



Mosques and the Challenge of Change

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Mosques in America today, not unlike those in Muslim history, continue the struggle to balance communal inclusivity with ritual orthodoxy. That this struggle has defined the function of the mosque since its very inception is lost on those who see mosques as spiritual retreats. As the evidence presented hereunder suggests, intermittent campaigns for uniformity-of ideas, dogmas, and rituals-often militate, not just against the establishment of the mosque as a restful retreat, but also as the nexus of a pluralistic community. Recent attempts at harmonizing mosque culture with modern realities raise serious questions, not just about the social utility of the mosque, but also about its sanctity. The concern with utility revolves mainly around broadening participation, particularly of women, smaller religious sects, and of course, the growing liberal voice of American Islam.

To take the issue of women in mosques as an example, those arguing in favor thereof seem unperturbed by the impact this would have on the sanctity of the mosque. Their critics thus fear that what passes for women's rights are in fact specific liberal values dressed up as universal rights.¹ To allow women participation in mosque activities based on prevailing social trends is one thing, they say, but to allow them veto powers over established dress codes, for example, or the authority to lead worship, runs counter to entrenched Islamic doctrines. Proponents argue to the contrary, that it is in denying women full access that mosques today run afoul not just of the values of a liberal society, but also of Islam, when interpreted correctly. In between are the mild traditionalists disturbed by the fact that cultural values common to the Middle East or South Asia are denying women even the

equitable treatment classical law promises them.

Whereas one end of this divide argues that perpetually synchronizing traditional practices with changing cultural patterns weakens the sanctity of the mosque, the other end is equally concerned about the viability of the mosque when it is so hidebound by traditional interpretations of sanctity. Yet, as the discussion that follows explains, even in early Islam, mosque sanctity comprised of an awkward amalgam of social forces and divine decree. The Qur'an certainly had much to say about the form and the function of the mosque, but so did the political maneuvers of early Islam. And while it has consistently served the spiritual needs of individuals—their refuge, if you will, from the drudgery of life itself—at various points in Muslim history the mosque also served the political agendas of tyrants, not to mention the career ambitions of aspiring scholars. The examples we focus on hereunder illustrate the extent to which the status and functionality of early sacred spaces was established or modified, not just by divine decree, but by painful changes in social realities.

On the Sacred

A word first, about sanctity, its relationship to society, and of course to religion. Sanctity, or the state of being sacred, is what turns the ordinary into the extraordinary—the world, for example, into an otherworld, a book into a holy book, and a mere man into a holy man. Even today in this disenchanted world of the profane, sanctity is still

present, but not just within the borders of religion. In fact, as some scholars have suggested, the sacred today is a consensual sacred, motivated, not by transcendence, but by the powers vested in the modern state, or some other universal value. And while today's sacred draws moral authority from civil religion or the universal values of humanism, it still appeals to those very emotions that the sacred in traditional religion previously stirred, albeit to serve some mundane purpose.² It works to great effect, when amplified through nationalistic rituals like flag ceremonies, or national anthems, where it rouses in otherwise levelheaded citizens the urge to engage in acts of great chivalry or unspeakable barbarity. Those who engaged in dastardly acts of terror in the name of nationalism—under Nazi Germany for example—were after all, ordinary citizens inspired, in their case, by the sanctity of the German state.³

Within the Islamic context itself, the Qur'an has much to say about sanctity. In the first place, the scope of the sacred is neither absolute, nor yet comprehensive. With regard to the new moon, for example, it signifies both the transcendent in human activities as well as the mundane; but outside the system of religion and its rituals, that same new moon embodies neither virtue nor evil. (2:189) Secondly, sanctity operates in an ever-alternating hierarchy determined, not by the rigors of religion, but by the exigencies of mere existence. For example, although taboos attached to the sacred sanctuary in Mecca are perennially sacrosanct, those

very taboos are put on hold whenever they impede a greater sanctity. Free access to the holy mosque, for example, was an inviolable right that pagan Arabia considered sacrosanct even before Islam. So, when Muslims pilgrims were denied access to Mecca, the Qur'an simply invoked this higher sanctity to allow pilgrims the right to protect themselves with weapons. Clearly, in exceptional cases, free access to the holy site takes precedence over the inviolability of the sacred months. (2:194) Thirdly, unlike some primitive religions, Islam along with the other Abrahamic faiths, considers the preservation of human life itself, the ultimate sacred object. In the case of abstinence during the Fast of Ramadan, for example, under normal circumstances, its sacred objective clearly is taqwa or God consciousness. But the mere threat of physical impairment, due to illness or travel, allows for the deferment of performance, and in chronic cases, even for permanent refusal. Lastly, sanctity, insofar as it conveys meaning is as much a pragmatic signpost, as it is a religious ritual. Those garlands strung around the sacrificial animals on their way to Mecca, for example, would seem to be as much a visa application for safe passage as they are symbols of the pilgrimage.⁴ When taken out of the desert context, however, or out of 7th century for that matter, both the communicative formality of these garlands, as well as their ritual resonance, lose all meaning. (5:2)⁵

While these examples point to sanctity as the defining feature of a ritual or a sacred space, they

also point to a cluster of competing sanctities that attendees must periodically rearrange, in keeping with exigent circumstances. These examples also illustrate the nuances that imbue the Qur'an's treatment of sanctity, as well as the extent to which these are molded by crucial changes in conditions. American Muslim society's confused approach to sacred spaces is in part a result of its inability to turn history's treatment of the sacred into what anthropologists call a homeostat, or an interpretive device that alternates meanings within the ambit of a sacred object, without devaluing the object itself.⁶ The sacred object in their case, is the mosque, and the alternative meanings to choose from are those supplied by the cut and thrust of events outside the mosque. In other words, if mosque attendees consider communal unity central to the mosque, then it alone will command respect as the ultimate sacred, and all outside events or competing interpretations is necessarily subordinated to the quest for unity. Surprisingly, this is precisely how the otherwise "text loving" government of Saudi Arabia treats pilgrims to the Haram in Mecca. Sadly, it is today the only mosque where both genders commingle, where all sects are free to worship, and where almost no indoctrination is actively pursued.

As mentioned previously, sanctity is what transforms ordinary space into a sacred site, and a mere building into a place of worship. This occurs in one of three ways: through the ritual activities performed repeatedly within such a building, or

the décor and imagery that identifies its religious affiliations, or the symbolic meanings its actual location or occasion might convey. Mosques however, are different from other sanctified spaces in two ways. Firstly, in the case of the mosque, the mere act of consecration triggers a slew of rules and regulations that immediately turn any place into sacred place, subject that is, to strict restrictions limiting access and performance. Secondly, unlike unconventional sacred spaces found within Islam itself, legendary personalities, or historic moments in time have no bearing on mosque rituals. As opposed to a Sufi shrine, or the Christian church, therefore, the rituals of the mosque signify neither the fear of death, nor the hope of eternal life; if anything, Islam considers taboo the mere representation of any iconic imagery that might express those very meanings.⁷

The Unifying Social Function of the Mosque

What then does the mosque ultimately symbolize? Apart from an obvious connection with the divine that the mosque aims to engender at the personal level, the major communitarian objective of the mosque is unity. From the orientation of all mosques in the direction of Mecca, to the synchronicity of the rituals performed therein five times daily, the mosque all but shouts out: Muslims, unite!

What prompted the first call for unity also happened to be arguably, the first meaningful attempt at interfaith theologizing. This was when the Qur'an called upon the children of Abraham, Jews,

Christians and Muslims, to unite as monotheists against idolatry. Surprisingly, the sacred symbol of that failed attempt at unity was not the Ka`ba, but the Aqsa mosque, in Jerusalem. While the Qur'an did not categorically call for a single faith community wedded to the idea of monotheism, it did call upon all "People of the Book" to unite on terms common to the Abrahamic family of religions—with the Aqsa as their common symbolic denominator. (3:64). It was, after all, this mosque in Jerusalem that best symbolized the broader intent of the Abrahamic family of religions, that of establishing a global monotheism rather than one restricted to a particular people, or a charismatic holy man. For much of early Islam, therefore, this same mosque also served as the direction towards which Muslims willingly turned in prayer, even though only Jews and Christians actually used it for purposes of worship.

But when these same People of the Book spurned his invitation to come to a 'common word', and conspired instead, to wreck his mission, the Prophet turned to the Heavens as if to renegotiate this implicit compact. (3:64). Permission was finally granted to turn away from Jerusalem towards Mecca in prayer, and by extension, from the global monotheism that Jerusalem symbolized towards the cultural insularity that Mecca embodied. (2:144). Henceforth, Jerusalem would continue to enjoy a special status as Islam's third holiest sanctuary, but would also serve as a reminder, that if the original script had played out, then the holy

mosque in Mecca would have been subordinate to the Aqsa, at least with regard to the daily prayer.

As for the quest for unity within Islam, it was in mosques that Muslim society's disparate individuals and social groups were to negotiate their dissimilarities. Initially this structure served a dual purpose of ridding Arab society of its partisanship, and facilitating the acculturation of converts into the "brotherhood of Islam". But later, when the community itself underwent theological and political upheavals, partisan worship centers emerged, not to unite disparate segments of the new community, but to function as safe havens for a brotherhood from within, comprising that is, of individuals considered undesirable by the Muslim majority itself.

In this regard, the mosque in Medina proved more significant than the Haram in Mecca, if only because the latter remained under direct pagan control for much of early Islam's social history. The Mosque of the Prophet by contrast, served as both a sanctuary for personal enrichment, as well as a center for conflict resolution. Of these conflicts, the most troublesome certainly was the one with the munafiqun, or the hypocrites, and this for two reasons. Firstly, their ambivalence towards Islam sapped the morale of those around them, and made the social coalescence Islam strived for, even more elusive. Secondly, even when their hypocrisy was in plain sight, Islam forbade disclosing the identities of specific hypocrites. The Qur'an instead, identified certain character traits to

look out for, of which the most egregious was their reluctance to attend congregational prayer. (142:4).

As a result, mosque attendance instantly expanded from being merely an act of personal devotion to becoming a litmus test for loyalty to the community itself. Every Muslim henceforth, went to the mosque, if only to be seen to be praying, or risk being counted among the hypocrites. Even in the case of one blind congregant, the Prophet gave instructions that on hearing the call to prayer, he too make his way to the mosque.⁸ It is in this context also, that one ought to understand the great emphasis the Qur'an (62:9) places on attending the Friday prayer, even when great profits might beckon on the outside. These conspiracies notwithstanding, the nascent Muslim community was nonetheless, instructed to keep an open door policy vis-à-vis mosque attendance and to recognize people's religious credentials on face value; not doing so would play into the hands of those bent on subverting unity and morale. (2:114).

This open door policy however, was abandoned after the Prophet, partly because of changes in the political climate, and partly in reaction to the cultural baggage new converts brought to the mosque. Whereas Arab Islam within the boundaries of Arabia provided a social experience common to most Arab Muslims, the cultural baggage converts brought into the faith forced Muslims to come to terms with novel theological challenges that centered, for example, on issues of political succession, the nature of sin, and free will.

Contested Sanctity and Sectarianism

One of the first examples of contested sanctity actually occurs during the time of the Prophet himself, in Quba, just outside of Medina. This little hamlet, some three miles southeast of Medina housed two mosques mentioned prominently in the Qur'an itself, one for having its foundation built on piety, and the other for undermining Islam from within. Whereas history remembers the town for hosting the Prophet on his arrival into Medina, it also gained some notoriety for having amongst its residents one Abu `Amir al-Rahib, a monk whose devotion to Christ apparently made it impossible for him to pay allegiance to a mere mortal like Muhammad. Not having the capacity to confront the Prophet directly, he instead feigned belief, and urged his devotees to build another mosque close by as an outpost to conspire against Islam. (9:107). The Prophet was invited to consecrate the mosque, but refused, and later instructed his followers to destroy the mosque itself, signaling thereby, that mosques are not all sacrosanct. Muslims were never to worship in sanctuaries, like Dirar, he seemed to be implying, because under the guise of sanctity, they sow discord from within. After the Prophetic era, therefore, and with the rise of sectarianism, the question of sanctity usually became inextricably entwined with sectarian rivalries, and political machinations.

Also worth remembering is the fact that mosques faced threats not just from the politically ambitious, but from competing sanctities as well.

In early Islam already, the issue of women in the mosque drove a wedge in the community, and in one case turned father against son. Waqid, the son of Abd Allah b. `Umar, himself a great champion of the sunna as the sanctified prophetic example, protested when his father, on the authority of the Prophet, demanded that women be given free access to mosques, at all times. The son, fearing the lowering of moral standards in the community, and perhaps the desecration of the mosque itself, refused to allow the women of his household access to mosques after dark.⁹ Clearly, the heated exchange that followed—and permanently estranged father from son—was prompted, not by utilitarian concerns, but by Waqid's alleged disregard for a prophetic directive, and his father's equal disregard for the sanctity of sacred space.

The second incident involves the Ka`ba and the Prophet, and is a singular illustration of the enduring power of the sacred, even over established authority.¹⁰ In a conversation with `A`isha, the Prophet expressed a desire to rebuild the Ka`ba in the shape Abraham had first given it. When urged to do so, however, he demurred, on the basis that public sentiment towards the inviolability of the sacred building, especially among new converts, would most likely, militate against such an undertaking—even if the Prophet himself gave that order!

After the death of the Prophet, the question of succession opened up a new battle for the sacred, with one group in particular, positing his family

as heirs to his sanctity. One consequence of this battle was the emergence, firstly, of the Party of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, and secondly of the cult of the family of the Prophet himself. Key to our discussion is the fact that the political disillusionments of `Ali's followers, and their unfair treatment within a silent orthodoxy, is what ultimately spawned a whole set of rituals requiring a separate sacred space away from the mosque.¹¹

To stymie `Alid political aspirations, the Umayyads exploited the silence of the majority to vilify `Ali from the pulpit. In so doing, they also took the first critical steps towards politicizing the Friday sermon, and forcing political malcontents to worship elsewhere. The repression of the house of `Ali intensified and matters came to a head in Muharram, the 12th month of the Muslim calendar, when Husayn b. `Ali, together with 72 of his followers suffered a massacre at the hands of the Umayyads in the Iraqi desert, near Karbala. At first, his devotees would gather at the site itself simply to mourn the dead, and revile the perpetrators, but soon, both the time and the site of the massacre came to represent an all new socially inspired sacred.

Despite state efforts to curtail their ritual practices, attendance grew and seeded a full-blown sectarian movement, to which the name Imami—as opposed to the later Ithna `Ashari—is sometimes appended.¹² These early Shiites loosely belonged to a group of the Tawwabun, or Repenters whose informal gatherings in homes evolved into the

establishment of a proper shrine, second only to the Hejaz in sanctity. In time mourning centers called Takya Khana in Iran, and Imambara, `Aza Khana, or Imambarga in South Asia would gradually vie with the mosque for attention.

Initially, these developments drew little attention, perhaps because ritual diversity itself was not peculiar to this era in Islamic history, and a few political dissidents coming together posed no real threat to orthodoxy. The growing signs of a sectarian split first appeared however, in the 8th century when dissidents in Kufa began using special liturgies like the qunut to set the Alids apart from the majority.¹³ Senior leaders of the opposition, including Ja`far al-Sadiq, and Muhammad al-Baqir led the campaign by encouraging their followers to frequent mosques that they considered blessed and avoid those they considered cursed. They based their distinction on a combination of historical and ritualistic factors that together, spawned a wholly other religious identity, one that ultimately came to distinguish Shiites from the majority.

One must remember however, that during this early phase in Muslim history mosques with shared sanctities at which all worshippers gathered still existed. All of that changed however, when the majority, in reaction to the ongoing squabbles for power, adopted an attitude towards political immoderations that by default favored the Umayyads over the Alids. Gone were the days when `Umar, the second Caliph would himself be

interrogated by congregants for his alleged abuse of authority, and this while he was delivering the Friday sermon.¹⁴ Muslims Orthodoxy's virtual indifference to Umayyad abuse of the mosque and particularly the judiciary's endorsement of the rule that prayer even 'behind the iniquitous' is permissible, simply pushed the party of `Ali further away from regular mosques.¹⁵ Their visitations to mourning sites took on a new vigor, festooned with special invocations, and ritual instructions, and endorsed by leading Shiite jurists, and even the Imams. Of the five signs of a true believer according to the Imam Hasan al-`Askari, for example, is pilgrimage to the tomb of Hussain every forty days after his death. Prayer and invocation at Ghadir Khumm, furthermore, is propitious because it is where God manifested the truth of succession.

Mosques with peculiar reputations soon emerged, with some like the Masjid Ghani, laying claim to sanctity for housing gardens and springs from heaven; and others, like the Masjid Ju`fi for hosting the Hidden Imam on his return from occultation. Masjid Suhail was deemed holy because every Messenger sent by God prayed therein, and Masjid bani Khalil because `Ali recited the qunut therein during the morning prayer. Some mosques however, were off limits because of the role they played in the struggle against the Umayyads. There was, for instance, the mosque of Al-Ash`ath b. Qais who not only opposed `Ali during the battle of Siffin, but also forced him to accept arbitration on terms favorable to Mu`awiyah. Then there

was the Masjid of Simak b. Makhrama in which `Ali refused to pray, perhaps because it was built in an area with strong Umayyad loyalties.

Shiites were not alone in their ambivalence towards the traditional mosque. The growing opulence of the masses and the political intrigues of the ruling elite—symbolized, for instance, by the transfer of the capital from Medina to Kufa, and then to Damascus—all but pushed the spiritually sensitive Sufis towards the fringes of orthodoxy. What catapulted them towards alternate sacred spaces however was their own partiality to seclusion, and their quest for ihsan, or the sense of seeing God in person. It would seem therefore, that political wrangling was but an excuse for ascetics such as Hasan al-Basri (d.728) to relinquish control over mosques, and seek refuge instead, in their very own third spaces.¹⁶ Add to this their perennial focus on haqiqah, or direct and personal experiences of the Divine, and one sees individual Sufis starting to form distinct subaltern groups with their increasingly 'popular' Islam on a collision course with the 'learned' Islam of the `ulama.

Nothing quite set them apart from the `ulama however, as did their syncretic approach to foreign cultures and religions. Conversion to Islam in Persia, for example, was considerably easier because of Sufism's appeal to Zoroastrian pantheism, and particularly, its ethics that saw human actions as essentially an amalgam of human and divine intent. In terms of conversion,

Sufi dissemination of Islam through poetry helped pave the way for mass movements towards Islam. Certainly, if not for the lament of the plight of the oppressed masses in the poetry of Sufis like al-Attar and Rumi, both Islam and Persian literature would have remained the preserve of the elite. But while this approach to Islam helped pave the way for mass conversions to Islam, it also had the opposite effect of upending established dogma and ritual practices—and earning the ire of the `ulama.¹⁷

Also irksome to the `ulama was the supplanting of their control over the public square by way of the law with the spiritual tutelage that the Sufi wielded over the individual's conscience. Here the emphasis shifted from obedience to the consensus based jurisprudence of the ulama to the inspirational utterings of Sufi masters, and to their unveilings or kashf¹⁸ And to accommodate the special needs of their acolytes, Sufis established separate safe spaces—called khalwat, mazar, dargah, or tekke—in some parts of the Muslim world.¹⁹

This withdrawal of individual Sufis from a society increasingly at odds with their asceticism later morphed into the formation of mystic clusters that withdrew from the mosque itself, and from the juridical authority of the `ulama. To the Sufis, the preservation of true inner worship eclipsed the ritual propriety of orthodoxy, even those performed in mosques. Whereas early worship in the mosque echoed the piety of the devout, later it came to exemplify `ulama authority mixed with political

power. Which is why in Persia and South Asia the shrine (khanqah) instead of the mosque, became the spiritual epicenter, where periodic festivals would celebrate the death of the saint (`urs), and where devotees would make offerings in the name of their special saint. The custodian of the shrine (sajjad-e-nashin)—often a member of the saint's immediate family—would utilize these offerings for the upkeep of the shrine as well as for distribution to the poor.²⁰ Even the symbols of the Sufi shaikh—the prayer carpet, the wooden sandals, the patched cloak, and of course, the rosary—endeared him to the masses with greater fervor than did the pomp of political office, or the dispassion of the judiciary.

The Challenge of Inclusive Sanctity Today

If history is anything to go by, then the costs of supplanting traditional mosques with specific sacred spaces that cater to trending social causes—Shiism and Sufism then, Liberalism now—are hardly inconsequential. Such trends raise serious questions, not just about the sanctity of the mosque, but more broadly, about Muslim identity itself. Clearly, those who drifted away from mosques in protest against political irregularities or epicurean decadence did not foresee their spiritual lean-tos morphing into permanent spiritual shelters, let alone separate communes within Islam itself. Yet, this is precisely what the mazar and the imambarah have come to represent in Muslim communities worldwide. Only those with ongoing affiliations to

the original founding sects frequent these sacred spaces and continue to find solace and camaraderie therein. For everyone else, these sacred spaces pose a challenge, if not to their understanding of what constitutes proper orthodoxy, then to their sense of communal inclusivity. Inside the mosques of America, Muslims prevaricate between preserving dogma at the expense of ostracizing their fellow Muslims, and suspending doctrinal judgment in order to strengthen communal ties.

The world in which we live however, poses a somewhat different set of challenges. While both communal inclusivity and ritual accuracy remain important, their promotion to the exclusion of all else, comes at a cost. The world has time only for such beliefs and performances as are both coherent in terms of their rationale, and non-discriminatory in terms of their social practices. The local mosque today, with its odd symbols and routines is now the only public space where customs and performances considered odd in both ways may still be performed with some measure of protection. One fears, however, that without the halo of the sacred around the mosque, this last preserve of religious quirkiness will inevitably capitulate to the vagaries of the secular. Noted sociologist Emile Durkheim, in fact, was the first to circulate the idea that sacred space is relevant only insofar as it promotes or inhibits human quirkiness, regardless of “. . .any utilitarian calculation of helpful or harmful results”.²¹ In other

words, the sacred, by design, is not just quirky and insensitive to changing utilitarian values, but also to the standards of normality when viewed from the outside. Normality in our case, would refer to the new social conventions towards which society shifts periodically, as well as to practical functions that may clearly useful, if not entirely traditional. This paradox between the normal and the sacred, therefore, is what drives Muslim America's growing cognitive dissonance vis-à-vis mosques.

The way forward, I believe, is not through the establishment of parachurch enclaves that accommodate the values of just one group, but through a healthy interaction in a common mosque, where competing values are negotiated. This is the only way to distill values that represent both the core elements of Islam as well as the best that civil society has to offer. As for those who find this arrangement antithetical to their value system, let them be the ones to suffer the consequences of establishing alternate religious centers.

1. This is admittedly a complex discussion over which much ink—and some blood—has already been spilled. But as Hans Morgenthau in his important book *Politics among Nations; The Struggle for Power and Peace*. (New York: Knopf, 1967), strongly suggests—and as some would argue is the case in today’s clashes at mosques—the struggle is not just about values and rights only, but ultimately about power. It is this universal struggle for power, he says, that pits those who demand control of the mosque, under the guise of sanctity, against those who do the same, but under the guise of human rights.
2. Richard Sosis, “Religious Behaviors, Badges, and Bans: Signaling Theory and the Evolution of Religion,” in *Where God and Science Meet: How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter Our Understanding of Religion*, volume 1: Evolution, Genes, and the Religious Brain, ed. Patrick McNamara (Westport: Praeger Publications, 2006) 61.
3. Nazi propaganda sanctified a troika of empires to justify its discriminatory policies, with the Holy Roman Empire (962-1806 c.e.) and the German Empire (1871-1918 c.c.) being the First and the Second Reich respectively, and Hitler’s empire, the third. See in this regard Richard J. Evans *The Third Reich at War* (Penguin, 2010) the third volume in a trilogy that covers 12 years of Nazi governance. Of relevance to the topic at hand is his analysis of the extent to which ordinary souls were motivated to partake in this orgy of violence, a motivation I would ascribe in some measure to the power of the sacred.
4. “O you who have faith! Transgress not against the sanctified symbols of God, nor against the sacred month, nor against the garlanded animals, nor against pilgrims to the Sacred Sanctuary, those who seek the bounties of their Lord, and His goodly acceptance. And when you have dispensed with the rituals of the pilgrimage, only then may you hunt.”
5. This garlanding was in fact, a ritual that pre-Islamic Arabia considered part of the pilgrimage, and some scholars subsequently endorsed. Sacrificial animals destined for the holy sanctuary in Mecca were daubed with wax, and occasionally garlanded with shoes to signify their sanctity.
6. Roy A. Rappaport, “Ritual, Sanctity, and Cybernetics” *American Anthropologist* Vol. 73, No. 1 (Feb., 1971) pp. 59-76.
7. This of course, does not apply to the Haram in Mecca where the travails of the Abrahamic family are duly reenacted, as part of the lesser or greater pilgrimage.
8. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Sharh Sunan al-Nasa’i* (Dar al-Basha’ir al-Islamiyya, 1986) 4 Vol., hadith no. 850.
9. Al-Mubarakpuri Muhammad, *Tuhfat al-Ahwazi fi sharh Jami’ al-Tirmidhi*. Dar al-Kutub al-`Illmiyya, Beirut. Hadith no. 570
10. Muhammad ibn Isma’il al-Bukhari, *Al-Sahih* Hadith no., 1509
11. One important source for this period in Muslim history is W. Madelung, especially his *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* New York 1997. The sources that Madelung cites seem to suggest that the practice of cursing from the pulpit was Mu’awiya’s way of consolidating power, rather than the airing of the personal resentments he may have harbored against `Ali. But Madelung is nonetheless, scathing in his criticism towards Mu’awiya, under whose authority, he argues, Islam was usurped, its pacifist core strangled, and its fraternal bonds were turned into an instrument of state repression.
12. See Etan Kohlberg, “From Imamiyya to Ithna `Ashariyya,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 39 (1976), 521-34; and “Early Attestations of the `Ithna `Ashariyya,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 24 (2000), 343-57.
13. The *qunut* is an extraordinary invocation that all legal schools encourage, but at varying points within the daily prayer. Some require that the hands be raised, others that it be recited loudly, and the Shiites in particular, require that it be recited in the final cycle of every obligatory prayer. See, for example, Najam Haider, “Prayer, Mosque, and Pilgrimage: Mapping Shi’i Sectarian Identity in 2nd/8th Century Kufa”, in *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 16, No. 2 (2009) pp. 151-174. Haidar’s study of Kufa between the 8th and 11th centuries details the role ritual idiosyncrasies also played in forging a separate Shiite communal boundary. For an earlier inquiry into this topic, see: Marshall Hodgson, “How did the Early Shi’a become Sectarian” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* vol. 75, No. 1 (1955), pp. 1-13.
14. Although Hamzah al-Malyabari, in his work *Nazarat Jadidah fi `Ulum al-Hadith* (Dar Ibn Hazm, 2002) casts doubt on the authenticity of the incident I allude to, its purport I believe, still reflects the egalitarian spirit of the early community.
15. Although the Tradition encouraging prayer even behind an iniquitous imam is generally considered weak, sunni schools of law have nonetheless incorporated the teaching itself into the law, albeit with several restrictions. Abu Daud’s narration goes so far as to compel prayer behind ‘every Muslim, whether he is righteous or iniquitous’. That this was a sensitive issue of great importance in the 8th and 9th centuries can be gauged by the fact that the Sahih of Bukhari includes in its chapter titles one that reads: “The prayer leadership of one beset by calamity or in heresy”.
16. Fritjhof Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*. (Lahore,

1985). Trans. William Stoddart.

17. The spread of Islam in the *Maghreb* amply illustrates the syncretistic Sufi approach that facilitated Berber conversion. In the Berbers Islam faced a community whose language and culture was most dissimilar to that of the Arabs, and unlike the Persians, they lacked the sophistication needed to morph Arabic and Islam into a localized orthodoxy. See in this regard, A.M. Mackeen, "The Early History of Sufism in the Maghrib Prior to al-Shadhili" *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, No.3 Vol. 91, (Jul-Sep., 1971) pp. 398-408.
18. Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh, 2007). Chapter 6 of this book is useful to understand the rise of Sufi masters among the masses, and its effects on politics. His summary of Sufi doctrine and in particular the differences between the traditionalists such as Abu Talib al-Makki, and the synthesizers of Khurasan brings into sharp relief the contested nature of Sufi thought itself.
19. Whereas western scholars often confused any spiritual enclave for a mosque, insiders almost always recognized the distinction. To these strangers to Islamic architecture, any sacred place was a Meskit, a Mosque, or even a funeral mosque. Part of the confusion stemmed from the fact that these alternate spiritual enclaves also served as places where the daily prayers were offered, thus making the regular mosque less significant. The *khalwat* is however unique in this regard, if only because it was a place of withdrawal, and not of gathering.
20. In Egypt the term used was *shaykh al-sajjada* (master of the prayer rug), but not always in reference to a Sufi master. See in this regard, John Livingstone, "Shaykh Bakri and Bonaparte" in *Studia Islamica* No.80 (1994) pp. 125-143.
21. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York, 1965) p.85. For Durkheim, the sacred is, in fact, prior to the idea of god.