

7

THE FUNCTION OF PROPHETIC TRADITIONS IN SUFISM

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic mystical tradition, or Sufism, has historically been one of the religion's most important components. Sufism has played a dual role in Islamic history. It has served as the medium through which a spiritual elect has achieved and described direct experience with God. At the same time, through popular rituals and the veneration of saints, Sufism has allowed those unsung masses in Islamic civilization, whether villagers in India or merchants in the Balkans, to feel closer to God and more intimately ensconced in their faith.

As the tradition of seeking and describing direct mystical experiences with God, Sufism is 'the art of knocking' on the door of the Divine.¹ Because for Muslims Muhammad was the human closest to God, practitioners of Sufism also see it as the science of understanding and applying the Prophet's message in the fullest and most perfect way. As the process of fulfilling the duties of the pious Muslim and gaining proximity to God, the famous Sufi Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945–6) described Sufism as 'comforting the heart with the fan of purity, clothing the mind with the cloak of faithfulness, acquiring generosity and rejoicing in meeting God.'² As the perfection of character, Sufism is 'all proper manners, for every time and every place.'³

As in other domains, in Sufism hadiths have served as a source of guidance and a medium of connection to the Prophet. In one sense, in Sufism the *isnād* of the hadith is all-important, for it establishes the

transmission of the Prophet's teaching, his excellence of character as well as esoteric knowledge inherited from him and taught by the pious elite. In another sense, however, *isnāds* and their authenticity mean nothing in Sufism – those Sufi masters for whom the door has been opened have been able to access God's truth directly without the medium of prophecy or Muhammad's teachings. For them, truths about the reality of God and man are true whether actually said by the Prophet or phrased in his words.

THE FOUNDATION OF SUFISM IN HADITH: THE HADITH OF GABRIEL

Hadiths have always played an important role in Muslim etiquette and pious ethics. The famous hadith scholar Abū Dāwūd once wrote that a Muslim only needed to know four hadiths, none of which involve dogmatic or legal strictures: **'Actions are judged only by intentions,' 'Part of a person perfecting their Islam is to leave aside matters that do not concern them,' 'What is prohibited is clear, what is permissible is clear, and what is other than that is uncertain,' and 'No one's faith is complete until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.'**⁴

From its early coalescence in the ninth century, the Sufi tradition has employed hadiths to instruct those seeking the Sufi path and to justify its teachings. The Forty Hadith collection devoted to Sufism written by the famous Iranian Sufi Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) was one of the most widely transmitted books in the centuries after its author's death and served as a primer for Sufism among Muslim students. It contained hadiths urging piety, generosity, and asceticism, such as **'Whoever wants to join me, let him suffice from the goods of this world with only what a traveler needs. And beware of mixing with the rich.'**⁵

The hadith that has historically essentialized the Sufi tradition and provided its most firm foundation in the Prophet's teachings is the famous Hadith of the Angel Gabriel. This report is extremely well known and met Muslim hadith critics' highest standards of authenticity. It appears in the *Sahīhayn* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, as well as the three *Sunans* of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn Mājah, narrated from the Prophet by the Companions 'Umar b. al-Khattāb, Talha b.

'Ubaydallāh, Anas b. Mālik, or Abū Hurayra. The version from Abū Hurayra appearing in al-Bukhārī's *Sahīh* reads:

← Ishāq ← Jarīr ← Abū Hayyān ← Abū Zur'a ← Abū Hurayra: One day the Prophet was out before the people when a man came walking up to him and said, 'O Messenger of God, what is faith (*īmān*)?' [The Prophet] said, 'Faith is to believe in God, His angels, His messengers, that you will meet Him, and to believe in the resurrection.' [The man] said, 'O Messenger of God, what is Islam (submission)?' [The Prophet] replied, 'Islam is to worship God, not associate anything with Him, to perform the prayer, render the poor tithe, and fast Ramadan.' The man asked, 'O messenger of God, what is *ihsān* (perfection)?' [The Prophet] said, '*ihsān* is to worship God as if you could see Him, for indeed even if you cannot see Him, He sees you.' [The man] said, 'O messenger of God, when is the Hour [of Judgment]?' [The Prophet] said, 'The one being asked is no more knowledgeable about that than the one asking, but I will tell you about its signs: when women give birth to their mistresses, that is one of the signs; when the naked and barefoot rule the people, that is one of the signs; one of five things that only God knows 'Indeed God knows the Hour, he sends down the rain and knows what is in the wombs' (Quran 31:34). Then the man left, and the Prophet ordered that he be brought back to him, but no one could find him. Then the Prophet said, 'That was Gabriel, he came to teach the people their religion.'⁶

The Hadith of Gabriel has served as a formative expression of how Muslims broadly conceive of their religion. The hadith structures Islam in three tiers: it consists first of select articles of belief, followed by the outward submission to God through the performance of set rituals and deeds. Beyond these two basic levels of religious commitment lies the level of supererogatory piety sought by those who truly want to live in a state of constant God-consciousness: *ihsān*. Sufism has defined itself as the quest for *ihsān*, to be continually in a state of remembering God and acting accordingly. Sufis have therefore considered their path to be an optional one. Those who do not choose to pursue it still remain fully Muslim in faith and practice. Sufis elect to go beyond what is required. 'For this elite of the elite,' explains the great theologian and mystic Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), 'the verse "And God is better and more enduring" (Quran 20:73) has become manifest, and they have chosen a place "in an assembly of truth in the presence of an omnipotent Lord" (Quran 54:55).'⁷

THE ISSUE OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF SUFISM AND THE *ISNĀD* OF SUFI TEACHINGS

From its inception, Islam has been an iconoclastic faith opposed to erecting intermediaries between God and man, founded on the premise that only revelation can shape the contours of faith and ritual. This extremely conservative approach to tenets of belief and ritual (as opposed to law) explains why Muslims from China to Great Britain, Sunni and Shiite, all pray their daily prayers in the same way, differing only in details. This conservative spirit has also meant that, although Sufism has played an undeniably prominent role in Islam, it has also been one of the most controversial dimensions of the faith tradition.

The central objection launched by Muslim critics of Sufism has been that it contains elements of heretical innovation (called *bid'a*) or belief not originally part of Islam. Some Muslim scholars have found three aspects of Sufism to be problematic: 1) it includes ritual practices and prayers that are viewed as imported innovations not originating in the Sunna of the Prophet or his Companions, 2) the institution of Sufi brotherhoods in the twelfth century with formalized relationships between a spiritual guide (Arabic '*shaykh*' or Persian/Turkish '*pīr*') and his disciples, and 3) a theosophical cosmology that upholds the 'Unicity of Existence (*wahdat al-wujūd*),' or the notion that only God actually exists and that creation is a mere illusion.

The first point was unacceptable to many Muslim scholars because it seems to break with the fundamental Islamic principle that only the Quran and Sunna can serve as the basis for ritual and belief. As Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 750/1351), a famous critic of Sufism, explained, in Islam 'the assumption about claims of ritual is that they are false until some proof is provided, whereas the assumption in contracts and personal interactions is that they are valid until proven otherwise.'⁸ The second point caused concern because Sufi brotherhoods and the veneration of *shaykhs* seemed to create formalized institutions and invest certain people with authority unacknowledged in the Prophet's message. As Ibn Taymiyya objected, 'It is not for anyone to belong to a *shaykh* by swearing to be his follower ... but rather he should take as a guide anyone who is from among the people of faith without specifying anyone with an excessive position of spiritual authority.'⁹ Finally, for many, 'the Unicity of Existence' was a theological perspective similar to pantheism, or the belief that the

divine was present in creation and objects of nature – a position firmly rejected in Islam.

Architects and proponents of the Sufi tradition were aware from an early stage of these objections and sought to ground their ideas in the original revelation of the Prophet. Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/910), the epicenter of classical Sufism in Baghdad, thus declared that 'Our science [of Sufism] is bounded by the Quran and the Sunna.'¹⁰ Sufis admitted that practices such as ritual gatherings where the names of God are recited or specific liturgies said after prayers were innovations. But they were like flowers that had blossomed from seeds rooted in the Prophet's original teachings. As the Sufi Abū al-Hasan al-Fūshanjī (d. 348/959) said, 'Today Sufism is a name without a reality, it was once a reality without a name.'¹¹

Al-Fūshanjī's quote raises another important point concerning objections to Sufism: many of Sufism's harshest critics, such as Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) and Ibn Taymiyya, were themselves Sufis who only rejected certain corrupted components of Sufism, such as extremist beliefs or the excessive practices of some Sufis. They maintained the legitimacy of the ethical components of Sufism, what they called 'the science of purifying the heart.'

As in hadiths and law, the principal anchor for the authenticity of Sufism was the *isnād*. The Sufi tradition cultivated two kinds of *isnāds* to the Prophet. The first was known as the *isnād al-tazkiya* (*isnād* of purification) or the *isnād al-suhba* (*isnād* of discipleship) and was a commonsense feature of traditional Islamic piety. The second form of *isnād* represented a formal or mystical chain of transmission from teacher to student back to the Prophet.

The *isnād* of purification/discipleship was based on a very sensible premise. If the Companions spent many years around the Prophet, they would have learned his pious and God-fearing ways from his example. The Successors who studied at the Companions' hands would have learned this from them, and so would any committed students of the Prophet's teachings in subsequent generations. A sincere scholar's duty to his students did not stop at teaching them the Quran, the Sunna, and Islamic law. He also instructed them on proper etiquette and instilled in them a desire for *ihsān*. We can see an example of this with Ismā'īl b. 'Ulayya (d. 193/809) of Baghdad, an early hadith scholar whose mother had brought him to a senior scholar and said, 'This is my son, let him be with you and take from your etiquette and character.'¹² As a youth the famous jurist and Sufi

of Baghdad, Ibn al-Jawzī, would attend the hadith dictation sessions of one teacher who would recite a hadith and then start crying out of fear of God and love for the Prophet. Later in life Ibn al-Jawzī would write, 'I benefited more from his crying than his simply transmitting the hadith.'¹³

The earliest recorded *isnāds* for Sufi teachings go back through al-Junayd. One Ja'far al-Khuldī (d. 348 /959) said that he 'took' from al-Junayd, who took from al-Sarī al-Saqatī, from Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, from Farqad al-Sabakhī, from al-Hasan al-Basrī, from Anas b. Mālik and the other great Companions, from the Prophet.¹⁴ The famous Sufi systematizer al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) traces his *isnād* through his teacher Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq, from Abū al-Qāsim al-Nasrābādī, from al-Shiblī, from al-Junayd, from Sarī al-Saqatī, from Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, from Dāwūd al-Tā'ī, from the Successors, from the Companions, from the Prophet.¹⁵

The second type of *isnād* in Sufism was understood as the transmission of esoteric knowledge – a weighty matter indeed – or something equally intangible but less serious: the transmission of blessings (*baraka*) from a saint to an aspirant. Many Muslims believed that the Prophet had chosen certain Companions with whom to deposit secret knowledge beyond the comprehension of normal Muslims and limited to the spiritual elite. The Companion Hudhayfa b. Yamān was told about all the strife and challenges that would afflict the Muslims until the Day of Judgment, and it was reported that Abū Hurayra said, 'I memorized two vessels [of knowledge] from the Prophet. As for the first, I made it known among the people. As for the second, if I made it known my throat would be cut.'¹⁶

This esoteric knowledge could be transmitted from the Prophet to a Companion, and later from saint to student, by a mere touch. As one report (admittedly very unreliable, according to Muslim hadith critics) has it, when 'Alī was washing the Prophet's body for burial some water splashed from the body into 'Alī's eyes, granting him in one instant 'the knowledge of the ancient and latter day sages.'¹⁷ Many Sufis believed that this knowledge could be transmitted from such Companions through teacher to student. For many Sufis, however, and even for critics of Sufism, these *isnāds* were not conduits for any secret mystical knowledge. They were merely symbols for the transmission of blessings from a revered pious figure to his students.

Only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries did the Sufi tradition elaborate the *isnād* as a medium for transmitting the Prophet's

mystical knowledge or his blessings, at which point 'Alī b. Abī Tālib first emerged as an important component in the Sufi chain of transmission.¹⁸ 'Alī had always been seen as the Prophet's spiritual heir, leading al-Junayd to say, 'that is a person who was granted *'ilm laḥunnī*', or the directly, divinely granted wisdom that God gives to select people.¹⁹ Sufis quoted the Companion Ibn Mas'ūd as saying that the Quran was revealed with 'an Outer and Inner meaning, and indeed 'Alī b. Abī Tālib has with him the knowledge of both.'²⁰

The Sufi *isnād* through 'Alī became very famous after the eleventh century because of what was known as the 'Investiture with the Cloak (*libs al-khirqa*). In this ritual, a Sufi master put a *khirqā* (a cloak or shawl) on a student being initiated into his Sufi order. The *khirqā* became the sign of 'taking the path' of a Sufi order and was often given to the student after he had fulfilled certain requirements such as a year of charity or of spiritual vigilance. Along with being told the special prayers of the order and giving his oath of allegiance to the *shaykh*, being invested with the *khirqā* was a crucial part of joining a Sufi order. Sometimes *khirqas* were colored and served as the uniform for a particular Sufi order. In addition to the *khirqā* of initiation, Sufis also cultivated the tradition of the *khirqat al-tabarruk*, or the 'cloak of blessings,' which was given as a benediction to a layman who did not intend to join the order.²¹

The famous Hanbalī scholar and Sufi Ibn al-Mubrad (d. 909/1502) explains that the devoted student of knowledge should 'be invested with a *khirqā* to wear, for blessing is to be hoped for from that. And a group of the righteous early Muslims used to do this, asking the righteous to invest them with a cloak and seeking to learn from their behavior and actions.'²²

Ibn al-Mubrad provides us with one of the *isnāds* for his *khirqā*, which we immediately note proceeds *via* the Family of the Prophet. He traces it back through a long chain of masters to:

Abū Bakr al-Shiblī, who was invested with the *khirqā* by the hand of Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd, who received it from the hand of Sarī al-Saqafī, who received it from the hand of Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, who was the spiritual disciple of 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Ridā, who was the disciple of [his father Mūsā] al-Kāzim, who was the disciple of [his father] Ja'far al-Sādiq, who was the disciple of [his father Muhammad] al-Bāqir, who was the disciple of [his father] Zayn al-'Abidīn, who was the disciple of his father al-Husayn, who was the disciple of his father 'Alī b. Abī Talib, who was the companion of the Prophet.²³

The most famous *isnād* for the *khirqā*, however, was through the Successor al-Hasan al-Basrī, from 'Alī, from the Prophet.

Critics of Sufism pounced on the chain of transmission for the *khirqā* as a point of vulnerability. Because the Sufi tradition had invested so much of its legitimacy in this *isnād*, the methods of hadith criticism would become a central tool for those who wished to question that legitimacy or to defend it. Ibn al-Jawzī of Baghdad criticized the way the Sufis of his day wore the *khirqā* in order to appear pious and gain repute. In fact, he rejected the idea of having an *isnād* for receiving the *khirqā* from one's *shaykh*, calling it 'all a lie' that had no basis in the Sunna.²⁴ Ibn Taymiyya argued that, not only did the donning of a *khirqā* not come from the Prophet's practice, not even the early Sufis engaged in the practice (we can note in Ibn al-Mubrad's *isnād* (above) that all mention of receiving the *khirqā* goes no further back in time than Ma'rūf). 'Rather,' he writes, 'it resembles more a king passing on the trappings to his successor ... which is fine if done with good intentions. But as for making that a Sunna [of the Prophet] or a path to God most high, that is not the case.'²⁵

Many critics of Sufism attacked a more technical aspect of the *khirqā isnād*. Many Sufis traced their *isnāds* through al-Hasan al-Basrī, from 'Alī to Muhammad. But hadith masters who did not support many Sufi practices, such as Ibn al-Salāh (d. 643/1245), Ibn Hajar (d. 852/1449), and al-Sakhāwī (d. 897/1402) all argued that al-Hasan al-Basrī had never met or heard hadiths from 'Alī.²⁶ How could he have received the *khirqā*, or any knowledge at all for that matter, from him?

Proponents of Sufism have tried to find evidence from the hadith tradition to bolster the claim of al-Hasan receiving the *khirqā* from 'Alī. Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) points out that al-Hasan al-Basrī was born in Medina and grew up in the house of one of the Prophet's wives. He met many of the Companions and attended congregational prayers led by the caliphs 'Uthmān and 'Alī. Since 'Alī did not leave Medina until al-Hasan was fourteen years old, al-Hasan would have had ample time to study with 'Alī. Furthermore, al-Suyūṭī finds examples of hadiths where al-Hasan al-Basrī explicitly states that he heard the report from 'Alī, such as the hadith from the *Musnad* of Abū Ya'lā al-Mawsilī that **'The parable of my community is like the rain: it is not known which is better, its beginning or its end.'**²⁷

The debate over the strength of the *isnād* for the *khirqā* and al-Hasan's hearing hadith from 'Alī was intense and has lasted until the

present day, when the Moroccan Ahmad al-Ghumārī wrote a book entitled ‘The Evident Proof for Sufis Being Connected to ‘Alī (*al-Burhān al-jalī fī intisāb al-sūfiyya ilā ‘Alī*).’ But ultimately this one point cannot settle the argument over the legitimacy of Sufism. As is clear from the *isnāds* listed above, Sufis cite many other *isnāds* for their teachings that do not involve al-Hasan al-Basrī, ‘Alī, or the *khirqā*. More importantly, many of the hadith scholars, such as Ibn al-Salāh, who criticized the *isnāds* for the *khirqā* practice, themselves sought and received *khirqas* from Sufi masters! Regardless of the authenticity of the practice, they did so because it had become an accepted tradition for receiving blessings (*baraka*) from pious Muslim saints. No matter how poor its *isnād*, the *khirqā* carried great weight as the sign of a relationship with a Sufi master as well as a token of his blessings.

HADITHS IN THEOSOPHICAL SUFISM

Since the early period of Sufism, mystics have underscored the absolute contrast between the ultimate reality of God and the transience of His creation. As the Quran states, ‘All things perish except His face’ (Quran: 28:68). Many Sufis stressed how all of creation is nothing more than an ephemeral reflection of God’s magnificence and held that man’s greatest accomplishment is to penetrate the veil of this world and ‘become annihilated’ in God in this life – as one forged hadith puts it, to ‘die before you die.’²⁸ A truly pious and perspicacious mystic grasps that God reveals His beauty (*tajallī*) in every object in this world and that the pinnacle of human awareness is to know God more and more intimately through His signs and perfectly reflect His attributes. Attaining this state of being dissolved in God is what led ecstatic Sufi mystics like Bayazid al-Bistāmī (d. 261/874) to declare ‘Glory be to Me!’ and the famous Sufi martyr al-Hallāj (d. 309/922) to pronounce ‘I am the Ultimate Truth/God (*anā al-haqq*)!’, both phrases being otherwise reserved for God alone. To achieve this profound understanding was to reconnect completely with the source of all existence and fulfill the deepest yearnings of the soul. As the great Persian Sufi poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) wrote, like the reed flute whose song laments its separation from the reed bed:

Every person who has long remained far from his source,
Longingly seeks the day of his reunion.

This mystical worldview flourished in the writings of Sufis like al-Ghazālī but was first organized into a comprehensive cosmology, or view of the universe, by the seminal Sufi Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), who hailed from Spain, traveled throughout the Middle East and eventually died in Damascus.

Ibn 'Arabī devised a conception of creation as a reflection of God's perfect attributes. Each of the manifold components and dimensions of the cosmos and the natural world mirrors His endless beauty, order, and creative capacity. The pinnacle and capstone of creation is mankind, the element that reflects God's most essential attribute: His unity. Humans embody within their souls and character all the multiplicity of the cosmos but are able to bring them into unified balance and proper proportion. A person who has achieved this state of enlightened balance not only embodies 'the spirit of the cosmos,' he or she also is the most perfect reflection of God's perfection. This is 'the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*),' who has purged him or herself of imperfections and grown closer and closer to God's attributes until he dissolves into non-existence. For only God truly exists at all.²⁹ For Ibn 'Arabī, investiture with the *khirqā* symbolizes 'putting on' the divine qualities.³⁰

The function of revealed religion is similar. Each of the great prophets sent by God to their respective communities embodied and reflected one of His attributes. Their culmination, which Ibn 'Arabī refers to with the Quranic phrase 'the Seal of the Prophets' (Quran 33:40), was Muhammad. He was 'the perfect human' *par excellence*, the consummate reflection of God who represented the goal that all seekers of truth sought and the station attained by saints. His timeless reality, which Ibn 'Arabī called 'the Muhammadan Reality (*al-haqīqa al-muhammadiyya*)' was, in fact, the whole purpose of creation.

The theosophical Sufi tradition, brought to its height by Ibn 'Arabī, explained the reason for God's creation in the 'Hadith of the Hidden Treasure,' which Ibn 'Arabī cites many times in his massive treatise *al-Futuhāt al-makkiyya* (The Meccan Revelations). It is a hadith *qudsī*, in which the Prophet quotes God directly as saying 'I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be known. So I created the cosmos so that I might be known (*kuntu kanzā makhfiyan fa-ahbabtu an u'raf fa-khalaqtu al-khalq li-u'rafa*).' This hadith communicated

an essential point of Ibn 'Arabī's cosmology: knowing God is the purpose of all creation. Humans exist because God wanted them to know Him and strive to become His flawless reflections. Although this sense is conveyed in Quranic verses such as the one reading 'I have not created the jinn or mankind except to worship me' (Quran 51:56), the Hadith of the Hidden Treasure imbued this motivation with an almost emotional longing that conveys the themes of desire and intimate knowledge so key to the Sufi tradition.

A second hadith that served as an important piece of evidence in Ibn 'Arabī's theosophical Sufism was known as the Hadith of Reason (*ḥadīth al-'aql*). It is another *qudsī* hadith, in which the Prophet explains:

Indeed God, when he created reason, He said to it, 'Come,' and it came. Then He said, 'Go back,' and it went back. So God said, 'By my glory and beauty, I have not created anything nobler than you. By you I will take and by you I will give' (*Inna Allāh lammā khalaqa al-'aql qāla lahu: aqbil fa-aqbala. thumma qāla adbir fa'adbara, fa-qāla 'wa 'izzatī wa jamālī mā khalaqtu khalqan ashraf minka, fa-bika ākhudhu wa bika u'tī*).

This hadith established an important tenet of Sufism and speculative theology in Islam in general: man's reason is ultimately subordinate to God and serves the cause of grasping His truth. For Ibn 'Arabī and upholders of the theosophical Sufi tradition, there were three ways for humans to attain knowledge: prophetic revelation, inspiration from God (often called '*dhawq*,' 'tasting,' or *kashf*, 'unveiling'), and rational investigation. Yet the mainstream Sunni tradition, especially in its infancy during the ninth and tenth centuries, was highly suspicious of relying on reason. They considered it a loophole for human beings to meddle in matters of religion that God alone should define. For Sufis like Ibn 'Arabī, the Hadith of Reason established that reason obeyed God and prophecy.

Unfortunately, neither the Hadith of the Hidden Treasure nor the Hadith of Reason had any basis in the actual words of the Prophet, according to Muslim scholars. Opponents of Ibn 'Arabī's theosophical Sufism, such as Ibn Taymiyya, said that the Hadith of the Hidden Treasure 'has no *isnād*, weak or strong, to the Prophet,' and even moderate scholars who supported Sufism, like Ibn Hajar and Mullā 'Alī Qāfī, acknowledged that its attribution to the Prophet was baseless.³¹ The Hadith of Reason actually did appear in some hadith collections,

although highly unreliable ones. Ibn Hanbal's son 'Abdallāh included it as a *mursal* hadith in his book of *zuhd*, and al-Tabarānī included it in his large *mu'jam*. However, every major Sunni hadith critic, from early figures such as al-'Uqaylī and al-Dāraqutnī to later ones such as al-Sakhāwī and Mullā 'Alī Qārī, agreed that the report was extremely weak or forged.¹²

Ibn 'Arabī himself was no amateur in hadiths; he had cultivated his own collection of hadiths with full *isnāds* back to the Prophet. He acknowledged that these two hadiths had no basis according to the methods of hadith critics. Rather, as he states in the case of the Hadith of the Hidden Treasure, it was known to be 'sound on the basis of unveiling (*kashf*)' (see Chapter 3 on Criticism through Unveiling).¹³ What concern was it to Sufis if no reliable *isnād* could be found for an important hadith? Sufi masters like Ibn 'Arabī felt that their understanding of the cosmos superseded the mere probabilities generated by Sunni hadith criticism and its reliance on the *isnād*. As the early Sufi al-Bistāmī was quoted as saying, 'You take your knowledge dead from the dead, but I take my knowledge from the Living One who does not die.'¹⁴

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Fortunately, a great deal has been written about Sufism in English. Helpful works include Annemarie Schimmel's *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975) and Sayyid Hosein Nasr's *Sufi Essays* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1972). Michael Sells' *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996) contains many original texts in translation. For a more specific discussion about the theosophical Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī, see Claude Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulfur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī* (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1993) and William Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). For an edited collection of essays dealing with debates over Sufism within the Islamic tradition, see F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke's *Islamic Mysticism Contested* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). For a translation and discussion of many of the hadiths frequently used in Sufism, see Javad Nurbakhsh, *Traditions of the Prophet* (New York: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1981). Ibn 'Arabī's *Mishkāt*

al-arwār is translated as *Divine Sayings*, trans. Stephen Hirtenstein (Oxford: Anqa Publications, 2004).

ENDNOTES

- 1 Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?*, p. 7.
- 2 Al-Khatīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, vol. 14, p. 393.
- 3 This statement is from Abū Hafs al-Naysābūrī, Al-Sulamī, *Tabaqāt al-sūfiyya*, p. 119.
- 4 Ibn Nuqta, *Kitāb al-taqyīd*, p. 280.
- 5 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn fi al-tasawwuf*, p. 5.
- 6 *Sahīh al-Bukhārī: kitāb al-īmān, bāb 38*.
- 7 J. Brown, 'The Last Days of al-Ghazzālī and the Tripartite Division of the Sufi World,' p. 93.
- 8 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Iʿlām al-murwaqqiʿīn*, vol. 1, p. 344.
- 9 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-fatāwā*, vol. 11, p. 289.
- 10 Al-Khatīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, vol. 7, p. 251.
- 11 'Alī Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 49.
- 12 Al-Dhahabī, *Mifzāt al-iʿtidāl*, vol. 1, p. 217.
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Hadith

*Muhammad's Legacy in the
Medieval and Modern World*

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ONEWORLD
OXFORD

A Oneworld Book

Published by Oneworld Publications 2009

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**ISBN 978-1-85168-696-4 (Hbk)
ISBN 978-1-85168-663-6 (Pbk)**

**Typeset by Jayvee, Trivandrum, India
Cover design by Design Deluxe
Printed and bound in Great Britain
by Bell & Bain, Glasgow**

**Oneworld Publications
185 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7AR
England
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