

# The Legacy of Abu al-Qasim Muhammad

The subject of Islam and Prophet Muhammad has already occupied many annals, yet some description from a gnostic angle would appear to be necessary.<sup>1</sup> The following is a perspective of Islam according to my understanding after some ten years experiential and objective study. These comments are not in any way intended as a complete description of the religion and the belief.

This Prophet of Islam was not (according to my understanding) a spiritual replacement for Jesus, though it is arguable that Islam contains much of what Jesus taught – especially in its esoteric form. The Qur'an<sup>2</sup> is specific that Adam, Abraham, Noah, Moses and Jesus were all representatives (and great Prophets) of God to teach and lead according to the circumstances of the time.<sup>3</sup> Muhammad declared, however, that he came to re-establish the religion of Abraham – a relic and symbol of whom was and is the Ka'abah at Mecca. This was a different perspective to that of Jesus, who came (as I see it) to tell of a direct spirituality, but whereas the message of Jesus was not understandable to all and was not taught as a religion, the message of Islam was open to so many, and provided doors via gradual spiritual growth. Prophet Muhammad was in this way indeed a 'Comforter' (the earlier-mentioned 'Paraclete' in the Gospel of John).

The general acceptability (at the time) of the genuine teaching of Muhammad is noticeable when, prior to his acceptance as Prophet by the Arabs in general, when circumstances were so tough and the Muslims so few in number, Muhammad and his companions were forced to seek shelter from the King of Abyssinia – who was a Christian! According to history, this King was in no doubt as to the authenticity of Muhammad.

Part of Muhammad's great accomplishment in the eventual creation of Islam was the unification of hitherto disparate Arab tribes. But the Prophet's demise brought fears as to who would be able to retain this unity – and those fears were well founded as three of the subsequent successors to Muhammad (the four *al-Rashidun Khalifat* – the Righteous Caliphs) were assassinated. Division became inevitable following the death of the last of these four - 'Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet – as so many believed it was he that should have been the Prophet's automatic successor. It is sad that a religion so strongly founded on the notion of peace was subject to so much violence, but the reasons for the violence should not be put on the religion itself.

It is important to realise that Islam is today seen to be consisting of two main threads, or groups. These are entitled *Sunnis* (relating to the practise of the religion based on the *sunnah*, or practises of the Prophet), and the *Shia*, whose name stems from the phrase *shia-atul 'Ali*, relating to that party of *Muslims* who followed the spiritual authority of 'Ali (the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet) on the death of the Prophet – even before 'Ali became Caliph. The Shia based their belief on the apparent authority of the Prophet himself, made just prior to his death, on the way from returning from his last pilgrimage (*hajj*).

The Shia believe that the divine wisdom of the Qur'an was most properly divulged by 'Ali, particularly after the death of the Prophet<sup>4</sup>. According to the Shia movement, 'Ali was vested with the power of *ta'wil* (inner teaching, or Gnostic wisdom), and, accordingly, was recognised as the first *Imam*<sup>5</sup> (spiritual leader of all Muslims) by the Shia. Subsequent Imams must be of the progeny of 'Ali and appointed by the Imam of the time, prior to his death. This notion was (and is) anathema to the Sunnis.

The term 'Fatimid' relates to the spiritual line of Imams emanating from the marriage of the Prophet's daughter Fatima and 'Ali. The division between Sunnis and Shia became particularly manifest on the assassination of 'Ali, and also the martyrdom of 'Ali and Fatima's son (and

---

<sup>1</sup> But a basic description of Islam is at the end of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> The Holy Book of Islam.

<sup>3</sup> The great Sufi ibn al-Arabi wrote of the nature and purpose of each prophet in his *Fusus al-Hikam* ("The Wisdom of the Prophets").

<sup>4</sup> A Shia tradition is that 'Ali was said to have a spiritual relationship to the Prophet "as Aaron was unto Moses".

<sup>5</sup> Note that the Sunnis use the word 'Imam' in a different sense – he is generally the spiritual leader of a mosque.

successor to the Imamate) Hussein at Karbala. Their shrines at Najaf and Karbala are to this day highly venerated by the Shia.

The teachings of the Shia are concerned with two major forms, or aspects of life; the outward (*zahir*), and inner (*batini*). A basic example of these two aspects is in the meaning of the word *jihad* (or sacrifice for God). The Western World may largely be unaware that the *greater* jihad is action against one's own base self, *not* (for example) action against others, and certainly not in the form of unwarranted terrorism.

One Shia Imam (the fifth or sixth, depending on Shia group), Jaffer-as-Saddiq, is also known to have had particular influence over the entire Muslim community (*Ummah*). He had the attention of many spiritual groups and individuals in Islam, both Sunni and Shia, and also (remarkably), the alchemist Gabir (Jabir). After Imam Jaffer, there was some confusion as to which son was to carry on the mantle as Imam, particularly as his eldest son (Isma'il) was thought to have died before his father. But Imam Jaffer is known only to have confirmed the passing of Imamate to Isma'il, however, but as Isma'il was not present on the demise of Imam Jaffer (nor his whereabouts known), the younger son Musa assumed the Imamate. Thereby began the first major division in the Shia Imamate, as Musa's line became known as 'the Twelvers' (ending in a 12th Imam without progeny), today being the most orthodox branch and living mainly in Iran and Iraq, whilst the believers in Imam Isma'il later became known as Isma'ilis.

Amongst the Shia, there is a party that, according to them, still has an Imam whose ancestry derives directly from 'Ali. This branch of the Shia is today generally called the Isma'ilis, or Nizari Isma'ili Shia, or Agakhanis, as their present Imam is the current Aga Khan. His followers are scattered worldwide, and are thought to number about 20 millions. A number is difficult to determine, particularly as the habitat of many is in the midst of Russia and China, as well as the major countries of the Western World, and elsewhere. Whoever is the current Isma'ili Imam has the task of interpreting the Qur'an to his adherents, the Isma'ilis, according to time and place – how things are *now*.

Though the Isma'ili movement is numerically a fraction of the totality of Islam (and has been for many centuries), it has had a disproportionate affect on the whole of Islam – indeed, on the world in general. The eminent writer on Islam, Seyyed Hossain Nasr, states in his introduction to *Isma'ili Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Iran, 1977):

The study of Islamic civilization and culture would not be complete without a careful consideration of the role of Isma'ilism in Islamic history. There is hardly an aspect of the life of the Islamic community, especially in its earlier period, which was not touched in one way or another by the presence of Isma'ilism. The history of the Persian Gulf as well as of North Africa was altered appreciably by Isma'ilian activity in the ninth century. Then the founding of the Fatimid caliphate [based in Egypt in the city of al-Qahira (Cairo), founded by the Isma'ilis] changed the whole course of history in a region ranging from Tunisia to practically the gates of Baghdad itself. It also played an important role in Persia especially with the advent of the 'Resurrection of Alamut' which grew out of the earlier phase of Isma'ilism. Subsequently, Isma'ilism has had an important role in the historical development of the Yemen, the Indian sub-continent and more recently East Africa.

As far as various intellectual and artistic aspects of Islamic civilization and culture are concerned, the presence of Isma'ilism is even more evident. Early Islamic theology, both Sunni and Twelve-Imam Shi'ite, bears the imprint of its debates with Isma'ilism. Isma'ili philosophy, still not fully appreciated as a major element in the intellectual life of the Islamic community, stands as one of the richest schools of thought in early Islamic history. The esoteric doctrines of Isma'ilism were related to certain schools of Sufism, while the Isma'ilis' pursuit of the intellectual sciences in general was instrumental in the development of the sciences. This is particularly evident in Fatimid Egypt which was witness to the activity of some of the greatest Islamic scientists. Likewise, members of this same dynasty became patrons of the arts and made possible one of the most creative periods of Islamic art. Even in juridical, social and political thought, Isma'ilism produced works of appreciable importance which had an impact upon the community as a whole.

Islam, especially during the Fatimid period, had a vitality which for hundreds of years was unequalled at the time of the so-called Dark Ages in Europe, and helped to inspire the European Renaissance. Muslims borrowed much learning from the Greeks, Persians, Jews and Hindus, and

integrated learning from those sources with teachings from the Qur'an. Western culture has, in turn, taken much from Islamic culture, including our numerical system, and many words in our vocabulary, such as alkali, algebra, alcohol, nadir, etc. And (some say) cultural handovers such as Morris Dancing!

There are also other 'gnostic' (*batini*) traditions in Islam, generally called *sufi*-ism, and are most often attached to Islam. Most of these traditions are known to have stemmed from Imam 'Ali also, although some strands have emanated from other 'Companions of the Prophet', such as Abu Bakr (the first Caliph after the death of the Prophet). From this source, many strands of Sufi teachings (*tariqas*) have evolved in their own style ("according to time and place"), each from a leader who is known to have passed on the inner spiritual message, such as Jami and Rumi. Rumi, who is also known for his poetic, but allegorical, writings, was greatly influenced by Shams-i-Tabriz, who is strongly suspected by some as having been an Isma'ili missionary (*da'i*), or even an Isma'ili Imam! Rumi was founder of the "Whirling Dervishes" movement in Turkey – the Mevlevi order of Sufis.

Where Islam spread, the gnostic element of the faith went also. It became most profoundly developed in Asia Minor, Persia (Iran), Afghanistan, Mesopotamia (Iraq) and India. Ibn al-'Arabi, born in Spain during the Omayyad Caliphate there, is a very major name in Sufi tradition. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith (an attempt at reconciling Hindu/Islamic disparities), was himself a Sufi or at least hugely influenced by Sufism, though born a Hindu. Isma'ilis and Sufis are now prevalent in Western countries, as are Muslims of all sects.

It is also noteworthy that at the height of its culture, Christians and Jews not only flourished within the Islamic state, but at one time were even allowed to practise their own laws within the Islamic state. The medieval *Knights Templar* (much to the chagrin of other crusaders) gained empathy with the Muslims, and the knights admitted both Muslims and Jews into their spiritual meetings.

An outstanding feature of Islam is that it is a total system – it permeates through every aspect and fabric of life. Whereas in Western societies religion is these days separate from politics, in Islamic nations the legal, economic and educational systems work *from* the religion (based on the *sharia*), though possibly less so than in ancient times. Sadly, Islam thus incurs criticism that it is a moribund system based on ancient values that have little relevance in to-day's world.

Islam probably remains 'alive' as much it is as a result of the spiritual influence of the *gnostic/esoteric/batini* movements discussed earlier, and it is through the practises and teachings of these elements that Islam should be understood. It is to the living successors of Islamic wisdom that we must turn to find what Islam has been really trying to say all these centuries.

The following statement from an early dialogue (attributed to the *Ikhwan-al-Safa* – "brethren of purity" – possibly a branch of Isma' ilism)reveals the essence of what is hoped for whichever spiritual path we choose:

I think I have entered the grace of God. He is so generous with me that I do not succeed in repaying His generosity. I am contented with what God gives me, and I am patient at His orders. I do not hate any creature and hurt no one; my soul is at peace, my heart is free, no creature needs to fear anything from me. I commit my religion and my ideology to God alone. I am of the Religion of Abraham<sup>6</sup>.

This is a message for Osama bin Laden to read, perhaps!

- **A few sayings of the Prophet<sup>7</sup>**

He who is devoid of kindness is devoid of good. (*Reported by Jarir, transmitted by Muslim*)

He who does not give up uttering lies and acting according to them, Allah has no need of his giving up food and drink. (*Reported by Abu Hurairah, transmitted by Bukhari*)

No one eats better food than that which he eats from the work of his own hands. (*Reported by al-Miqdam, transmitted by Bukhari*)

There are two blessings which most people misuse – health and leisure. (*Reported by Abu 'Umar, transmitted by Bukhari*)

---

<sup>6</sup> *Isma'ili Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Seyyed Hossain Nasr, Iran, 1977)

<sup>7</sup> from *Submission (sayings of the Prophet)*, by Shems Friedlander (1977).

You will recognize the faithful, for they show mercy to one another, love one another and are kind to one another as if they all were of the same body. When one body ails, the entire body ails. (Reported by Nu'man, transmitted by Bukhari)

The best Islam is that you feed the poor and offer salutations to those you know and those you do not know. (Reported by Abdullah ibn 'Amr, transmitted by Bukhari)

When you observe four things there is nothing in the world that may cause your loss of bliss: guarding of trust, truthfulness in speech, good conduct and moderation in food. (Reported by Abdullah ibn 'Amr, transmitted by Bukhari)

- **A Great Muslim Saint: Rabi'a the Mystic**

(by Margaret Smith)

Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, who has been called by a modern writer on Islamic mysticism "*the saint par excellence*", was born, probably about A.D. 717, at Basra, where she spent the greater part of her life. She was early left an orphan, and being seized one day while out walking, she was sold as a slave. In the midst of the hardships entailed by her servile condition, one day she heard a heavenly voice saying to her, "*Grieve not, for on the day of resurrection, thy rank shall be such that those nearest to God in heaven shall envy thee.*" This encouraged her in her service for God, and she continued to spend her days fasting, and her nights in vigil and prayer. One night, while she was engaged in prayer, her master woke up, and on looking out of his window, saw Rabi'a with her head bowed in worship, while above her and round about her shone a radiance, by which the whole house was illuminated. When day dawned, her master set her free.

Rabi'a was now able to devote herself to a life of contemplation, and she built herself a place of retreat and spent her time on works of devotion. Hers was at all times a religion of the spirit, and she was little concerned with the formalities enjoined upon the orthodox Moslem. Of the Ka'ba she said, "*It is only a stone to me,*" and on another occasion, "*It is the Lord of the house Whom I need, what have I to do with the house? I need to meet with Him Who said, 'Whoso approaches Me by a span's length, I will approach him by the length of a cubit.' The Ka'ba which I see has no power over me: what joy does the beauty of the Ka'ba bring to me?*"

Rabi'a received many offers of marriage, according to her biographers, but she refused them all, feeling that it was only in the solitary life that she could devote herself to the service of her Lord, and come into that union with the divine, which was the goal of her desire. When one of her suitors pressed her, she said to him, "*Marriage is for those who have their existence in this world. For me that is not so, since I have ceased to exist, and have passed out of self. My life is in my Lord, and I am altogether His. The marriage-contract must be asked for from Him and not from me.*"

Rabi'a lived a life of extreme asceticism and chose to live the life of poverty, though she might have become wealthy by the gifts that her visitors and disciples sought to bestow upon her, but she refused them all, trusting that her Lord would provide for her needs. In refusing one gift, proffered by a wealthy merchant, she said, "*Shall not He Who provides for those who revile Him, provide for those who love Him? He does not refuse sustenance to one who speaks unworthily of Him, how then should He refuse it to one whose soul is overflowing with love toward Him?*"

On one occasion when she was ill, one of her friends observed that if she would pray to God, He would relieve her suffering. Rabi'a turned to him and said, "*Do you not know that it is God who wills this suffering for me?*" He said, "Yes." "*Since you know this,*" said Rabi'a, "*why do you bid me ask for what is contrary to His will? It is not good to oppose one's Beloved.*"

It was by the life of prayer that Rabi'a attained to this sense of trust in God and perfect acquiescence in His will. She spent most of the night in prayer, and at nightfall used to go up on her roof, and pray under the open Eastern sky, "*O my Lord, the stars are shining and the eyes of men are closed, and kings have shut their doors, and every lover is alone with his beloved, and here am I, alone with Thee.*" To her, prayer was not mere intercession for herself or for others, but communion with the divine Friend, and perfect satisfaction in the sense of His presence. Once she prayed, "*O my Lord, whatever of this world Thou wouldst give to me, give it to Thine enemies, and whatever of the next world Thou wouldst give to me, give it to Thy friends. Thou art enough for me.*" Again she prayed, "*O my Lord, if I worship Thee from fear of hell, burn me in hell. And if I worship Thee in hope of paradise, exclude me thence, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me Thine eternal beauty.*"

Rabi'a was greatly revered as a teacher and guide along the mystic way, by the Sufis of her time, and much of her teaching has been passed down to us by the great Sufi writers. One of her biographers says of her, "*Rabi'a was unique, because in her relations to God and her knowledge of things divine she had no equal. She was an unquestioned authority to her contemporaries.*" The aim of the Sufis, as of all the mystics, was to attain union with the divine, and this could only be achieved by treading the mystic path. The first stage of preparation, was the life of purgation, by which, through asceticism, the soul might be purified from the lusts of the flesh and cleansed from its sins, and so be fitted to tread the way which would lead it up to perfection. This way, according to the Sufi teaching, was made up of a number of stages, and as it passed through these stages, the soul acquired certain qualities which enabled it to rise higher and higher, until at last, by its own earnest striving, aided by the grace of God, without which its own efforts would avail nothing, it reached the mystic gnosis (*ma'rifa*), and was admitted to the contemplation of God Himself, and attained to abiding union with Him.

Rabi'a's teaching deals with all the stages of the way. She had a deep sense of sin and the need for repentance and forgiveness; she pleads with her Beloved to have pity on the sinner who comes to Him, and again she speaks of God as a Comforter in sorrow, the Healer of souls, and the One Who alone can cleanse her from her sins. "*My sorrow,*" she said to a friend, "*is not for the things which make me grieve, but my sorrow is for the sins for which I do not grieve.*" She felt, and she taught, that sin was hurtful in the highest degree to the soul, not because it involved punishment hereafter, but because it was the cause of separation between the soul and God. But, to the sincere penitent, forgiveness would be granted, for repentance, Rabi'a held, was sent by God as a sign of grace, and sin and grace could not continue to dwell together in the same soul.

Patience and gratitude were both qualities to be acquired by the Sufi, and Rabi'a practised and taught both. Once a young man came to her with a bandage round his head, and complained of headache. Rabi'a asked him how old he was, and he told her that he was thirty years old. She asked him if he had suffered much in his life, and he said "*No.*" Then she said, "*For thirty years God has kept your body fit, and you have never bound upon it the bandage of gratitude, but for one night of pain in your head, you bind it with the bandage of complaint.*" She herself had the faith which accepted all gifts as from God the Giver, and which regarded misfortune and suffering in the same light as favour and happiness.

Unlike most of her contemporaries among the Sufis, Rabi'a was unmoved by thoughts of the fear of hell or the hope of heaven, as we have seen in the prayer given above. When asked, "*Why do you worship God, have you no desire for paradise?*" she replied, "*The neighbour first and then the house. Is it not enough for me that I am allowed to worship Him? Even if heaven and hell were not, would it not behoove us to obey Him? For He is worthy of worship apart from any interested motive.*" For her, the fear of God was the reverence due to His awful holiness, and her hope in God was of the vision of His beauty.

True poverty, and the renunciation of both this world and the next—indeed of all save God Himself—was a stage through which the Sufi had to pass before he could hope to reach the goal of his quest. The true gnostic sought to cut himself off from all else in order to obtain that divine vision. We have seen how Rabi'a renounced all the joys and riches of this world, in order that she might concern herself only with what belonged to God. Once a disciple asked her, "*What should the servant do who desires to draw near to his Lord?*" and she replied, "*He should possess nothing in this world or the next, save Him.*" A wealthy admirer once bestowed on her a beautiful house adorned with paintings, but after her first visit to it, Rabi'a restored it to the donor, and said that she had done so in order to leave what did not really concern her and find what *did* concern her—fellowship with One Who was eternal. She abandoned the transient treasures of this world, in order that she might find the heavenly treasure that would endure forever.

The last stage on the mystic way was love; the passionate and all-consuming love of the soul for God. Of Rabi'a her biographer wrote that she was "*on fire with love to God,*" and she was one of the first among the Sufis to teach the doctrine of disinterested love to God. She was asked if she hated Satan, and answered "*No,*" and when asked if she loved the Prophet [Muhammad], she said, "*My love to God has so possessed me that no place remains for hating aught, or loving any, save Him.*" She was asked "*What is Love?*" and she said in reply, "*Love has come from eternity and passes into eternity and none has been found who can comprehend it until at last he passes from self into God and hence comes the saying, ' God loves them (His saints) and they love Him.'*" (V-59.)

In Rabi'a's teaching on love, it is made plain that the true lover of God must turn aside from the world and all its attractions, and must be prepared to be stripped of everything, and cut off from all that is

creaturely, for the sake of the Creator. So also the lover must rise above the claims of the senses and allow neither pain nor pleasure to distract or disturb that contemplation of the divine, which would lead to union with the beloved. She teaches, as we have seen, that this love, directed towards God to the exclusion of all else, must be pure love, free from all interested motives, seeking only to do the will of God, and to accomplish that which is pleasing to Him, that He may be glorified. So will the lover be dominated by that highest type of love that alone is worthy of the beloved. Only to the adoring gaze of such a lover will God draw aside the veil and reveal Himself in His perfect beauty, and only through this self-renouncing love can the loving soul at last be united with the beloved, and in His will find its peace.

Rabi'a was over eighty when she died, in A.D. 801. As she lay dying, with her friends around her, she bade them rise and go out, "*For a moment,*" she said, "*leave the way free for the messengers of God most high,*" and when they had closed the door behind them, they heard a voice speaking to her, "*O soul at rest, return unto Thy Lord, satisfied with Him, well-pleasing unto Him. So take thy place among my servants and enter into My Paradise.*" (89—27.30.)

### • Some Basics about Islam

• Islam ('submission to Allah') is, according to its adherents (the *Muslims* - those who practise Islam), the last revealed Word of God through His Prophet (*nabi*) and messenger (*rasul*), Muhammad son of Abdullah, as contained in the Qur'an, revealed to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel.

Muhammad was born in the 6<sup>th</sup> Christian century in Arabia, and began his Islamic mission at the age of 40. Islam is, however, founded on the religion of Abraham (*Ibrahim*), and the Judaic/Christian prophets Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus (*Isa*), together with Muhammad, constitute the six major prophets recognised by Islam. But authenticated tradition (*Hadith*) and the Qur'an state that there were many more prophets preceding Muhammad, who is the last.

• The following (taken from *al-Islam*, by the Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din of Woking Mosque, Surrey – written in the 1930s<sup>8</sup>) summarises five major aspects of Islam:

Islam, subjectively, is a disposition to obey Laws. It respects social order. To strengthen this disposition, Al-Qur'an prescribes a course of disciplinary measures, rightly called the FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM : The Formula of Faith - there is no object of adoration but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger; Prayers, Fasting, Poor Rate and Pilgrimage to Mecca. Their observance lies in our partially parting with that which we rightly possess. The Book says: "By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend out what you love,"<sup>9</sup> such as time, occupation, food, drink, connubial companionship, wealth, family, business, friends, clothes, personal comforts, and above all our various objects of adoration. These are our chief concerns, and cause the whole struggle in life. They move our criminal tendencies if we are not scrupulously honest. But could we commit wrong in order to have them, if we learn to give them up willingly? The formula demands from us that we give up every object of adoration before Allah. In Prayer we part with our occupations; in Fasting with food, drink, and connubial relations; in Poor Rate with a portion of our wealth. Then comes the Pilgrimage. We leave our family, friends, business and country; we part with our clothes and comfort, covering ourselves only with two sheets; and when we enter Hedjaz, we must abstain from disputes, quarrels and evil language; we observe strict fraternal relations with strangers, always proclaiming aloud our readiness to offer all that we possess to God.

The Khwaja also says:

Islam laid great stress on charity, because charity cultivates the sacrificial spirit. Sacrifice is the mainspring of all moral qualities. Al-Qur'an divides them under two headings. First, those that prevent us from injuring others' life, property and honour; and chief among these are CHASTITY, HONESTY, MEEKNESS and POLITENESS. Secondly, those that prompt us to do good to others. Among these are FORGIVENESS, GOODNESS, COURAGE, TRUTHFULNESS, PATIENCE, SYMPATHY and KINDNESS. [The Khwaja goes on to describe these qualities in detail]

---

<sup>8</sup> A wonderful little book that I found (with other material) in an old second-hand bookshop in Wimbledon on arriving there in 1976. The bookshop has long gone.

<sup>9</sup> al-Qur'an, iii, 91.

...

Al-Qur'an came to uplift man from animality to Divinity ... The soul [has] its evolutionary stages, as al-Qur'an describes:

<i>Ammarah</i>	The Commanding
<i>Lawwama</i>	The self-accusing
<i>Mulhima</i>	Inspired
<i>Mutma'inna</i>	At rest
<i>Radiah</i>	Pleased with God
<i>Mardiyyah</i>	Pleasing to God
<i>Kamilah</i>	Perfected

- The Prophet Muhammad is known to have been extremely honest in his dealings before he received the message of Islam. To such an extent, Khadija, a business-woman herself, chose Muhammad as her husband, even though she was much older. This clearly demonstrates that the Islamic woman's rights were clear and bold, and that any notion of restricting a righteous woman is, in reality, anathema in Islam.
- The SUNNI practise today represents the vast majority of Muslims, and the SHIA are mostly to be found in Iran and Iraq. The SHIA, however, are themselves now broken in two main threads, and it is the most orthodox of these that are to be found in Iran and Iraq. From the Shia movement grew the Isma'ili branch, which has been hugely influential on Islam throughout its history, but is generally vilified by orthodox Muslims, as are many great Sufi saints.
- The origin of the Arabs is said to lie with the seed of Abraham through his servant-concubine Hagar and their son Ishmael. They were both cast out into the desert, and were saved by the appearance of a divinely created spring. This water-source is still venerated by the Muslims when they perform pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca.
- Islam progressed into Europe, even as far as mid-France, until Charles Martel prevented its further advance in 732 AD. Much of Spain - indeed, much of all Iberia - was held by the Muslims for hundreds of years.

Further reading:

P.K. Hitti, '*The Arabs*';

Karen Armstrong, '*Islam; A Short History*';

Idries Shah, '*The Sufis*';

A.J. Arberry's part-translation of Attar's *Memorial of the Saints*, published as '*Muslim Saints and Mystics*';

Fahad Daftary, '*The Isma'ilis; their History and Doctrines*';

Seyyed Hossain Nasr, '*Isma' ilContributions to Islamic Culture*'.

- **Connections Between Mystical Groups**

From 'The Sufis' (Idries Shah):

The influence of Sufism upon Indian mystical life has been so great that several schools which had been considered to be the product of ancient Hinduism are revealed by scholars to have originated in Sufi teachings. This historical fact is of less importance to the Sufi than the fact that the mystical stream, its source, is essentially one. The different outward aspects of mysticism in the Far East have generally caused it to be assumed that the cults are independent products of the culture in which they are rooted. But such a view of life is impossible to those who believe that there is only one truth, and that those who know it must communicate and cannot remain in compartments.

Over a thousand years ago the seed which was to bloom into a variety of meditative schools of apparently Hindu origin was planted in India. The love mysticism of the *bhakti* type is one example, here noted by Dr. Tara Chand, in the *Cultured History of India*:

Certain other characteristics of South Indian thought from the ninth century onward, however, strongly point to Islamic influence. They are the increasing emphasis on monotheism, emotional worship, self-surrender (*parpatti*) and adoration of the teacher (*guru bhakti*), and, in addition to them, laxity in the rigors of the caste system and indifference to mere ritual ... absorption in God, through devotion to a teacher. . . .

The Sufi conception of the deified teacher was incorporated into medieval Hinduism.

Dr. Chand, great scholar though he is, fails to note here that the significant points which he lists are, in their grouping and emphasis, Sufic rather than directly Islamic in the usual sense—in the sense in which they are understood by the Moslem clergy. In most Indian cults the role of the deified teacher has been perverted from its originally Sufi nature, and has undergone a transformation which has given later Hindu schools a non-Sufi emphasis. All too often these are the cults which fascinate Western students, anxious to find spirituality in action in the East, who tend to be reduced to attachment to mere derivatives of Sufi schools, which use the trappings of Hinduism.

Although they undoubtedly had something to build upon, it was the Sufi teachers who were responsible in great measure for the establishing of what became known as great Hindu schools of mysticism.

It seems that the Hindus actually adopted the Arabic word for a dedicated Sufi – Fakir – and applied it to themselves.

Idries Shah goes on to record how the Sikh religion was founded by the 'Sufized' Hindu Guru Nanak, and that the *Cultured History of India* draws attention to the fact that Nanak was "steeped in Sufi lore...".

Shah's book also draws attention to the relationship between Sufism and Zen Buddhism, and the Kabbalah of the Jews.

There are many other connections that would be more properly understood by reading Idries Shah's book, which even alludes to Sufi thought influencing the Knights Templar, and the origin of the Garter in the Knights of the Garter and the idea of chivalry, and of Masonic orders.