

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN ISLAM

DR RON GEAVES

Introduction

All of the world's major religious traditions are marked by considerable diversity of belief and practice. Even though Islam achieves a remarkable degree of unity and coherence through the five pillars and six core beliefs,¹ there still remains considerable diversity created by such factors as the degree of commitment to practice, interpretation of belief and the nature of experience participated in by the believer. There are many whose allegiance to the faith is a question of birth or identity and these are often labelled 'nominal Muslims' by the devout. In a world where population movements, globalisation processes and conflicts of various kinds impact upon individuals and communities, many Muslims take the issue of identity much further and see in Islam a way of proclaiming selfhood through belonging to a community of God that takes precedence over all other loyalties. Their experience of their faith enters the psychological, sociological and political realms. There are also those who maintain their commitment to the faith as the final and best revelation in which a relationship with the divine can be achieved. To some of these the dominant motivation is obedience to the divine will but to others the emphasis of their practice is closeness or intimacy.

Categories of Religious Experience within the Muslim Communities in Britain

In my book *The Sufis of Britain*, I have attempted to categorise the degree of mystical or spiritual experience that exists within Muslim communities in Britain by attempting to establish some criteria of motivation. Essentially I decided to look at the relationship between religion and ethnicity in order to provide some sort of ordering of motivation. After some deliberation it was decided to utilise four categories into which the varieties of experience could be placed.

1. A loose allegiance to the traditional Muslim community defined as the *Ahl-as Sunna wa Jamaat* which represents the variety of Muslim ethnic communities present in Britain.

The adherents of this kind of allegiance to Sufism are not necessarily members of a *tariqa* (Sufi order) nor follow its self-purification practices. However, emotional bonds and loyalties to the Prophet are likely to be strong and Sufi shrines in the place of origin are likely to be visited.

2. Those who are practising Muslims following both a *tariqa* and the *shari'a* (divine law) but still confined to a particular ethnic community.

In this category, membership of the *tariqa* will be confined to a homogeneous ethnic identity. Many members will belong out of a need for identity with a local movement or group arising from the specific place of origin in the country of birth. However, it is important to bear in mind that this kind of membership does not necessarily rule out mystical or religious experiences arising from deep piety. Famous *tariqas* such as the Mevlevi or Chisti have been historically bound to a region but have produced eminent mystics of world renown such as Rumi. Members of these *tariqas* encounter charismatic *shaikhs* (spiritual teachers or guides) whose influence transforms their lives. It is also likely that adherents will come to the *tariqa* on their journey for spiritual fulfilment because they are familiar with the language and the cultural influences or they may be introduced through friendship and family circles.

3. Those who are practising Muslims following both *tariqa* and *shari'a* but who have transcended ethnic boundaries.

In this category, the followers will have given their allegiance to a charismatic living *shaikh* affiliated to one of the major *tariqas*. In these cases, the motivation for adherence is unlikely to have anything to do with ethnic loyalty, and the quest for spiritual experience is likely to be high amongst joiners. It is usually these *tariqas* that are discovered by western converts to Islam through Sufism. Although Islam offers the convert the assurance of certainty that arises from revelation and the security of the maintenance of daily practices authorised by revelation, these converts are attracted through the possibility of mystical experience and direct contact with divinity embodied in the teachings of a living exemplar and described in the classical literature written by Sufi mystics such as Ibn Arabi, Rumi and Attar.²

Transcendence and Immanence

To speak of religious experience in Islam it is first necessary to ascertain the place of experience in the Muslim religious psyche and to discover the kind of experience that has been encouraged by the verses of the Qur'an and the subsequent Hadith. In order to achieve this I am going to make a crude dichotomy between those Muslims that understand the central concept of *tawhid* (divine unity or uniqueness) in a way that stresses transcendence and those that make their focus Allah's immanence.³ Generally, observers of Islam tend to see the religion as one with a view of the Divine as essentially transcendent and encapsulated in the idea of uniqueness contained within *tawhid*. In this view, Allah is the Holy Other who manifests divine will and mercy through the provision of guidance manifested through messengers and books. This revelation essentially provides the directions in which human beings can live an existence in harmony with and obedient to Allah's will. The reward of paradise will greet the obedient and hell will punish evildoers who ignore Allah's direction and guidance.

Recording Angels, Divine Beings and Worship

In interviews with Muslim informants, I have been struck by their strong belief in paradise and hell. On many occasions Muslim friends and associates have urged me to convert to Islam as they fear for my fate on the Day of Judgement. For all Muslims this polarity of destination is reflected in the six core beliefs which clearly established an imperative rather than interpretative framework in which human beings could live under the sovereignty of God and in accordance with his will.⁴ The final prophethood of Muhammad is the means for the last and complete revelation of God's will through which the Qur'an is given for all humankind. The Day of Judgement will ensure that the obedient and the disobedient receive their just rewards. The Qur'an indicates that recording angels note every person's intentions

and deeds in preparation for the final judgement.⁵ Traditionally Muslims believe that there are two pairs of angels involved in the task of recording for judgement. The first pair accompany human beings throughout their life. The angel on the right-hand side of the person records all good intentions and actions, whereas the angel on the left only records actual wrong-doing.⁶ Bad intentions that are not translated into action are not counted against the believer at the Day of Judgement. The Qur'an confirms the presence of these angels for the Muslim:

Behold, two guardian angels
Appointed to learn his doings
Learn and note them,
One sitting on the right
And one on the left.⁷

The Qur'an also affirms the presence of Munkar and Nakir, the two angels that appear in the grave to provide initial judgement.⁸ It is believed that these angels will eventually accompany the soul at the final Day of Judgement. These angels do not in anyway lessen the supremacy of God's omniscience. However, they do indicate that the Muslim conscience must deal with an overwhelming sense of being observed by the divine. When you add the sense of sharing the earth with the invisible jinn, we can begin to comprehend something of the nature of the enchanted world that the believing Muslim inhabits.

It is in worship that the Muslim most fully experiences the presence of supernatural beings. Just as pious jinn were attracted to the revelation of the Qur'anic verses, so they are attracted to Muslim holy places, special occasions and places where the devout perform prayers or *dhikr* (the remembrance of Allah). This is equally true of angels. A traditional pious Muslim is not only aware of two personal angels but the possible presence of supernatural beings in the place of worship especially on days that are sacred. An Hadith states that Muhammad has said:

Whoever prays one hundred *raka'at* in this night, God will send him one hundred angels – thirty to announce paradise for him, thirty to protect him from the punishment of the fire, thirty to keep the accidents of this world from him, and ten to keep the cunning of Satan from him.⁹

The Prophet is referring to the Night of Power (*Lailat al-Qadr*) celebrated in the middle of Ramadan and which commemorates the first revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad.¹⁰

The act of praise (*tasbih*) is the chief occupation of angels and the Hadith speak of thousands upon thousands of angels who surround the Throne of Allah in constant praise. Muslim prayer manuals often stress that human beings perform an act of praise they are sharing in the worship of angels as part of wonderful divine order.¹¹ Padwick points out that this heavenly order is so holy and powerful that the devout will often use it to reinforce their prayers of petition.¹² This joining with the angels is a two-way communication. It is believed that wherever human beings express deep piety or love for Allah and His final Prophet, angels are also attracted. Muslim prayer-manuals tell of the deep interest of the angelic world in the worship of human beings and their participation in it and their own prayers of intercession on behalf of the worshipper.¹³ An Hadith recounts that:

God has wandering angels, who, when they pass a *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) circle say to one another, 'Sit down here'. And when the people offer a petition they say Amen to the prayer. And when the people call down blessings on the Prophet those angels join in the blessing till they finish; then the angels say to one another: 'Blessed are they, they will not go away unforgiven.'¹⁴

On the Night of Power, it is particularly believed that the supernatural beings appear or descend. Again an Hadith confirms the believer's conviction in regard to the presence of divine supernatural beings.

When the Night of Power comes, Allah commands Gabriel to descend with 70,000 angels. And they set up their torches in the mosque of the Meccan sanctuary and in the Medinan sanctuary, and in Jerusalem and Mount Sinai. Then Gabriel plants his torch on the roof of the Ka'aba.

Then the angels separate over the lands of the earth and visit every Muslim whom they find at the prayer-rite or engaged in *dhikr* and salute him and clasp his hand and say Amen to his petition, and ask forgiveness for all the community of Muhammad and pray for them until daybreak.¹⁵

Padwick states that all 'human worship is overshadowed with the rustling of wings.'¹⁶ In part these references in the prayer manuals function as encouragement to the devout but they also provide a strong sense of the immanence of the Divine in a religion whose imperative mood is one of transcendence. In this interpretation of *tawhid*, Allah may not be literally omnipresent in space as He is in time, but the angels ensure that He is represented in His creation and thus the divine presence can be felt by those that worship. When attending particularly powerful *dhikr* gatherings especially those held on special occasions such as the Prophet's birthday, Muslims will describe their experience of the occasion as the presence of angels in the gathering rather than the presence of Allah.

Jacques Jomier (1989) states that 'Muslims have a very lively faith in the invisible world; this is particularly marked in popular belief.'¹⁷ However, the evidence from the Qur'an and Hadith suggests that this faith in the presence of the supernatural goes beyond popular belief to the heart and essence of the religion. Although conventional Muslim doctrine does not ascribe to Allah's literal presence within matter, the Creator is believed to have provided enough bridges between this world and the next, for the Muslim to be able to feel a sense of the numinous within the creation. In fact, observation of the creation is recommended as an act that will bring the pious to an awareness of Allah's glory. The Qur'an itself describes creation as a 'sign' of Allah.¹⁸

Union with the Divine

The Qur'an can also provide a very different interpretation of Allah's presence and the possibility of a more mystical framework of religious experience based on immanence. One of the most important verses of the Qur'an for Sufis was the statement that Allah is 'nearer to man than his jugular vein'.¹⁹ Allah is perceived by the Sufis as the Beloved and they are His lovers longing for union with the Divine Essence which is only attainable by the Heart.²⁰ By the ninth century, the doctrine and methodology of this path to mystical union was fully developed. Leading mystics proclaimed their experience of Allah in ways that overwhelmed the strong sense of distinction and otherness found in more orthodox presentations of *tawhid*. Typical of these ecstatic utterances is this well-known proclamation by Abu Yazid:

Adorn me with Thy Unity,
Clothe me with Thy Selfhood,
And raise me up to Thy Oneness,
So that when Thy creatures see me
They will say we have seen Thee
And Thou art That.²¹

This Sufi experience of union led to profound reinterpretation of the nature of Divinity and the human being, and brought about a unique understanding of *tawhid* not found amongst those who simply followed the outer observations of Islam. The emphasis on transcendence had stimulated a numinous experience founded upon fear and awe in which Allah is primarily seen as the ultimate judge of humankind's actions. But the closeness of the divine immanence made Allah intimate to His lovers. The female mystic, Rabi'a of Basra (d.801CE) makes this clear in her well-known and often quoted pronouncement:

Allah, if I worship Thee for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I Worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, grudge me not Thine everlasting Beauty.²²

The Sufis' focus on love and union revolutionised the central Islamic doctrine of *tawhid*. They saw Allah as the sole reality and there was no other existence apart from or independent of Allah. *Tawhid* is defined as the awareness of the reality of an all-embracing, all-encompassing oneness. *Shirk*, the greatest sin of orthodox Muslims, usually defined as associating another with Allah or departing from strict monotheism, is reinterpreted as awareness of duality or existence outside of Allah's omnipresence in both time and space.²³ This is supported by the verse of the Qur'an that states: 'He is the First and the Last and the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden.'²⁴

The Modern Sufi in Britain

In bringing this analysis of classical Islamic mysticism closer to my own interest in the experience of contemporary Muslims, particularly those living in Britain, it is necessary to re-examine the term 'Sufi'. In my book *Sufis of Britain* I decided to use Nicholson's definition:

The transformation of the One transcendent God of Islam into One real Being who dwells and works everywhere, and whose throne is not less, but more, in the human heart than in the heaven of heavens.²⁵

Nicholson's proviso of 'more and less' gave me a scale of flexibility to monitor the diversity in the tradition. The challenge was to incorporate the full range of diverse groups that defined themselves as Sufi. There are large numbers of Muslims who define themselves as Sufi and belong to recognised *tariqas* but who cannot be defined as mystics in any sense. On the other extreme, there are those that define themselves as Sufis, certainly have a self-identity that places them in the mystic tradition but do not acknowledge any allegiance to Islam.

Many of my informants would prefer not to make the distinction between Islam and Sufism, but instead, simply define Sufism as the inner dimension of Islam which must go alongside and complement the outer dimension maintained by obedience to the injunctions of the *Shari'a*. Many Muslims who understand the need of the inner dimension to their faith would prefer not to be labelled as Sufis since they feel that the label would distract from their primary identities as practising Muslims. Many others would feel strongly that to be a Muslim would require commitment to both the inner and the outer dimensions of their tradition. They would argue that the absence of the former reduces Islam to a sterile outward observance lacking in essential inner purification while the lack of the latter would remove them completely from the Muslim community. In this context many practitioners of the disciplines taught in a *tariqa* often identified themselves to me as 'practical Muslims'. This is interpreted to mean that every aspect of their being, body, mind and heart, is involved in their path of surrender to Allah. Beyond this there is a far wider circle, comprising of millions of traditional Muslims who might not necessarily identify themselves as Sufi but who would practice their faith in a manner which acknowledges the contribution of Sufis as practitioners of Islam *par excellence*.

The Manifestation of the Inner Dimension

As these devout Muslims consider the practice of their religion to be incomplete without its inner dimension, it is essential to explore the dynamics of how that dimension of the faith manifests in their lives. Most do not proclaim the monistic experience of Abu Yazid but they are rooted in the common mystical practice of remembrance, defined as maintaining a sense of God's presence throughout one's daily life. The Qur'an addresses the Prophet with the following advice:

And keep yourself content with those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face; and let not thine eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this life; nor obey any whose heart We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us; one who follows his own desires, and his affair has become all excess.²⁶

In order to achieve this awareness of Allah it is necessary to cleanse the heart of impurities and those who define themselves as Sufis place considerable importance on *tassawuf* (cleansing the heart) or *tazkiyat al-nafs*, the term used in the Qur'an. Muhammad himself is the ultimate model for the ideal state of self-purification and remembrance of Allah and the intense love of his Companions (*sahaba*) for the Prophet is the ideal of the Sufi relationship with the final messenger of God.²⁷ It is more likely that someone who practises this path of self-purification (*ilm al-tassawuf*) will be regarded as a Sufi by fellow Muslims in spite of their own definition of themselves.

Teaching and Practice based on a Hadith

This ideal Muslim experience is expressed as *Islam* (perfect submission), *Iman* (perfect faith) and *Ihsan* (perfected character). An important Hadith expresses the role of all three to the Sufi. The Hadith is narrated by Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (d.875), whose collection is regarded as the most reliable along with that of Muhammad ibn Ismail Bukhari (d.870), but will be told in the story form as recounted by a British Muslim informant.

A man came up to the Prophet whilst he was sitting with some of his Companions. He was unknown to any of them and wore white clothes. His hair was very black. He sat close to the Prophet and placed his hands on the Prophet's knees. He asked Muhammad, 'Tell me about Islam?' The Prophet replied, 'Islam is to bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is His Prophet; to perform the prayer; to pay *zakat* (the poor tax); to fast in the month of Ramadan; and to undergo the Hajj if it is possible.' The man replied, 'Correct, you have spoken the truth.' Then the man asked, 'What is *iman*?' The Prophet replied, '*Iman* is to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Prophets and in the Day of Judgement; and to believe in what has been ordained whether it is good or evil. The man responded again, 'Correct, you have spoken the truth.' The man then asked, 'Tell me about *ihsan*?' The Prophet replied, '*Ihsan* is to worship Allah as though you see Him for it is certain that He sees you.' Later the Prophet told Umar that the man was Jibreel (Gabriel) who had come to teach them their religion.²⁸

This Hadith is clearly a direction to all Muslims as it includes the compulsory five pillars and the six core beliefs of Islam. But for Sufis it is the third part of the questioning by Jibreel that has become central to their belief and practice and places their emphasis on pious experience. For a Sufi *Islam* and *Iman* must be based in *Ihsan*. In other words, it is essential to perform the rituals of Islam as if in the presence of Allah or, at least, with the awareness that Allah sees and knows not only a Muslim's actions but also his intentions. *Ihsan* thus guards against the danger of the religious practices provided by revelation becoming dry rituals. It also serves to remind the Muslim that the presence of Allah is a reality. Therefore it is necessary for Muslims to maintain the remembrance and awareness of Allah's presence in their hearts at all times. The ultimate condition of worship would be to recollect Allah at every moment to the complete forgetfulness of the world or self. It is the goal of the Sufi to

achieve this by perfecting *Ihsan* through modelling themselves on the actions of the Prophet and by practising *tazkiyat al-nafs* to purify the *nafs* of impurities such as anger, greed, jealousy, hatred and lust. The variety of disciplines which allow the Sufi to remember Allah (*dhikr*) are taught in the various *tariqas* and are collectively known as *tasawwuf*.²⁹

The most important of the practices that lead to purification is *dhikr*, the method of remembrance of Allah. Although acknowledging the importance of the five times a day ritual *salat*, most Sufis only begin their practice in the five pillars of Islam. Based on the Qur'an's injunction to: 'establish regular prayer; for prayer restrains from shameful and evil deeds; but remembrance of Allah is the greatest thing in life without any doubt'³⁰, the *tariqas* have developed various spiritual disciplines to maintain the recollection of Allah in all the situations of daily life. *Dhikr* is the heart of the Sufi existence and regular practice leads to immersion in Allah and the practitioner becomes transformed as the heart becomes soaked in Allah's love and mercy. *Dhikr* usually consists of chanting Allah's divine names but the most universal and beloved method of remembering Allah is the repetition of the first clause of the *Shahadah*, '*la illaha illa'llah*. Some *dhikr* groups perform passionately and emotionally whilst others are more melodic and harmonious creating a sense of tranquillity and peace. Others use various means of chanting in conjunction with the breath to create transformations of consciousness.³¹

The Prophet and His Light

Alongside this spiritual discipline of self-purification, two important focuses of devotion promote an environment of piety amongst the devout. These are love of the Prophet and the *Shaikh* (spiritual master). Many of my informants in Britain indicated that they were different from other Muslims in regard to their love and respect for the Prophets of Islam but encapsulated in Muhammad, the final seal of Prophethood. His actions have become the norm for all generations of pious Muslims and many Sufis attempt to model themselves on his life right down to fine details of behaviour and even appearance.³²

Many Sufis believe that the Prophet preceded his own human existence as the first creation of Allah and that creation actually came into existence for the sake of God's ultimate beloved. This respect for the Prophet is manifested in intercessionary prayers. Devout Muslims will often take the opportunity to increase their love for the Prophet either individually or collectively by praising him or sending blessings to him. There is a vast body of popular poetry and songs that praise Muhammad and their lyrics are used in Sufi gatherings to increase their love for him. Any gathering of traditional Muslims, whether in the mosque on Friday or at regional, national or international conferences or gatherings will take the opportunity to lavish praise upon the Prophet of Islam. It is believed by Sufis that this demonstration of love for the Prophet will transform the appearance, personality, character and mannerisms of the *murid* (disciple). Without the spiritual presence of the Prophet in their practices and gatherings access to Allah would not be possible and Islam would have no inner path and Muslims would be left with the outer shell. It is not possible to be in the company of Sufis for very long before becoming aware of an enchanted world in which the Prophet not only intercedes on behalf of the pious, but also manifests in dreams and visions to transform lives and provide guidance.³³

The transmission of spiritual authority which originates in the Light of the Prophet is believed by Sufis to pass through an authorised *silsila* (chain of authority) passed down through spiritual masters (*shaikhs*) and traceable to Muhammad through either of his two companions, Hazrat Ali or Abu Bakr.³⁴ These masters are believed to be Allah's friends

(*awliya*) and as such they share in the privileges granted to the final messenger of God. They too are alive in the grave and provide a focal point where Muslims can seek intercession to give them hope and solace from the ills and injustices of this world. Their tombs are not only centres for solace and intercession but provide focal points for spiritual journeys and retreats for the devout seeker of Allah.

This vast community of past and present saints cements the Sufis together into a recognisable tradition within Islam and extends their influence into traditional Muslim worship through the countless *mazars* (tomb shrines) that provide an alternative network of sacred places throughout the Muslim world in addition to the mosques. The shrines are a sacred space that centres around human spirituality embodied in the remains of Muslims who have not only maintained obedience to the outer laws of Islam but whose lives manifested an inner path of proximity to Allah. The power of the saint is not diminished by death and it is this belief that maintains the importance of the shrine and provides the impetus for the manifest devotion of the pilgrims as they enter the tomb-enclosure.

The living *shaikh* is no less important to his disciples. It is believed that his power from Allah extends to spiritual insight into an individual's heart and mind (*firasa*), entry into the secrets of God and creation (*kashf*), the ability to perform miracles (*karamat*) and the permission to bless (*baraka*), but above all he is connected spiritually with all the *shaikhs* that form the *silsila* back to the Prophet. For this reason the light of the Prophet is present in him and he is therefore able to guide his *murids* by first transmitting his spiritual blessings through the initiatory *bai'at*. It is the *shaikh* who will guide the *murid* in his or her personal spiritual discipline. Living sheikhs are connected to a cosmic network of *awliya* who are organised into a spiritual hierarchy which is believed to maintain the existence of the physical creation. Such is the awe and devotion of *murids* to their living master that they are liable to perceive him as the *ghaus* or *qutb*, the pinnacle of the saintly hierarchy.³⁵

Sufism remains a vibrant living tradition which still maintains its position at the heart of traditional Islam, and contemporary practitioners of *tasawwuf* draw upon scriptural sources to justify their tradition and their access to direct experience of Allah's immanence through their practices. Areas where Sufism remains a strong influence on traditional Muslim belief and practice tend to be at the periphery of the Muslim world away from the Arab hinterland. These areas such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Turkey, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Persia are also the places that constitute the dominant communities that have migrated to western Europe. Consequently the Sufi influence on the Muslim migrant communities is strong.

Conclusion

In spite of the strong motivation of community and self identity that forms part of the ethnic phenomenon in Britain, my researches amongst the Muslim communities, in particular those that are Sufi influenced discovered a world where the presence of the Divine was experienced in a number of ways. Heavenly beings that form part of the cosmic hierarchy such as angels and jinn seemed to be experienced as part of the everyday world inhabited by the pious Muslim. Very often deceased saints formed an additional hierarchy of divine intervention available through the prayers of the supplicant and above all these, the Prophet occupied the Muslim religious psyche as the ultimate living presence of the mercy and love of Allah. All of these functioned to bring the transcendent Allah close to the practising Muslim and enclose him or her in a world where the Divine is available as part of the experience of living this life before moving to the next.

In addition to these spiritual beings, living *shaikhs* and shrine networks all supplemented the more well-known sacred spaces of Islam to provide concentrated well-springs of experience that transcends the everyday and mundane. In addition to this, the Sufi practitioner maintains the conviction that Allah's essence is the same as the heart's essence and can be reached in a moment of self-shattering ecstasy of unity that breaks the boundaries of normal everyday space and time. To such a pious Muslim, every invocation of Allah's name brings the experience of Allah one step closer.

NOTES

1. The five pillars of Islam are a) the Shahadah, the statement of faith that witnesses to Islam '*La ilaha illa 'llah, Muhammadun rasulu 'llah*' (there is no god but God and Muhammad is His messenger); b) *salat* (the five-times-a-day obligatory ritual prayer); c) *Ramadan* (the month of abstinence from food, drink and sex from sunrise to sunset); d) *Hajj* (the annual pilgrimage to Makkah that should be undertaken at least once in the lifetime of a Muslim); e) *Zakat* (the contribution from income over and above normal requirements to provide welfare for the needy). The six core beliefs are 1). the oneness of Allah; 2). the omniscience of Allah; 3) belief in angels; 4) scriptural revelation 5) prophethood 6) reward or punishment in the life after death decided at the Day of Judgement.
2. Geaves, R. A. (2000) *The Sufis of Britain*, Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, p.72.
3. *Tawhid* (the unity and uniqueness of Allah) is the central doctrine of Islam. It presupposes not only the absolute Oneness of God but also the uniqueness. Allah cannot be compared with anything in His creation. However, those who focus their understanding of *Tawhid* on uniqueness tend to emphasise Allah's transcendence. Those who focus on unity or oneness tend to emphasise immanence. The latter interpretation of *Tawhid* can lead to more monistic rather than monotheistic understanding of divinity.
4. For a detailed exposition of the workings of conscience in Islam see Geaves, R.A. (1999) 'Conscience in Islam', *Religion and Conscience*, ed. Hanniford, Robert, Canterbury: Gracewing Books
5. But verily over you
Are appointed angels
To protect you
Kind and honourable-
Writing down your deeds
They know
All that ye do.
As for the Righteous,
They will be in bliss;
And the Wicked
They will be in the Fire

(*The Holy Qur'an* (11405AH revised Abdullah Yusef Ali English translation), The Presidency of Islamic Researches, Mushaf Al-Madinah An-Nabawiyah: King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex, Sura Al-Infitar, 82:10-14).

6. I have not been able to ascertain the Arabic names for these two angels in any text. However, informants have assured me that they are called *Kiraman* (angel of the right) and *Katebeen* (angel of the left). My informants are Muslims from the Indian subcontinent and the transliteration of these names is from the Urdu form rather than the Arabic.
7. *The Holy Qur'an*, (op.cit) Sura Qaf 50:17.
8. At length, when death approaches
One of you. Our angels
Take his soul, and they
never fail in their duty (Sura Al-An'am 6:61).
9. Gatje, H. (1997) *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*, Oxford: Oneworld, p.50.
10. The Night of Power has been compared with Michaelmas by Constance Padwick (p.232). The night when 'angels and spirits descend (ibid). Gatje also emphasises the lessening of the divide between the divine and human world on this night. He states that mercy and forgiveness are easily accessible and the Prophet's intercession readily available. In Muslim miracle stories it is claimed that the waters of the Zamzam spring in Makkah increase on this night (Gatje, op.cit, p.50).
11. Padwick, Constance (1996 2nd ed) *Muslim Devotions*, Oxford: Oneworld, p.67.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid, p.231.
14. *Al-Hirju 'l-man*, as-Sanuti, p.90 cited in Padwick, op.cit, p.232.
15. *Taharatu 'l-qulub*, p72, cited in Padwick, ibid.
16. Padwick, op.cit., p.231
17. Jomier, Jacques (1989) *How to Understand Islam*, London: SCM Press, p.41
18. The Qur'an has several passages in which it describes the phenomena of nature as signs of Allah. Some such as 50:20 and 45:3 specifically refer to aspects of creation as a sign; others cite the phenomena of nature as evidence of Allah's power or mercy without using the term 'sign'. These are still regarded as 'sign passages' (Watt, W.M. (1970), *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, Islamic Surveys 8, Edinburgh University Press, p.122).
19. *The Holy Qur'an*, (op.cit), Qaf, 50:16
20. Geaves, (2000), op.cit, p.13.
21. Quoted in Zaehner, R. C. (1994) *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, p.94 but attributed to Abu Yazid of Bistam by Abu Nasr al-Sarraj.
22. Quoted in Lings, M. (1995) *What is Sufism*, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, p.106.
23. Geaves, (2000), op.cit., p.13.
24. *The Holy Quran* (op.cit), al-Hadid, 57:3.
25. Nicholson, R. (1989 3rd Edition), *The Mystics of Islam*, Harmondsworth: Arkana, p.8.
26. *The Holy Qur'an* (op.cit), al-Kahf 18:28.
27. Geaves, (2000), op.cit. p.23.
28. The Hadith was recounted in an interview with Abid Hussein, a *murid* of Sufi Abdullah, on 27th November, 1997 in Birmingham.
29. Geaves, (2000), op.cit., p.25.
30. *The Holy Qur'an* (op.cit), al-Ankabut 29:45

31. Geaves, (2000), op.cit, p.43.
32. This kind of imitation of the Prophet's behaviour, practices, morals, ethics and appearance is known as *adab*. Members of a spiritual *tariqa* are likely to follow the *adab* of their *shaykh*. It is believed that the *adab* of the *shaykh* will lead to surrender. As the *shaykh* is believed to be surrendered to the Prophet so also will the disciple be led to the next stage of the Prophet's *adab*. The Prophet is believed to be surrendered to Allah and thus the disciple is led on to the final stage of imitation where he/she is lost in the consciousness of Allah.
33. Geaves (2000), op.cit.pp.28-32.
34. In the Sunni tradition, Abu Bakr was the first Caliph of Islam after the Prophet's death. Hazrat Ali was the fourth Caliph and the last of the caliphs known as 'rightly-guided'. In the Shi'a tradition it is believed that Abu Bakr usurped the leadership of the Muslim community and Ali should have been the first caliph. This would have kept the succession in the Prophet's bloodline. Sufis give great respect to both of the two close companions of the Prophet. All of the Sufi orders claim that they originated with Hazrat Ali except for the Naqshbandi *tariqa* that claims to have been founded by Abu Bakr.
35. Geaves, (2000) op.cit. pp.35-42

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THE AUTHOR

Dr Ron Geaves is Head of the Study of Religions at University College Chichester. He has published several articles on a variety of faith communities that have successfully transmigrated to Britain from the subcontinent but his main focus has been on the Muslim communities.

In particular, he is interested in Muslim mysticism and the various forms of Sufism. His last book was entitled *The Sufis of Britain* and was published by Cardiff Academic Press in 2000. He has travelled extensively in Northern India and other parts of the Muslim world and has extensive contacts with contemporary Sufi practitioners both in diaspora and in places of origin. He is firmly committed to ethnographic study of religion that allows for intimate contact with contemporary spiritual and religious experiences of practitioners.

His latest publication is the Continuum *Glossary of Religious Studies*, an exploration of terminology used in seven world faiths. It will be published by Pinter Press in the summer of 2001.

RERC Second Series Occasional Paper 29
May 2001
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ISBN 0 906165 40 7