

ASCETICISM AND MYSTICISM IN ISLAM

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**Abstract:** The article discusses the philosophy of the mystical-ascetic current of Islam, Sufi poetry about love and wine, their music and dances - as well as criticism of Sufism.

**Keywords:** Koran, sufism, mystic, dervishism, submission, poetry, love lyrics.

Sufism is a mystical-ascetic trend in Islam that arose around the 8th century AD.e., shortly after the emergence of Islam itself. It is generally believed that asceticism and mysticism involve an escape from the world. However, this is not quite true. Indeed, some ascetics flee from the world: they go to the mountains, to the shores of the sea, to caves, forests, and there they practice their relationship with God. However, many mystics still prefer to remain in the world in order to correct it. Most Sufis just stay in the world to transform it, to make it more comfortable for human life and habitable for people with spiritual needs. In this respect, asceticism and mysticism in Islam have many features in common with the mystical-ascetic movements in Christianity, Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. In Islam, mystics and ascetics who withdraw from the world or seek to improve it are called "friends of God" - *avliya* in Arabic. They achieve a high degree of spiritual perfection and the highest degree of knowledge about God and the world. It is not surprising that they themselves become the object of a cult. Ordinary mortals, who do not have the opportunity to communicate with God directly, turn to them in the hope that the "friends of God" will put in a word for them before God. They believe that people who have achieved spiritual and moral perfection are more likely to be heard than mere mortals, who are more sinful and unable to maintain moral and ethical standards. Most Sufis, unlike Christian monks, started families because it was difficult for them to go against the prophet's instructions that all men should find a spouse and live a normal life. Emphasizing at the same time that the wife and children should not distract the Sufi from the most important thing - serving God Sufism is partly a passive protest against the reconciliation of society. After the Arab conquests led to the emergence of a huge Arab-Muslim empire that stretched from China to North Africa, people settled down, became less pious, for trade and their occupations they began to forget about God. And so ascetics and mystics came into the world in order to remind Muslims of what is most important in a person's life: this is service to God and submission to His will. In Arabic, "submission to the will of God" is Islam. That is the name of the religion itself.

Since the "friends of God" very often lived among their followers, they became, as it were, the conductors of the aspirations and hopes of the masses in relation to the ruling circles, to the powerful of this world. Sufis, who possessed spiritual authority, very often turned to the rulers, took on the duty of persuaders,

and acted as defenders from harassment by the military administration of the provinces of the Muslim caliphate. Thus, they gained even more confidence from

the masses. Criticism of society and power is an integral part of the ascetic-mystical movement in Islam.

Sufis are characterized by overcoming egoistic impulses, which usually enslave a person, make him a slave of passions and aspirations. That is, they give preference in real life to other people and consider themselves the most unworthy

representatives of the human race. But, of course, those who dealt with the "friends

of God", on the contrary, considered them to be the outstanding representatives of divine power and spirituality in this world. That is why the Sufis, who left the world and considered the world unworthy of attention, arose large circles of followers, which gradually expanded, and eventually turned into real brotherhoods

- they are called tarikats. Tarikat is an organization of like-minded people, which is built, in principle, according to the same scheme as the communities of monks in Christianity. They also lived in special monasteries, observed strict discipline, which consisted in the performance of religious rites, in constant prayer, and the desire to help their neighbors. And gradually the Sufis turned into a very important political and social force in society. In part, you can think of it as a social security service. In those areas where the state was unable to help the local population, he had no resources or desire, the Sufis acted as a protection for the most oppressed, poor elements of society. This, of course, helped to increase their reputation in the eyes of followers. Very often, entire villages, villages became followers of a sheikh.

Sheikh is an "elder" in Arabic, he is similar to the Russian Orthodox elder. The sheikh built his spiritual lineage through the righteous caliphs (successors of the prophet at the head of the state) to the prophet himself, who, in turn, built it to the archangel Gabriel, who told him the Koran, and God himself was the final link in the chain. This chain was called silsilya. Every Sufi had such a genealogy and was very proud of it. A Sufi novice, or murid, had to undergo an initiation ceremony, accept the conditions of his sheikh and do his will. Fulfill vows, perform certain ritual actions under the guidance of the sheikh, tell him about your thoughts, your aspirations and your dreams. Gradually, in the eyes of the followers of Sufism, the followers of the "friends of God", an understanding arose that Sufis are capable of performing miracles. Early Sufi literature is replete with tales of miracles of healing, crossing great distances in the blink of an eye, walking on water, being able to feed a huge crowd with a small amount of bread - I believe that the listeners have already learned the miracles that they know from the history of Christianity.

Sufis also had the ability to work miracles. In any case, their miracles are described in great detail in a special genre of Muslim literature called keramat, that

is, literally "miracles." Now we need to talk about the practice that the Sufis performed within the walls of their cloisters. What were they doing there? They kept repeating the name of God. This practice is called dhikr, which in Arabic means "remembrance of the name of God", that is, Allah. However, in the Islamic tradition, Allah has many epithets praising all his aspects and abilities. For example, he is the All-Just, Eternally Alive, Always Helping, Forgiving, and so on. By repeating the name of God, the Sufis, as it were, instilled God into their hearts. This kind of practice has a parallel in Orthodox Christianity - it is called "name worship" and was practiced by Russian monks who lived on the Greek Mount Athos. This practice also somewhat resembles the practice of the Jesus Prayer and Hesychasm - the constant creation of prayer. Dhikr is a very important part of the Sufi ritual. Without it, there is no Sufism as such - although, according to critics of Sufism, the prophet did not set a precedent for performing dhikr, therefore, this is an innovation and even heresy. Sufi remembrances of God were very often accompanied by dances and music, which also provoked criticism from Muslim authorities who believed that music was incompatible with ritual actions in Islam. Nevertheless, the Sufis just became famous for their bright, memorable zeal, in which dances were used. Everyone knows about the so-called whirling dervishes - this is the Mevlevi order, which arose and spread throughout the

territory of Anatolia (modern Turkey) and which received great publicity and coverage in the West thanks to its colorful dances. The use of music, praises to the prophet during the rites also attracted the attention of many researchers and just the public - travelers in the Middle East. In general, the dervishes themselves, due to their exotic appearance and behavior, aroused the interest of the administrators of the colonial Western powers who worked with Muslim societies. Their way of life was seen as contrary to Islam. Therefore, the idea arose that dervishism is not Islam, but is a manifestation of some heretical currents within Islam. This idea was then picked up by the opponents of Sufism, who accuse the Sufis of using musical instruments and dances, believing that this is incompatible with the principles of Islam - as they understand it. Approximately in the X-XI centuries, the codification of Sufi knowledge takes place. It is very curious that such an almost elusive, subtle experience, like the Sufi, required the creation of numerous books. The Sufis have always said that it is impossible to put into words what they feel when they meet God or when He is present in their hearts. Nevertheless, despite their claims of inability to express this feeling, they wrote a huge amount of works, which are the object of study of a special branch of Islamic studies - Sufi studies.

What was said in this literature? First of all, about the biographies of the early ascetics and mystics of Islam. At the same time, both the prophet himself and his

closest associates were portrayed as an ascetic and mystic. It was believed that Sufism appeared almost simultaneously with the prophecy of Muhammad, which

began in 610 and ended with his death in 632. Indeed, the prophet led a very ascetic lifestyle: facts are mentioned that he washed his own shirt, patched it up and was very unpretentious in food. The Sufis have constantly pointed to these facts. They said, "We're just following in the footsteps of the prophet." These followers left a legacy of spirituality and moral and ethical principles, which were set forth in the biographical codes of Sufism. Sufi biographies portray them as ideal Muslims. They adhere to the orthodox creed, perform all the rituals and add their own - night vigils, vows of silence, and so on. Again, in this respect there are many parallels with Christian monasticism - in the Middle East, in Egypt, in Syria and in Iraq. Now let's talk about the content of Sufi literature. What else did she describe? In addition to the exploits and sayings of the early Sufis, she described their behavior - how they behaved in various situations. The texts allow you to recreate the life of the first Muslim ascetic and mystical communities: how the Sufis treated their leader, the sheikh, how they treated each other. Gradually, these relationships were recorded in special literature, which described the so-called adab - the rules of good behavior towards each other, towards the leader of the community, as well as towards the laity - that is, towards Muslims who were not part of the Sufi community. Life inside and outside the abodes was seen by the Sufis as a kind of path to God. Usually the path to God begins with repentance: a person repents of the sins of his ordinary, worldly life. He realizes that he is destined not for earthly life, but for the future life, and his moral, ethical and mental reorientation to the values of the future life and the values of the upper world takes place. This is followed by several stages of the path, which are described in detail in Sufi textbooks. What "parking" can be called on this path? Apart from repentance, this is godliness. The attitude towards food played a very important role. The food had to be only halal, that is, permitted in terms of Muslim law. But the Sufis went further: for example, they could not take food from the rulers. It was believed that the rulers oppress ordinary Muslims,

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and therefore the money earned in this way is not correct and legal for the Sufis. Very often, the Sufis practiced long fasts and retreat from the world into a forty-day solitude, which was accompanied by dhikr, the repetition of the name of God, as well as the repetition of a series of prayers or prayer forms inherent in one or another Sufi brotherhood. In each brotherhood, the Sufi prayers were different: they are a feature that distinguishes one brotherhood from another. In addition to the Sufi concept of the path to God and the explanation of how to achieve the goal, the Sufis also talked about various mystical states. What is a mystical state? It is something that comes upon you unexpectedly. If you are able to conquer the "station" of the Sufi path (with your own labors, with your own actions), then God

sends down a special state on you, and this state can have both a negative and a positive connotation. For example, at one point you feel a very intense, almost crushing fear of divine power. And suddenly this same state is replaced by a state of hope - when you realize that you may achieve salvation in a future life. And it is possible that you are the chosen one of God. Thus, the Sufis were between two poles: the fear of God, on the one hand, and the hope of salvation and being chosen in the eyes of God, on the other. Such a relationship with God inevitably turned into love and passion. God was seen as a beloved (very often the term is used in the feminine gender) and as a sublimation of carnal, earthly love. This kind of relationship was well translated into the language of poetry. Poetry became a favorite genre of the Sufis, in which they described the relationship between the divine beloved, that is, God, and His lover, the Sufi. Sufi poetry is filled with images associated with love, with erotica. Because, as I said, God was seen as a beloved, who is not always benevolent towards her adorer. She can test him (that is, God can test a Sufi), offering him all kinds of temptations and distractions from the object of his desires, passions - that is, from God. Therefore, Sufi works can very often be read on two levels: simply as erotic poetry, love lyrics, or as a story about love between God and man. Another image of Sufi poetry, which appears first in Arabic, then appears in Persian, in Turkish, then in other languages of Islam, is the image of wine. Why wine? Is wine forbidden in Islam? However, the Sufis likened their love and intoxication with intimacy with their beloved (that is, with God) to intoxication with simple wine. That is, this is divine wine, just like this divine love. Another source of inspiration, besides the love of God, was the Koran for the Sufis. The Quran for all Muslims is a direct way to communicate with God, it is the literal word of God. Not changed by the prophet. The prophet gave it as he received it from God. Therefore, it was believed that through the Koran, passing it through his heart, a person can achieve intimacy or even unity with God. But the commentary and understanding of the Koran by the Sufis is very different from the commentary that we find in other areas of Islam - in Sunnism, in Shiism. Sunni scholars have emphasized the grammatical aspects of the Koranic revelation: they were interested in rare and strange words in the Koran, the images of the prophets from the Old and New Testaments and how they are reshaped in the Koranic revelation; they were interested in the historical circumstances in which the prophet received certain passages from the Koranic text. The prophet usually received such revelations in response to certain situations. Sufis were interested in something completely different. They were interested in the allegorical meaning of the Koran. The meaning behind everyday Arabic phrases. They were looking for what they called batyn - a hidden, inner understanding. When they interpreted the Koran, they always thought about its universal meaning and the allegories that are present in the Koran. Take, for example, the Hajj. For an ordinary Muslim, this means traveling to the Arabian Peninsula and

entering the boundaries of the sanctuary, which is called the Meccan sanctuary, circumambulating the house of God - the Kaaba, and so on. For a Sufi, this is an allegory for the search for God in one's heart. God lives in the believer's heart, and a person must make the rounds of the house of God in his heart. Without leaving your home. Without enduring the difficulties of the journey to Arabia. He can even build a small replica of the Kaaba in his backyard and walk around it. When the Sufis did this, they were condemned for undermining the foundations of Islam. What is the reason why Sufism continues to be a very important part of the life of Muslims and, as we have seen, also non-Muslims who are interested in spirituality? I think that the mystery of Sufism's permanence and vitality lies in the fact that it is an unusually rich cultural, intellectual, spiritual tradition. This tradition was expressed in architectural monuments: these are the tombs of saints, these are special Sufi institutions, similar to monasteries, which are called zawiyas, or khanaks; they are Sufi institutions, brotherhoods. And also - the creative beginning of Sufism. This is poetry, music. Often the remembrance of God was accompanied by musical instruments, and music played a large role in Sufism. That is why it is premature to talk about the death of Sufism and even about its decline. Its flexibility, ability to adapt to different conditions, ability to use new technologies to spread its teachings, ideals and ideas allow us to say that Sufism will continue to flourish in different forms and in different forms in the coming, at least, decades - and maybe even more.

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