast boundaries. Some historians argue that the Sufi orders filled the void left by the defeat of Isma'ili Shi'ism, in the form of the Fatimid empire in Egypt and the Assassins in Syria and Iran (in Isma'ili Shi'ism, a continuous series of Imams descended from the Prophet is recognized as holding supreme authority; today many Isma'ilis regard the Aga Khan as the present Imam). Both Sufism and Isma'ilism are forms of spiritual esotericism made available to the people through charismatic leaders. Others point to the remarkably similar descriptions of the spiritual qualities possessed by the Sufi master and the Shi'i Imam. The very notion of sainthood is conceptually and historically related to the authority of the Imams. Some Sufi genealogies explicitly include the first six or eight Imams, and 'Ali figures as the first transmitter of Sufism from the Prophet in nearly all genealogies, with the notable exception of the Naqshbandis, for whom Abu Bakr plays this role.

An assertion that is often met with is that Sufism, especially through the Sufi orders, was one of the principal channels for the diffusion of Islam. The notion that one gets is that Sufis acted as missionaries, bringing people around the world into the fold of Islam through example, sermon, and persuasion. It is also frequently maintained that the remarkable literary production of Sufis in local languages (see chapter 6) was part of a deliberate effort of conversion. There are a number of problems with this idea. First of all, the concept of Sufis spreading Islam contains a number of unexamined assumptions about the relationship between the terms *Sufism* and

Islam and also about the nature of conversion. What does it mean to become a Muslim? From the viewpoint of Islamic law, the simple assertion of the profession of faith (in the unity of God and the prophecy of Muhammad) constitutes the minimum form of submission to God. Making this simple transition constitutes a juridical change of status, but it does not in itself indicate anything further about the degree to which an individual follows Islamic law and ritual. In other words, one could become a Muslim but be religiously indifferent or even act reprehensibly; to use internal religious language, one who has submitted to God (*muslim*) may not be dedicated enough to be considered faithful (*mu'min*), and may even through disobedience to God become an infidel (*kafir*). To the external sociological observer, however, the question of religious practice and devotion is entirely subordinated to the issue of group identity. In other words, the outsider only wants to know whether an individual can be classified as a member of the Muslim community or some other religious group. The term *conversion* also has strongly Christian implications, linked to the very strong Christian missionary programs of the modern era.

From what we know of the Sufis, it is difficult to make a case for them as self-conscious missionaries. Sufi manuals do not contain any instructions for converting nonbelievers to Islam. Travel to foreign lands is recommended for Sufis, to be sure, but as a difficult penance for the lower self rather than as a missionary tour. Sufism was self-consciously esoteric; if the ordinary Muslim could not understand it, how should one expect Sufis to seek a following among those who had never even heard of the Prophet? Because of the modern preoccupation with ideology in politics, it is customary to look at the medieval societies ruled by Arabs, Turks, and Persians as Muslim societies. Certainly the rulers of these societies acknowledged the authority of the Prophet and Islamic law through certain legal institutions, but the degree of application of Islamic law varied widely, as did the amount of local custom and ancient political tradition. It is

important to remember, too, that Muslims were minorities for long periods of time in many lands where they are now majorities and that their political structures were composites of different systems; to call these Muslim societies is a simplification. Certainly the Arabs had an amazingly successful period of conquest in the period immediately following the Prophet, but contrary to the standard stereotype, conversion of nonbelievers to Islam was not an objective of that military program. Nor was the Turkish conquest of northern India a campaign by religious fanatics to turn heathen Hindus into Muslims. Still, it is clearly through the political support of expansive imperial regimes that Islamic legal and religious institutions have been maintained. The accretion of Islamic norms among subject populations must have been a centuries-long gradual process—in which different groups and individuals took on particular customs and practices for a variety of reasons, while still preserving differences of ethnicity, language, class, and wealth. That kind of explanation has not satisfied European Christians, who have for centuries been intent upon a program of missionary conversion. They at first concocted ferocious images of Islam as “the religion of the sword.” In the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries and colonial officials then imagined that there must also have been some Muslim counterparts to themselves, who brought about a change of heart that caused non-Muslims to convert. This imagined Muslim missionary they identified as the Sufi.

While there are premodern texts that describe early Sufis as instrumental in the Islamization of whole tribes and regions, there are strong reasons for interpreting these accounts as political and economic claims that invoke the Sufis as authorities for legitimization. Some late political histories portray Sufis as the peaceful or militant agents of Islam, but neither of these images can be found in early Sufi literature. One suspects that later princes and royal chroniclers found it very useful to portray ancient saints as forerunners of their own claims to domination. Oral traditions collected by colonial ad-

ministrators in the nineteenth century have frequently portrayed Sufi saints performing miracles that caused whole tribes to become Muslims. This kind of story was frequently linked, however, with issues of patronage and control of saints' shrines administered by large landowners. Today the Islamic regime of Pakistan identifies famous early Sufis as missionaries of Islam, and by extension, as predecessors of the modern state; India, in contrast, invokes some of the same saints as examples of its own official secularist tolerance (both countries are sensitive, in different ways, to the powerful implications of joining or separating the terms *Sufism* and *Islam*). But if we momentarily decouple the Sufis from political issues of this type, it is still possible to construct an estimate of the effect of Sufi institutions on non-Muslim populations, especially since Sufi shrines to this day are widely frequented by Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, and others. In other words, while there was no overt missionary policy among Sufi orders, the impact of the shrines established to commemorate famous saints probably played a significant role in popularizing certain Islamic norms and practices among non-Muslims.¹⁸

How did one join a Sufi order? Sufis trace the customs of initiation to the Prophet Muhammad and to the way in which he was said to have formalized his relationship with his disciples. The term used for initiation, *bay'a*, is taken from the oath of allegiance that Muhammad's followers swore to him. The basic elements of the initiation were shaking hands and the presentation of garments, usually a cloak but frequently also a hat or other apparel. Often men's heads were shaved, again in imitation of the action of the Prophet. Muhammad remarked, “My companions are like the stars; whichever of them you follow will guide you.” This is understood by extension as an allusion to the Sufi masters. How masters judged whether someone should be taken on as a disciple was another question. Frequently it was said that the master gazed upon the tablets of destiny to see if the disciple's connection was decreed from pre-eternity; in other words, not everyone had the proper affinity. The exact proce-

dures of initiation differed from one order to another. Here is an interesting and detailed account of the ritual from a master of the Shattari and Qadiri orders who lived in Lahore at the end of the seventeenth century.¹⁹ First the prospective disciple should bring fruit and flowers and sweets, if he can afford it, to present to the dervishes; if the disciple is poor, some flowers will do. "For there is no reliance on the life of this world; there is no telling what will happen from one hour to the next." The procedure that follows is complex and dramatic:

When he intends to become a disciple, he does not suddenly go to the lodge, nor does he tell anyone. First he goes to kiss the feet of the master's attendant, saying, "I long for the revered master; cast me at the feet of the revered master, and have me be accepted." Then the attendant takes him by the hand to the presence of the revered master. When he gets near the room, he kisses the room. When he sees the master, he kisses the ground. Then when he is taken to the feet of the master, he quickly places his head at the feet of the master and kisses them, with much crying and emotion, saying, "I long to be a disciple; accept me and make me one of your slaves." Then the master should excuse himself and say, "I am not worthy to be a master. There are others greater than I; go, be a disciple of them." But he should seize the feet of the master and say, "I am very certain about you. Without you, I have no belief in any other, nor will I be a disciple of anyone else." When the master sees a pure intention, he tells the attendant to make this person perform ablutions and then bring him back. After having him perform ablutions, the attendant has him face the master, with the master's back towards Mecca, so the disciple is facing Mecca, standing before the master and taking his hand. The master should first have him say three times the formula of seeking forgiveness. . . . Then the master should say, "I am not wor-

thy to be a master. Accept me as a brother." The disciple says, "I accept you as a master." Then the master says, "Have you accepted me as a master?" The disciple says, "Yes, I have accepted you as a master." Then in this way, the master makes him accepted in every order that he intends, from himself up to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Then follow detailed instructions for reciting Qur'anic passages, prayers for forgiveness, abjuration of the devil, obedience to God, vows of upright behavior, prayers of thanksgiving, and general celebration and congratulations from other disciples. The master takes scissors and cuts some hair from the right side of the disciple's forehead and then has the disciple take a vow to perform the five pillars of Islam (profession of faith, ritual prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and alms). Then he places a hat with four corners on the disciple's head for a regular Shattari initiation, although the hat may differ if it is a Shah Madari or Naqshbandi initiation. He then tells the disciple to write out the tree of the order's genealogy, first writing in himself the name of the disciple. The disciple's offerings are then distributed, with the first portion going to the new disciple. The offerings are divided into three parts: one for the attendants, one for visitors whether rich or poor, and one for the master. If the master has a family, however, the offering is divided into four parts, with the fourth part going to his wife. The manner of initiating women disciples is basically the same as for men, except that they refrain from the physical contact of the handshake and the cutting of hair. Instead, the woman disciple puts her fingers into a cup of water into which the master places his index finger; if she has a scarf, she holds one end while the master holds the other. For men disciples, it concludes with placing the right hand between the hands of the master. This symbolizes reaching the Prophet through the intermediate degrees of the masters who have each performed this ritual in the past. There were a number of relationships with a Sufi order indicated

by rituals in which the presentation of a cloak (*khirqā*) from a master was an important symbol.²⁰ In this respect Sufi customs paralleled the customs of caliphal and royal courts, where the gifts of rich fabrics and garments were an important part of courtly ritual. Again, Sufis traced this custom to the practice of the Prophet, as for instance when he made a point of giving a special shirt to an Ethiopian woman disciple named Umm Khalid, telling her to wear it out. The symbolism of the shirt also recalls the story of the prophet Joseph. In the Qur'anic account the scent of Joseph carried by his shirt restored the eyesight of his blind father Jacob; it is said that this shirt (the "many-colored coat" of biblical tradition) was the very shirt that Gabriel provided to the prophet Abraham when Nimrod threw him naked into the fire. Some Sufi orders refer in addition to the shirt given to the Prophet by Gabriel and worn by him during his ascension; this is believed to have been handed down by masters to their successors over the generations. In earlier times, the cloak was frequently dark blue, according to some because it was easier to keep clean. Another form it took was that of a patched cloak. In any case, the importance of the garment is a reminder of the original etymology of Sufism from *suf*, or wool. The principal types of cloak used in early Sufi rituals were the cloak of longing or discipleship (*irāda*), given to the true disciple, and the cloak of blessing (*tabarruk*). The cloak of discipleship signifies the relationship between master and disciple and is a constant reminder of the master's presence. More than that, as the stories of the shirts of the prophets suggest, the shirt is a sign of the possibility of the presence of God; in the cloak the disciple sees divine mercy and grace. The cloak of blessing is available to those who are not at the point of becoming disciples but who are drawn to Sufism. They obtain the blessing of the garment of the Sufis and will be influenced by them, perhaps to the point of becoming disciples some day. Another type of cloak found in later times was the cloak of succession (*khilāfa*), given to a disciple who was judged to be ready to stand in the master's place and initiate

others. The term for a successor (*khālifa*) is the same term used for the successors of the Prophet, usually Anglicized as caliph. This indicates once again how important the model of the Prophet was for Sufis, particularly in such a crucial area as the transmission of religious knowledge and authority.

The emphasis on something so apparently external as dress brings us back to something very important about Sufism: namely, external comportment as a necessary part of the mystical tradition. Contrary to the subjective and individual character of mysticism as it is often understood in the modern West, Sufism requires that inner experience be coordinated with correct social interaction. This is why the term *Sufi* was defined at the beginning of this study as a prescriptive ethical concept. This stress on the social dimension found its expression in the formulation of rules of conduct, designed for the use of a community. The form that these rules took was the enumeration of morals or ethical norms (*adab*), an approach that also had been articulated for other areas of Muslim society, such as the court. The earliest collections of such norms predated the establishment of the Sufi orders, and they dealt with general topics, such as relations between master and disciple, relations with fellow disciples, and the control of selfish desires. More detailed rules appeared in the first lodges, such as that of Abu Sa'id in eastern Iran, where a list of ten rules applying to communal life emphasized purity, constant prayer, meditation, and hospitality. Later rules became more elaborate, and they included many dispensations or relaxations of the stricter rules that suggest a wider circle of adherents than previously. Topics such as how to behave during performance of music and poetry were treated in detail, including such items as how to divide Sufi cloaks that had been torn in ecstasy. Other forms of behavior covered in these manuals were things such as how to sit with the master, how to behave while traveling, how to respond to offers of food when fasting, and how to deal with pride in one's literary accomplishments. Disciples are warned to refrain from the company of mad

Qalandars, wine drinkers, and disreputable Sufis. As usual in the case of pointedly detailed rules, one suspects that particular cases of ostentatious, bad behavior lie behind each of these stipulations. The sheer volume and detail of the many manuals of ethical conduct testify to the widespread application of the Sufi path to many different circles of teaching in widely scattered locations, which still shared the basic ethical concern of regulating one's behavior with God, with Sufis, and with other people in general. It is especially in this sense that one can regard the Sufi orders as the organized means for applying the insights of mystical experience in society at large.