

Book Chapter Review: “Muslim
Personal Piety” in *The Venture
of Islam*

By Marshall G. S. Hodgson

BY BILAL MUHAMMAD



BERKELEY INSTITUTE
FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES



BERKELEY INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

The Berkeley Institute for Islamic Studies (BLIIS) is a non-profit organization that was established in 2017 and is based in Berkeley, California. It was founded with the goal of promoting scholarship on Islam and Islamic cultures both historical and contemporary. The institute's academic research on Islam includes a broad range of academic disciplines from theology to law, and from anthropology to political science.

The institute encourages an interdisciplinary approach to the academic study of Islam. Within the Islamic tradition, the institute promotes research on those areas which have had relatively little attention devoted to them in Western academia to date. These include the intellectual and literary expressions of Islam in general, and Shi'ism in particular.

As a new kind of online academic institution, the Berkeley Institute for Islamic Studies is aimed at a high-visibility context and its digital platform makes the institute cost-effective for high-value content compared to traditional academic departments.

The views and conclusions of any BLIIS publication are solely those of its author (s), and do not reflect the views and conclusions of the Institute, its board of directors, management, or its other researchers and scholars.

Copyright © 2018 Berkeley Institute for Islamic Studies

2425 Channing Way Ste B #302 Berkeley, California 94704

www.bliis.org

AUTHOR (S)

Bilal Muhammad is a Fellow and Research Assistant at the Berkeley Institute For Islamic Studies. He is also an MA Candidate at the University of Ottawa Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, B.Ed at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, and Honors BA in Political Science and History at the University of Toronto. He is an educator and researcher based in Toronto, Canada. His main areas of interest include Middle Eastern history, Islamic studies, New Testament studies, Jewish mysticism, Shaykhism, international politics, gender studies, Jungian psychology, and the civil rights movement.

Book Chapter Review: “Muslim Personal Piety” in *The Venture of Islam*.

Bilal Muhammad

Berkeley Institute for Islamic Studies

Keywords

Sufism, Sufi, Venture of Islam, Marshall Hodgson, Muslim Personal Piety, Shi‘ism, Ismā‘ilism, Shi‘a

Book Chapter: “Muslim Personal Piety.” in *The Venture of Islam*, 359-409. By Marshall G.S Hodgson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974. Pp. xxii + 532. ISBN 978-0226346830. \$35.00.

Marshall Hodgson was a scholar of Islamic Studies at the University of Chicago, and he wrote on a diversity of topics in traditional Islamic thought, piecing together the history of Muslim groups. Perhaps his most famous work, which had not been published until after his death, is *The Venture of Islam*, which illustrates the cumulative history of the development of Islam. Particularly, Hodgson analyzes Islamic spiritual traditions in their formative period and their relation to history and selfhood in his chapter on Muslim Personal Piety. However, whilst discussing themes of piety in Twelver and Ismā‘ilī Shi‘ism, Ḥadīth-folk Jamā‘ī-Sunnism, and Sufism, Hodgson makes some unfitting generalizations, binding abstract religious movements with restrictive categories and labels. The assumptions Hodgson makes regarding what are, in reality, polymorphous traditions are in need of being addressed. While Hodgson outlines interesting distinctions between the differing modes of piety of several major Islamic factions, his approach to Sufism is too limited to truly understand its multi-faceted natures, its historical development, its relationship with other Islamic and non-Islamic groups, and its canonizing texts.

An inaugural piece in Hodgson’s article is his crucial distinction between three major spiritual components that make up the “devotional religious experience”.¹ The first component, which he refers to as paradigm tracing, plays little importance Hodgson’s chapter and hence this paper will instead focus on the other two. He identifies the kerygmatic component, which he describes as a spiritual approach that “is sought in irrevocable datable events, in *history*...”² – in other words, a romanticised founding moment in a religious tradition, be it one of triumphant glory or tragic sorrow, is realized and observed. These datable events crucially affect a group’s consciousness and often challenge adherents to respond to them.³ Hodgson offers kerygmatic examples in “radical Shi‘is”⁴, who, among

¹ Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press: 1977), pp. 363

² Ibid, pp. 363

³ Ibid, pp. 364

⁴ Ibid, pp. 373

other groups, presented a “privileged vision of history”.⁵ He notes that the Shī‘a having special knowledge (*‘ilm*) of the hidden meanings of the Qur’an and Sharī‘ā was simply not enough to set them apart from other spiritual sects, and that they furthermore adopted qualities of a “true historical community”.⁶ These qualities would include both a historical connection to a line of suffering Imams⁷ and a post-historical eschatology to be awaited and prepared for.⁸ These aspects, and many others, linked the Shī‘ā to experiential practices recalling the misery of their Imams, such as Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī⁹ and others, and actively waiting for the Hidden Imam.¹⁰

The third major approach was the mystical component, a module of personal piety in which esoteric self-building and discovery creates a recognition of God’s majesty over all things.¹¹ Hodgson describes this approach as controlling one’s consciousness, so that “the person penetrate into ... his self to find ever more comprehensive meanings in the environment”¹². The mystical component, in this article, has been applied to communities centred on inward piety, which had mainly been the Sūfis.¹³ Hodgson sees the embryonic proto-Sufi Muslims as belonging to an original community concerned with individual purification, while the Ḥadīth-folk, Twelver and Ismā‘īlī Shī‘īs, and Mu‘tazilīs were considered kerygmatic.¹⁴ To support this argument for Sufism’s unique development, he cites Sufi focuses on mystical experiential phenomena, moral discipline, general dissociation from social interactivity (on the political and legal ends), asceticism, and the regular performance of “everyday mysticism”.¹⁵ This would, in Hodgson’s view, contrast with the kerygmatic groups, which he believed were less concerned with self-recollection and were instead moulded in reaction to a politically dominant culture – the sociological developments in the Islamic community would, hence, affect the way piety in Islam is understood.

However, Hodgson’s reductionist approach in dealing with Sufism does not sufficiently consider influences in Sufism’s development beyond personal piety. It must first be established that Sufism itself is not a monolithic tradition,¹⁶ and accordingly, Hodgson has incorrectly homogenized its evolution by categorizing it solely under his “mystical component”. Each group within Sufism must be looked at individually rather than collectively, because although the label Sufi (which had arisen in either Kufa¹⁷ or Baghdad¹⁸) has been applied retrospectively on these groups, Sufism itself did not become a collective frontier of Islamic mysticism until its formative period in the 11th century.¹⁹ ‘Sufi’

⁵ Ibid, pp. 373

⁶ Ibid, pp. 373

⁷ Ibid, pp. 377

⁸ Ibid, pp. 373, 377

⁹ Ibid, pp. 378

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 377

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 364

¹² Ibid, pp. 364

¹³ Ibid, pp. 393

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 392-393

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 403, 407, 402, 394, 396

¹⁶ Eric Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam* (World Wisdom: 2010), pp. 66-76

¹⁷ Hodgson, pp. 393

¹⁸ Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (University of California Press: 2007), pp. 7

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 133-134

as a label seems to not have been in popular circulation until the first half of the 9th century,²⁰ and this term has been perhaps incorrectly applied to earlier Muslims with mystical tendencies by many orientalist. Consequently, the term Sufi itself loosely encompasses several different groups, whose teachings can be opposite and whose origins can be affected by factors that have not been considered.

Paradoxical differences have existed within each Sufi community's interaction with society. Most Islamicist academics agree that the word "Ṣūfi" comes from the Arabic word for wool (*ṣūf*). In the view of Karamustafa, the implication of the word *Sufi* "had a certain 'avant-garde' or 'cutting-edge' resonance",²¹ as the wearing of woollen garments was uncommon and even "socially unconventional".²² Hence, the Baghdadi Sufis distinguished themselves as a distinct mystical group with these apparels. However, groups like the Malāmātī Sufis of Khorasan despised such ostentatious display and instead maintained "a strong conformist drive to blend into society".²³ Moreover, Sufi sentiments towards monetary wealth differed in a bipolar way. By the 11th century, Moroccan Sufis were generally a moneyed, wealthy middle class of craftsmen in urbanized areas, or rural political elites and aristocrats.²⁴ The same applied to the followers of Tirmidhī in Lower Iraq, who were proponents of wage-earning.²⁵ But other groups found themselves opposed to money, with some promoting a lifestyle of asceticism. Ghulam Khalil of Baghdad would trample "social convention" by throwing his earned dinars into the river, deeming them as an ungodly temptation.²⁶ Hence, Sufis were not just swayed by esoteric maturity and inward reflection, but also engaged in a social interaction with their communities and time periods. Although Hodgson appropriately recognizes the spiritual disagreements between prominent Sufi teachers like Junayd and Bistāmī, his piece does not discuss the important exoteric differences in Sufi interactions with society within the same era.

Beyond dealing with the multi-faceted nature of differing Sufi communities, many aspects of Sufism may fall under the previously mentioned kerygmatic category. Contrary to Hodgson's argument, Sufism's esoteric nature is not prone to the development of social practices connecting the community to a historical abstract. Perhaps the most popular example of this is the Sufi celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthdate (*mawlid*).²⁷ Celebration of *mawlid* became a part of Sufism's flamboyant "rise in social visibility",²⁸ as it connects the mystical movement to a historical identity ("revelatory moment") at the beginning of the Prophet's life. Moreover, many modern Sufi paths (*turuq*) have adopted doctrines regarding the eschatological Mahdī, which appeal to the expectation of post-historical political figures expected to bring out physical and metaphysical reform.²⁹ These examples can be paralleled with the Shī'ī observance of the death of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī and the doctrine of the awaited Qā'im of Shi'ism, which Hodgson used to reason Shi'ism's kerygmatic nature. Some of these

²⁰ Ahmet Karamustafa, *What is Sufism?*, Voices of Islam, vol. 1 (Praeger Publishers: 2007) pp. 266

²¹ Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, pp. 7

²² *Ibid*, pp. 7

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 48

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 134

²⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 47

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 133

²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 133

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 133

²⁹ Ibrahim Abu-Rabi, *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Blackwell Publishing: 2006), pp. 198

same characteristics exist within Sufism, and therefore, the Sufi tradition cannot be exempt from this component, which is vital in the development of all religious traditions.

The idea that Sufism and Shi‘ism were two clearly distinguishable sects prior to their respective formative periods is perhaps inaccurate. Hodgson says Sufism eventually “formed a single movement, which was closely associated with the Ḥadīth folk... most Sufis were Jamā‘ī-Sunnīs at any rate”.³⁰ This, though, is a generalization more suited for post-Ghazali Sufism, which marked Sufism’s fertilization into Sunni legal tradition.³¹ Rather, Sufism had matured in a similar time and space Shi‘ism had been developing, and we could thus see commonly revered figures like ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Jā‘far al-Ṣādiq. Sufism also held in common many Shi‘ī doctrines that made them both dissimilar to the Marwānids and the Ḥadīth-folk. The concept of Guardianship (*wilāya*) plays a heavy role in Shi‘ism, as *wilāya* was applied to each Shi‘ī group’s differing lines of Imams. A Friend of God (*walī*) is a living saint appointed by God among the Muslims, and he is close to God in love and proximity, with power to intercede and bequeath marvels by God’s will.³² While these *awliyyā*’ and their special rank have been limited to the family of the Prophet in Shi‘ism, many Sufis in Iraq, including Ṭustarī, Nūrī, and Kharrāz adopted this concept.³³ Ṭustarī even claimed to have been the representative of God (*ḥujjat Allah*) on earth; a central concept of Shi‘ism applied to the Imams.³⁴ Visitation of the graves of *awliyyā*’ also became an important custom for Sufis, as Karamustafa outlines, “*ziyāra* was a complex of rituals that included prayer, supplication, votive offerings, sprinkling fragrances and water, lying on tombs, residing within funeral structures, circumambulation, touching and rubbing them...”.³⁵ Although many Sufi communities (but not all) had later become associated with Hodgson’s Jamā‘ī-Sunnīs, the lines dividing Sufi and Shi‘ī spiritualism were probably blurred, making the two groups less distinct in esoteric issues.

Still, there are several traditional penetrations that affected the development of Sufism that Hodgson either brushes over or leaves out completely. Hodgson gives much primacy to the individual, rather than outside influences, as the major originator of Sufi characteristics. He even summons Sigmund Freud in an attempt to explain the mystical ‘oneness’ many sages experience during supernatural experiences.³⁶ Though, Hodgson does not spend much time discussing the impact of pre-Islamic religions in Iraq, Iran, and elsewhere, as they possibly incur influences over Sufi beliefs and practices. A foremost religious tradition existing in pre-Islamic Persia and Lower Iraq was Manichaeism, an Eastern offshoot of Jewish Christianity famous for its dualistic traditions. The Manicheans were largely absorbed into Islam, giving rise to the new-found interest in discovering hidden (*batīnī*) interpretations to the Qur’an in Twelver, Ismā‘īlī, and “Ghulāt” circles.³⁷ Hodgson drew connections

³⁰ Hodgson, pp. 393

³¹ Karamustafa, *Voices of Islam*, pp. 260

³² Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, pp. 128

³³ *Ibid*, pp. 128

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 39

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 130

³⁶ Hodgson, pp. 396-397

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 379

between Ismā‘īlism and Manichaeism,³⁸ but does not consider doing the same with Sufism. But since Sufism had progressed in the same areas as the above traditions, it is probable that some Manichean ideas made their way into some Sufi circles as well. Ṭustarī had taught that the Prophet was a cosmic entity “composed of light” pre-existing his natural self in a primordial state,³⁹ which can further be compared to the Manichean “light-messengers” and “True Prophet” doctrines.⁴⁰ So, Hodgson applies these realities to other major sects without suggesting that perhaps some Sufi doctrines were influenced in the same ways.

While recognizing the importance of the Qur’an in the development of Sufism, Hodgson does not give enough attention to other texts that engendered the formulation of Sūfī thought. Among the most important traditions for Sufi were the Holy Traditions (*aḥādīth qudsī*); a category of divine utterances narrated from the Prophet. While the Holy Traditions were considered to be the literal words of God, they were distinct from the Qur’anic verses, and employed spiritualist connotations in general. Furthermore, although Junayd and Bistāmī were discussed, Hodgson fails to give much mention to the Sufi masters’ biographies and manuals, such as Tirmidhī’s autobiography and eighty surviving works,⁴¹ Kharrāz’s *Kitāb al-Ṣidq*,⁴² al-Nūrī’s *Maqāmāt al-Qūlūb*,⁴³ Ibn ‘Arabī’s works, and many others, despite their grand role in influencing Sufism before, during, and after its formative period. It is, thus, crucial to understand the impact of texts on a Sufi’s individual cognitive spiritualism, as it is often guided by the Holy Traditions, as well as mystics and their works.

Although Hodgson interestingly discusses the challenges and responses of Jamā‘ī-Sunnīs, the Shī‘ā ‘Alids, the Mu‘tazilīs and other traditions, his analysis of Sufism is unseemly. Hodgson fails to recognize simply how polymorphous Sufi groups are, and overlooks social, cultural, and historical influences on Sufism. While Hodgson does identify unique trends to the development of Sufism, including its mostly apolitical attitude, a more complete investigation is necessary in order to fully grasp the evolution of Sufism. Only through inquiry of inner and outer influences on Sufism can the academic community understand the roots of Sufism’s most distinct characteristics. Surely, a religion is much more than what exists within the adherent: it is an abstract that cannot be separated from what impacts it.

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 379

³⁹ Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, pp. 42

⁴⁰ Gerard Luttikhuisen, *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, vol. 58 (Brill: 2006) pp. 171-180

⁴¹ Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, pp. 44

⁴² Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North Carolina Press: 1975) pp. 55

⁴³ Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, pp. 11