

Translator's Introduction

Al-Sahifat Al-Sajjadiyya is the oldest prayer manual in Islamic sources and one of the most seminal works of Islamic spirituality of the early period. It was composed by the Prophet's great grandson, `Ali ibn al-Husayn, known as Zayn al-'Abidin ('the adornment of the worshippers'), and has been cherished in Shi'ite sources from earliest times. Zayn al-'Abidin was the fourth of the Shi'ite Imams, after his father Husayn, his uncle Hasan, and his grandfather 'Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law. Shi'ite tradition considers the Sahifa a book worthy of the utmost veneration, ranking it behind only the Qur'an and `Ali's Nahj al-balagha.

Ali Ibn Al-Husayn

`Ali ibn al-Husayn was born in Medina, according to most sources in the year 38/658–9. He may have been too small to have remembered his grandfather 'Ali, who was killed in 40/661, but he was brought up in the presence of his uncle Hasan and his father Husayn, the Prophet's beloved grandchildren. Many Shi'ite sources state that his mother was Shahrbanu, the daughter of Yazdigird, the last Sasanian king of Persia.

Thus he was said to be `Ibn al-Khiyaratayn', the `son of the best two', meaning the Quraysh among the Arabs and the Persians among the non-Arabs. According to some accounts, his mother was brought as a captive to Medina during the caliphate of `Umar, who wanted to sell her. `Ali suggested instead that she be offered her choice of the Muslim men as husband and that her dower be paid from the public treasury. `Umar agreed and she chose 'Ali's son Husayn. She is said to have died shortly after giving birth to her only son `Ali.

There is no need to recount here the tragedy at Karbala' in 61/680, when Husayn and many of the male members of his family were killed by the forces of the Umayyad caliph Yazid, an event which shook the Islamic world and precipitated the nascent Shi'ite movement.

Zayn al-'Abidin accompanied his father on the march toward Kufa, but he had fallen deathly ill and was lying on a skin in a tent. Once the Umayyad troops had massacred Husayn and his male followers, they looted the tents, stripped the women of their jewellery, and even took the skin upon which Zayn al-

'Abidin was prostrate.

The infamous Shamir (Shimr) ibn Dhi'l-Jawshan was about to kill Zayn al-'Abidin in spite of his helplessness, but Husayn's sister Zaynab threw herself on top of him to save him, and `Umar ibn Sa'd, the Umayyad commander, told Shamir to let him be. Zayn al-'Abidin was taken along with the women to the caliph in Damascus, and eventually he was allowed to return to Medina.

Several accounts are related concerning his grief over this tragedy. It is said that for twenty years whenever food was placed before him, he would weep. One day a servant said to him, `O son of God's Messenger! Is it not time for your sorrow to come to an end?' He replied, `Woe upon you! Jacob the prophet had twelve sons, and God made one of them disappear. His eyes turned white from constant weeping, his head turned grey out of sorrow, and his back became bent in gloom [cf. 12: 84], though his son was alive in this world. But I watched while my father, my brother, my uncle, and seventeen members of my family were slaughtered all around me. How should my sorrow come to an end?'

Zayn al-'Abidin resided in Medina until his death in 95/713-4 (or 94/712-3). He was the object both of great sympathy because of the massacre of his family and of veneration as the great grandson of the Prophet. He dedicated his life to learning and worship and became an authority on prophetic traditions and law, but he was known mostly for his nobility of character and his piety, which earned him his sobriquet already in his lifetime. The details that have reached us about his life in Medina mainly take the form of anecdotes affirming his constant preoccupation with worship and acts of devotion. He fathered fifteen children, eleven boys and four girls.

After Karbala¹, there were a number of different factions in the Shi'ite community, not all of which supported Zayn al-'Abidin as the rightful Imam of the Muslim community. Many Shi'ites, such as those involved in the `Tawwabun' movement, felt that the Umayyads had to be overthrown and that it was the duty of the Imam to lead a revolt. But Zayn al-'Abidin himself refused to become involved with politics.

After his death, a split occurred between his eldest son and designated successor Muhammad al-Baqir, the fifth Imam, and his second son, al-Baqir's half brother Zayd, who advocated active resistance to Umayyad oppression and gained a large number of followers as a result. Al-Baqir continued to pursue his father's policy of rejecting any sort of involvement with political movements until his death (probably in 117/735).

Zayd revolted toward the beginning of the imamate of al-Baqir's son Ja'far al-Sadiq and was killed in Safar 121/January 739; his son Yahya, who plays an important role in the preface to the Sahifa, continued in his father's path and was killed three years later at the age of eighteen. The Zaydi Shi'ites, still strong in the Yemen today, trace the lineage of their imams back to Zayd.

Al-Sahifat Al-Sajjadiyya

The title Al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya means simply 'The Book of al-Sajjad'.

Al-Sajjad is one of the titles given to Zayn al-'Abidin and signifies 'the one who constantly prostrates himself in prayer'. The book is often called Al-Sahifat al-Kamilat al-Sajjadiyya, that is, 'The "Perfect", or "Complete", Book of al-Sajjad'.

According to its commentator Sayyid 'Alikhan Shirazi, the word *kamila* refers to the perfection of the style and content; some sources state that the adjective was added to differentiate it from another, incomplete version of the work, which is known among the Zaydis, but this seems less likely, given the manner in which the title is employed in the preface (verse 20). The Sahifa has been called by various honorifics, such as 'Sister of the Qur'an', 'Gospel of the Folk of the House', and 'Psalms of the Household of Muhammad'.

According to Shi'ite tradition, Zayn al-'Abidin had collected his supplications and taught them to his children, especially Muhammad al-Baqir and Zayd. In later times the text became widely disseminated among Shi'ites of all persuasions. The specialists in the science of hadith maintain that the text is *mutawatir*; in other words, it was generally known from earliest times and has been handed down by numerous chains of transmission, while its authenticity has never been questioned.

Nevertheless, the arrangement of the text allows us to draw a certain distinction between the fifty-four supplications which make the main body of the text and the additional supplications which make up the fourteen addenda (including the prayers for the days of the week) and the fifteen *munajat* or 'whispered prayers'. The original fifty-four supplications show an undeniable freshness and unity of theme and style, while the latter, especially the *munajat*, add a certain orderliness and self-conscious artistry which may suggest the hand of an editor.

The addenda are said to have been collected and added to the text by Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Makki, known as al-Shahid al-Awwal (the 'first martyr'), the famous author of Al-Lum'at al-Dimashqiyya in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) who was killed in Aleppo in 786/1384. The fifteen *munajat* have been added to several modern editions of the Sahifa and seem to have been brought to the attention of the main body of Shi'ites by 'Allama Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1110/1689-9 or a year later), author of the monumental compilation of Shi'ite hadith, Bihar al-Anwar.

Many supplications have been handed down from Imam Zayn al-'Abidin in addition to those recorded in the text of the Sahifa as given here, and various scholars have collected these together in a series of works known as the 'second Sahifa' the 'third Sahifa' and so on. The second Sahifa which is about as long as the Sahifa itself, was compiled as the 'sister' of the Sahifa by Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Hurr al-'Amili (d. 1104/1692-3), author of the famous Wasa'il al-Shi'a in the year 1053/1643.

A third Sahifa was put together by the author of *Riyad al-'ulama'* Mirza 'Abd Allah ibn Mirza 'Isa Tabrizi, known as Afandi and a student of Majlisi. The longest of the published versions is *Al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyyat al-khamisa* ('The Fifth Sahifa of al-Sajjad') by Muhsin al-Amin, the well known contemporary author of *A'yan al-shi'a*. It includes all the supplications included in the previous Sahifas; 130 of these are found in the first and second Sahifas and 52 are added. In her sympathetic study of Islamic prayer manuals, *Muslim Devotions*, Constance Padwick made use of this fifth recension of the text, which fills more than six hundred pages.

Any serious attempt to sort out the relative historical reliability of the individual supplications found in all the versions of the Sahifa on the basis of modern critical scholarship would be an undertaking of major proportions. The result of such a study – if one can judge by studies of other ancient texts – would probably be that, after years of toil, we would have a series of hypotheses, leaving varying degrees of doubt.

This would be of interest to Western scholars and modernized Muslims, both of whom, in any case, have no personal involvement with the contents and teachings of the Sahifa. But the attitude of most Muslims has been to look at the content of the texts established by the authority of tradition and not be too concerned with who actually wrote the words in 'historical fact'. In this regard the saying of 'Ali is well known: 'Look at what has been said, not at who has said it', since only the truth or untruth of the words is of real concern.

From this point of view, if the author of the *Sahifat al-kamila* was not Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, he – or they – would in any case have to have been a spiritual authority of equal rank, so the whole exercise leaves us where we started: with a text which expresses the highest aspirations of the Muslim soul.

However this may be, we can be satisfied to have the core text which has been attributed to Zayn al-'Abidin by centuries of Shi'ite tradition. In other words, in the fifty-four basic prayers of the Sahifa we have the Zayn al-'Abidin who has been known to Shi'ites for more than a thousand years and who has helped give to Shi'ism its specific contours down to the present day.

Scholars may eventually reach the conclusion that the Zayn al-'Abidin of 'historical fact' differs from the Zayn al-'Abidin of tradition, but this will remain a hypothesis, since at this distance 'historical facts' are impossible to verify and as open to interpretation as literature. Whether or not historians accept the text as completely authentic will not change the actual influence which Zayn al-'Abidin and the Sahifa have exercised upon Islam over the centuries, nor is it likely to change the way they continue to influence practising Muslims. The 'real' Zayn al-'Abidin is the figure enshrined by the text as it now stands.

The opinion of the writer of these lines concerning the authenticity of the Sahifa – admittedly based only upon an intimate acquaintance with the text gained through many months spent in translation – is that the original fifty-four prayers go back to Zayn al-'Abidin, that the addenda are nearly as trustworthy, and that the *munajat* may have been worked upon by others. But the Sahifa in its larger forms probably

contains a good deal of material from later authors.

It is interesting to note Padwick's comments on the Sahifat al-khamisa: 'The great body of devotion attributed to him is characterized by a deep humility and sense of sin, and by an intransigent, undying resentment against the foes of his house.' Only the first half of this statement is true about the present Sahifa. Though the Imam makes a number of allusions to the injustice suffered by his family and the fact that their rightful heritage has been usurped, no one can call this a major theme of the Sahifa or an 'intransigent, undying resentment'. In the one instance where Zayn al-'Abidin speaks rather explicitly of the injustice suffered by the Imams (48.9-11), this is accompanied by an admission of God's wisdom in His ordainment.

The Arabic Text

The Arabic text of the Sahifat al-kamila which forms the basis for the translation was established by al-Shahid al-Awwal. The modern Iranian editions are based mainly on the version of this text transmitted by the father of the above-mentioned Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, Mulla Muhammad Taqi Majlisi (d. 1070/1659-60), also an important scholar of the Safavid period. and another son, Mulla 'Abd Allah (d. c. 1084/1673); but at least one of these editions goes back to the famous Safavid jurist, philosopher, architect, poet, and mathematician Shaykh-i Baha'i (d. 1031/1621-2).

The elder Majlisi had at his disposal numerous manuscripts of the text, which he had received from the foremost Shi'ite authorities of his day. In one of his works he refers to all the chains of transmission by which he had received the Sahifa, and, we are told, these number more than a million.

The question naturally arises as to why Majlisi chose the particular chain of transmission mentioned in the preface out of the many he had at his disposal, especially since the chain itself is exceedingly weak (as indicated by the commentators and recorded in the notes to the translation). The reason for this seems to be the accuracy of this particular version going back to al-Shahid al-Awwal, as confirmed by another 'special' route through which Majlisi received the Sahifa. This special route is worth mentioning in detail, since it provides a good example of the aura which has surrounded the text in Shi'ite circles.

One day, lying in bed half asleep, Majlisi saw himself in the courtyard of the 'Atiq mosque in Isfahan, and before him stood the Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam. Majlisi asked him about a number of scholarly problems which he had not been able to solve, and the Mahdi explained their solutions. Then Majlisi asked him for a book which he could put into practice, and the Mahdi directed him to seek out Mawlana Muhammad al-Taj.

In his vision Majlisi found the book, and it appeared to be a book of supplications. Waking up, he saw that his hand was empty, and he wept until morning at his loss. At daybreak it occurred to him that perhaps the Mahdi had meant Shaykh Muhammad Mudarris, calling him by the title 'Taj' (the 'crown') because he was so famous among the scholars. Hence he went to see Shaykh Muhammad, and,

entering his circle, saw that he held a copy of the Sahifa in his hand. He went forward and recounted his vision to Shaykh Muhammad, who interpreted it to mean that he would reach high levels of gnostic and visionary knowledge.

But Majlisi was not satisfied with this explanation, and he wandered around the bazaar in perplexity and sorrow. Upon reaching the melon market, he met a pious old man known as Aqa Hasan, whom the people called, Taja ('Crown'). Majlisi greeted him, and Aqa Hasan called to him and said that he had a number of books which were consecrated for religious purpose (*waqfi*) but that he did not trust most of the students to put them to proper use. 'Come', he said, 'and take whichever of these books which you think you can put into practice.'

Entering Aqa Hasan's library, Majlisi immediately saw the book he had seen in his dream, so he said: 'This is enough for me.' It was a copy of the Sahifa. He then went back to Shaykh Muhammad and began collating his newly acquired copy with that of Shaykh Muhammad; both of them had been made from the manuscript of al-Shahid al-Awwal. In short, Majlisi tells us that the authenticity of his copy of the Sahifa was confirmed by the Mahdi himself.

At least forty commentaries and glosses have been written on the Sahifa mostly during the period extending from the Safavid era (907–1125/1502–1722) to the present. Among famous Safavid scholars who wrote commentaries are Shaykh-i Baha'i, the philosopher Mir Damad (d. c. 1040/1630), and the younger Majlisi. The most well-known of the commentaries is *Riyad al-salikin* by al-Sayyid 'Alikhan al-Husayn al-Hasan al-Shirazi (d. 1120/1708–9).

Prayer In Islam

The Sahifa has been called a 'prayer manual', but this description may be misleading to Western readers not familiar with the different varieties of prayer in Islam. The best introduction to these – as well as to the contents of the Sahifa – is provided by Padwick's *Muslim Devotions* which also analyzes the major themes common to all supplications and explains many of the important Arabic terms employed. Given the existence of Padwick's study, we can be excused for providing only a few comments to situate supplication in the larger context of Muslim prayer and to suggest the importance of the Sahifa for gaining an understanding of Islam as a religion.

'Prayer' in Islam can be divided into obligatory and voluntary. The obligatory prayer includes the daily ritual or canonical prayer (*salat*) which the Prophet called the 'pillar of Islam', and various occasional prayers such as the Friday congregational prayer (according to most opinions), which need not concern us here. Nothing is more basic than the daily prayers to Muslim practice except the testimony of faith or *shahada*: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger.'

Every Muslim must perform the *salat* five times a day, exceptions being made only for children and for women during periods when they cannot fulfill the requirements of ritual purity. Even the bedridden must

pray the *salat* if they are conscious and coherent, though they are excused from the physical movements which normally accompany it. 'Perform the *salat*!' is one of the most common injunctions in the Qur'an.

Most of the many forms of recommended prayer can be classified either as *salat*, *dhikr* or *du'a'*. The recommended *salat* involves the same movements and recitations that are contained in the obligatory *salat* while the Prophet's *sunna* sets down various times during the day or occasions when various specific *salats* may be performed. In addition, the worshiper is free to perform *salat* as he desires, and thus it is related that Imam Zayn al-'Abidin used to perform one thousand supererogatory cycles of *salat* every night, in imitation of his grandfather 'Ali.

Dhikr – which means literally 'remembrance' or 'mention' and which is frequently translated as 'invocation' – is the mention of a name or names of God, often in the form of the repetition of a Qur'anic formula such as There is no god but God, Praise belongs to God, Glory be to God, or God is great. Most Muslims recite such formulas a set number of times after completing an obligatory ritual prayer.

Fifteen Qur'anic verses command *dhikr* of Allah or the 'name of Allah', emphasizing the fact that this practice involves a verbal mention of a divine name. If the Shari'a does not make *dhikr* an incumbent act, this has to do with the fact that the Qur'anic command to remember God was not given a single, specific form by the Prophet's *sunna*, in contrast to the command to perform the *salat*. In other words, everyone agrees that it is important to perform *dhikr* and that the Prophet practiced it constantly.

But the Prophet never made any specific form of *dhikr* mandatory for the faithful; on the contrary, he practiced many different forms and seems to have suggested a great variety of forms to his Companions in keeping with their needs.

From earliest times the sources confirm the power of *dhikr* to provide for human psychological and spiritual needs and to influence activity. It is not difficult to understand that reciting *ya rahman ya rahim* ('O All-merciful, O All-compassionate') will have a different effect upon the believer than reciting, *la hawla wa-la quwwata illa bi-Allah al-'ali al-'azim* ('There is no power and no strength save in God, the All-high, the All-mighty'). Spiritual teachers eventually developed a science of different *adhkar* (plural of *dhikr*) appropriate for all the states of the soul.

Du'a' or 'supplication' is closely connected to *dhikr*, such that it is often difficult to make a distinction between the two. The term means literally 'to call upon' and it is commanded by the Qur'an in several suggestive verses, including the following:

Supplicate your Lord humbly and secretly; He loves not transgressors. (7:55)

Supplicate Allah or supplicate the All-merciful. Whichever you supplicate – to Him belong the most beautiful names. (17:110)

Supplicate God, making your religion His sincerely, though the unbelievers be averse. (40:14)

***Your Lord has said: 'Supplicate Me and I will respond to you. Surely those who wax too proud to worship Me shall enter Gehenna utterly abject.'* (40:60)**

And when My servants question thee concerning Me – I am near to respond to the supplication of the supplicator when he supplicates Me. (2: 186)

Collections of hadith, both Sunni and Shi'ite, devote chapters to the benefits of supplication; the following sayings of the Prophet from Sunni sources are typical:

Supplication is the pith of worship. (TIRMIDHI)

When one of you supplicates, he should not say, 'O God, forgive me if Thou wilt', but he should be firm in his asking and make his desire great, for what God gives is nothing great for him. (MUSLIM)

God will respond to the servant as long as he does not supplicate for anything sinful or for breaking the ties of the womb, and as long as he does not ask for an immediate response. (MUSLIM)

Each of you should ask your Lord for all your needs; he should even ask Him for the thong of his sandal when it breaks. (TIRMIDHI)

Shi'ite sources provide some of the same sayings while adding many more. For example:

The Prophet related that God says: 'O My servants, all of you are misguided except him whom I guide, so ask Me for guidance, and I will guide you. All of you are poor except him whom I enrich, so ask Me for riches, and I will provide for you. All of you are sinners except him whom I release, so ask Me to forgive you, and I will forgive you.'

The Prophet said: 'Supplication is the weapon of the man of faith, the centrepole of religion, and the light of the heavens and the earth.'

'Ali was asked: 'Which speech is best in God's eyes?' He replied: 'A great amount of *dhikr*, pleading (*tadarru'*), and supplication.'

'Ali said: 'Four things work to a man's benefit and not against him: faith and thanksgiving, for God says:

***What would God do with chastising you, if you are thankful and have faith?* (4:147);**

asking forgiveness, for He says:

***God would never chastise them with thee among them; God would never chastise them while they prayed forgiveness* (8:33);**

and supplication, for He says:

***My Lord esteems you not at all were it not for your supplication* (25:77).**

Husayn said: 'The Prophet used to raise his hands when he implored and supplicated, like a man in misery begging for food.'

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir said: 'God loves nothing better than that His servants ask from Him.'

In short, supplicating or calling upon God is to address Him with one's praise, thanksgiving, hopes, and needs. It is 'prayer' in the personal sense commonly understood from the term by contemporary Christians. It forms a basic part of the religious life, but like *dhikr*, though commanded by the Qur'an in general terms, it does not take a specific form in the injunctions of the Shari'a because of its personal and inward nature.

Everyone must remember God and supplicate Him, but this can hardly be legislated, since it pertains to the secret relationship between a human being and his or her Lord. The *salat*, however, is the absolute minimum which God will accept from the faithful as the mark of their faith and their membership in the community.

Its public side is emphasized by the physical movements which accompany it and the fact that its form and contents are basically the same for all worshipers, even if its private side is shown by the fact that it can be performed wherever a person happens to find himself. In contrast *dhikr* and supplication are totally personal.

But the private devotional lives of the great exemplars of religion often become public, since they act as models for other human beings. The '*sunna*' of the Prophet is precisely the practices of the highest exemplification of human goodness made into an ideal which everyone should emulate, and the supplications which the Prophet used to make are part of his *sunna*. When he recited them aloud, his Companions would remember and memorize them. They also used to come to him and ask him for supplications which they could recite on various occasions and for different purposes.

To the Prophet's supplications, the Shi'ites add the supplications of the Imams, beginning with 'Ali. Nowadays the most widely employed of the comprehensive prayer manuals, which contain a wide variety of supplications from all the Imams and for every occasion, is probably *Mafatih al-jinan* ('Keys to the Gardens of Paradise') by 'Abbas Qumi (d. 1359/1940).

The Role Of Supplication

Though many of the supplications which have been handed down from the Prophet and the Imams were certainly spontaneous utterances of the heart, others must have been composed with the express purpose of reciting them on specific occasions or passing them on to the pious.

Most of the prophetic supplications are short and could easily have been recited on the spur of the moment, but some of the prayers of the Imams – such as Zayn al-'Abidin's supplication for the Day of 'Arafa (no. 47) – are long and elaborate compositions.

Even if they began as spontaneous prayers, the very fact that they have been designated as prayers for special occasions suggests that they were noted down and then repeated by the Imam or his followers when the same occasion came around again.

Naturally it is not possible to know the circumstances in which supplications were composed, but we do know a good deal about early Islam's general environment which can help suggest the role that supplication played in the community. Many Muslims, no doubt much more so than today, devoted a great deal of their waking lives to recitation of the Qur'an, remembrance of God, and prayer.

Even those who left Mecca and Medina to take part in the campaigns through which Islam was spread or participate in the governing of the new empire did not necessarily neglect spiritual practices. And for those who devoted themselves to worship, supplication was the flesh and blood of the imagination. It provided a means whereby people could think about God and keep the thought of Him present throughout their daily activities. It was an intimate expression of *tawhid* or the 'profession of God's Unity' which shaped their sensibilities, emotions, thoughts, and concepts.

In the Islamic context, supplication appears as one of the primary frameworks within which the soul can be moulded in accordance with the Divine Will and through which all thoughts and concepts centered upon the ego can be discarded. The overwhelming emphasis in the Sahifa upon doing the will of God – 'Thy will be done', as Christians pray – illustrates clearly a God-centeredness which negates all personal ambitions and individual desires opposed in any way to the divine Will, a Will which is given concrete form by the Shari'a and the *sunna*.

For Muslims then as today, obeying God depended upon imitating those who had already been shaped by God's mercy and guidance, beginning with the Prophet, and followed by the great Companions. For the Shi'ites, the words and acts of the Imams play such a basic role in this respect that they sometimes seem – at least to non-Shi'ites – to push the *sunna* of the Prophet into the background.

The companions of the Imams constantly referred to them for guidance, while the Imams themselves followed the Prophet's practice of spending long hours of the day and night in *salat*, *dhikr*, and supplication. Though much of this devotional life was inward and personal, the Imams had the duty of guiding the community and enriching their religious life. As Imam Zayn al-'Abidin emphasizes in the 'Treatise on Rights', translated in the appendix, it is the duty of every possessor of knowledge to pass it on to others, and the Imams were acknowledged as great authorities of Islam by their contemporaries, Sunni and Shi'ite alike.

Hence it was only natural that they would compose prayers in which their knowledge of man's relationship with God was expressed in the most personal terms and which could be passed around and become communal property. Many if not most of the supplications recorded in the Sahifa seem to be of this sort. A few of them, such as 'His supplication for the Day of Fast-Breaking' (46) or 'for the Day of Sacrifice' (48) seem to have been composed for public occasions. One of them provides internal

evidence to suggest that the Imam had in mind his followers rather than himself: in the supplication for parents (24), he speaks as if his parents were still alive, whereas this could hardly have been the case, unless we suppose that he composed it in his youth before the events at Karbala¹.

Tawhid In Devotional Mode

No one with any sensitivity toward human weakness and God's love can fail to be moved at least by some of the supplications contained in the Sahifa. Here we have one of the greatest spiritual luminaries of Islam so overawed by the sense of God's goodness, mercy, and majesty as to express his utter nothingness before the Creator in terms that may seem surprisingly explicit for one deemed by his followers to be the possessor of such holiness.

In the Sahifa we see Islamic spirituality – or that dimension of the religion of Islam which deals with the practical and lived reality of the personal relationship between man and God – expressed in the most universal of languages, that of the concrete and intimate yearning of the soul for completion and perfection.

Muslim ideas and attitudes go back to *tawhid* or the 'profession of God's Unity' as expressed in the first half of the *shahada*: 'There is no god but God.' This is the essence of the Qur'anic message, as Muslim authorities have affirmed and reaffirmed throughout Islamic history. The Sahifa provides a particularly striking example of what this means in personal, practical terms, not in the abstract language of theology or metaphysics.

The basic theme of the Sahifa can be put into a series of formulas simply by taking every positive human attribute and placing it within the context of the *shahada*: 'There is no goodness but in God', 'There is no repentance but by God's grace', 'There is no gratitude but through God', 'There is no patience without God's help', 'There is no knowledge but in God', 'There is no love except through God's initiative'. The complement of this perspective is that every negative attribute belongs to the human self: 'There is no evil but in me', 'There is no pride but in myself', 'There is no impatience but in my own ego', 'There is none ignorant but me', 'There is no hate but in myself.'

Later authorities frequently cite the first prophet and his wife, Adam and Eve, as Qur'anic examples of this attitude of self-deprecation demanded by the *shahada*. When Adam and Eve had disobeyed their Lord's commandment, they said:

'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves' (7:23).

In contrast, Iblis – who personifies the tendency in the human soul to pride, self-centredness, and heedlessness said to God:

'Now, because Thou hast led me astray...' (7:16).

The prophetic attitude is to ascribe any evil, sin, error, stumble, slip, fall, inadvertence, negligence, and so on to oneself, while the satanic attitude is to ascribe these to God or to others. To suggest that God is responsible – certainly a temptation in the Islamic context where the stress on the Divine Unity tends to negate secondary forces – is the epitome of discourtesy and ignorance, since it is to deny one's own self precisely where it has a real affect upon the nature of things: where evil enters into the cosmos.

In short, the *shahada* means in practice that the worshiper is nothing and God is all. Everything positive that the servant possesses has been given to him by God, while every fault and imperfection goes back to the servant's own specific attributes. If he has patience in adversity, this was given by God, but if he lacks it, this is his own shortcoming.

If he knows anything at all, the knowledge was bestowed by God's guidance and mercy, but if he is ignorant, that is his own limitation. If he possesses a spark of love in his heart, God has granted it, but every coldness and hardness belongs to himself. Every good and praiseworthy quality – life, knowledge, will, power, hearing, sight, speech, generosity, justice, and so on – is God-given. Only when this fact shapes a person's imagination and awareness can he begin to see things in their right proportions and be delivered from his own self-deceptions.

From the beginning of Islam, supplication has been one of the fundamental modes through which Muslims actualized the awareness of correct proportions and trained themselves to see God as the source of all good. In its great examples, as typified by the Sahifa, supplication is the constant exercise of discernment by attributing what belongs to God to God and what belongs to man to man. Once this discernment is made, man is left with his own sinfulness and inadequacy, so he can only abase himself before his Lord, asking for His generosity and forgiveness.

Those familiar with the writings of the later spiritual authorities may object that the perspective of supplication as just described deals with only one-half of Islamic spirituality, leaving out the theomorphic perfections which the friends of God (*awliya'*) actualize by following the spiritual path. Granted, on the one hand man is the humble and poor slave of God, possessing nothing of his own. But is he not – at least in the persons of the prophets and friends – God's vicegerent (*khalifa*) and image (*sura*)?

In fact, this second perspective is implicit in the first, since the more one negates positive attributes from the servant, the more one affirms that they belong to the Lord. By denying that the creature possesses any good of his own, we affirm that everything positive which appears within him belongs only to God. To the extent that the servant dwells in his own nothingness, he manifests God's perfections. This point of view is made rather explicit in the famous *hadith qudsi* in which God says: 'My servant continues drawing near to Me through supererogatory works [such as supplication], until I love him, and when I love him, I am the hearing through which he hears, the sight through which he sees, the hand through which he grasps, and the foot through which he walks.'

But the early Islamic texts leave the mystery of 'union with God' or 'supreme identity' largely unvoiced,

since it is far too subtle to be expressed in the relatively straightforward terms which characterize these texts. In any case, identity is alien to the perspective of supplication, which keeps in view the dichotomy between Lord and servant, a dichotomy which remains valid on one level at least in all circumstances and for all human beings, even in the next world.

Asking Forgiveness

As is well known, the Shi'ites hold that the Imams are 'inerrant' or 'sinless' (*ma'sum*, from the verb *'isma*, which means to be preserved by God from sins). The reader of the Sahifa will be struck by how often Zayn al-'Abidin asks God to forgive his sins, employing all the standard terms (*ithm*, *dhanb*, *ma'siya*, etc.). To be surprised at this or to suggest that therefore the Shi'ites are wrong to call the Imams sinless is to miss the points which have just been made about the *shahada* as the root of Islamic spirituality. It is not my concern to defend the dogma of *'isma*, but I should at least point out that one cannot object to it on this level.

According to various hadiths, the Prophet used to pray for forgiveness seventy or one hundred times a day by repeating the formula 'I pray forgiveness from God' (*astaghfiru llah*), a formula which is pronounced universally by practicing Muslims. Muslims hold that all prophets are sinless, and the Prophet Muhammad is the greatest of the prophets, yet no one has ever seen any contradiction between his asking forgiveness and his lack of sins. One easy but shallow way of explaining this is to say that the Prophet was the model for the whole community, so he had to pray as if he were a sinner, since all those who followed his *sunna* and recited the prayers which he taught would be sinners. But to say this is to suggest that he was a hypocrite of sorts and to lose sight of the meaning of the *shahada*.

Christians have never doubted Christ's divinity because he said: 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone' (Mark 10:18). Here, in Christian terms, is a concise statement of the *shahada* as applied to the lives of God's creatures. In as much as anything can be called created, it is 'other than God' and less than absolutely good. God is possessor of mercy, knowledge, love, life, power, will, patience, and so on – the 'ninety-nine names of God' provide a basic list of the divine attributes. If something 'other than God' possesses any of these attributes, it clearly does not possess them in the same way that God possesses them. They belong to God by the fact that He is God, but if they belong to the creatures in any sense, it is by His bestowal, just as the creatures have received their existence through His creation.

This basic teaching of the *shahada* means that nothing and no one – not even the greatest of the prophets – stand on a par with God. Since goodness is a divine attribute, 'None is good but God alone', and everything other than God is evil at least in respect of being 'other'. 'Evil' here may be another name for 'lesser good', and no one in the Islamic context would dream of attributing evil to the prophets.

Nevertheless, the prophets in as much as they are human beings cannot be placed on the same level as God. The respect in which human beings differ from God is all important for the spiritual life. It is man's

clinging to the difference his own servanthood, his own createdness, his own inadequacy, his own sinfulness – which allows him to fulfill what is required of him as the creature of his Lord. Just as the Prophet is first *`abduhu*, 'His servant', and only then *rasuluhu*, 'His messenger', so also every human being must first actualize the fullness of his own servanthood before he can hope to manifest anything on behalf of his Lord.

The greater a person's awareness and knowledge of God, the greater his awareness of the gulf between the 'I' and the Divine Reality. As the Qur'an says:

Only those of His servants fear God who have knowledge (35:28).

The greater the knowledge of God and self, the greater the understanding of the claims of independence and pride that are involved with saying 'I', and so also the greater the fear of the consequences. Those nearest to God fear Him more than others because they have grasped the infinite distance that separates their created nature from their Creator; hence also they are the most intense in devotion to Him, since they see that only through devotion and worship can they fulfill His claims upon them.

No Muslim can think that he has reached a point where he no longer has need for God's forgiveness, so no Muslim can stop praying for it. Moreover, the overriding goodness of God and the nothingness of the creatures demands that a pious act can never belong to the servant. To the extent that a human being is able to do what God wants from him, this is because God has granted him the power to do so.

The well-known formula *wa ma tawfiqi illa bi-Allah*, 'I have no success except through God', is of universal application. In the last analysis, no good act can be attributed to the servant – the merit is always God's (for example, Supplication 74.2). It is here that the mystery of God's ever-present and immanent reality manifests itself, such that there is nothing left of the creature but a face of God turned toward creation.

If the Prophet and the Imams constantly prayed for forgiveness with the utmost sincerity, this does not contradict the idea that they were 'sinless', since the sins envisaged here entail a willful disobedience to the divine command, not the 'creaturely sin' of being other than God. Later authorities invariably distinguish among levels of sinfulness as also among levels of virtue, a doctrine epitomized in the oft-quoted saying, 'The good qualities of the pious are the bad qualities of those brought near to God' (*hasanat al-abrar sayjyat al-muqarrabin*).

At least three basic levels are distinguished for every positive human quality, though these levels are not exclusive and may coexist in various degrees within a single person depending upon his spiritual maturity. The examples of 'repentance' (*tawba*) and 'asking forgiveness' (*istighfar*) can illustrate these points.

In the Sahifa the Imam often asks God for success in repentance, which may be defined as turning toward God through acts of obedience and avoiding disobedience. The later authorities speak of a first

level of repentance belonging to the faithful in general, who sin by breaking the commands of the Shari'a and who repent by asking God to forgive their sins and trying their best not to repeat the sin. In other words, their repentance pertains basically to the level of the activities governed by the Shari'a while the forgiveness they seek means that they ask God to pardon any act of commission or omission which is contrary to the Shari'a.

On the second level of repentance there are those who have dedicated their lives to God and spend their waking moments in careful observance of the details of the Shari'a and following the recommended acts of the *sunna*. Such people, who might be called the 'pious' in keeping with the above saying, have no difficulty following the practical commands and prohibitions of the Shari'a, so they turn their attention toward the inward attitudes which should accompany the outward activities.

They repent of the heedlessness (*ghafla*) of their own souls, which are unable to remember God with perfect presence. They see their acts of obedience as falling short of the ideal because of their inward weaknesses and the various forms of blindness and hypocrisy which Satan is able to instill into their hearts, such as the temptation to ascribe their piety and diligence in observing the Shari'a to themselves. They repent not of sinful acts, since they observe the Shari'a with exactitude and do not 'sin' according to the Shari'ite definitions. Rather, they repent of inappropriate thoughts and intentions and ask God to forgive these whenever they occur.

The third level is that of 'those brought near to God'. They have passed beyond outward and inward sins, since they see nothing but God's will, guidance, and mercy in every act and every thought, but they are still faced with the greatest of all barriers, that of their own self, the 'supreme veil' between man and God. God has given them knowledge of Himself and of themselves, so they have come to understand that the 'I' can never be totally innocent or sinless. They repent of their own inadequacies as creatures and ask forgiveness for their own existence as separate beings.

Western readers may object that there is something artificial about this division of 'repentance' into levels. How can one 'repent' of one's own existence? How can one ask forgiveness for something which is not one's own fault? These objections might be valid if the texts had originally been written in English, but in fact the objection arises because of the difficulty of translating the concepts of one religious universe into another.

The original Arabic words translated as 'repentance' and 'forgiveness' convey meanings far broader than the English terms, both of which are connected with a sentimental and moralistic sense of guilt. (Similar problems, it should be remarked, exist with much of the terminology which is normally used to translate Islamic texts and which has also been employed – because there is no other real choice – in the present translation of the Sahifa.)

The word *tawba* or 'repentance' means literally to 'turn' or 'return' from one thing to another. One of God's Qur'anic names is *al-tawwab*, 'He who turns', and the verb from this root is used both for God's

turning toward man and man's turning toward God. Man's `repentance' refers to every level of turning away from self and towards God; it makes no difference whether the self is conceived of as a tissue woven of sins or as the veil of ignorance and heedlessness that pertains to one's creaturely situation. There may be a moralistic sense attached to the word in a particular context, and there may not.

In a similar way, *maghfira* in Arabic is far richer than the term `forgiveness' in English. To begin with, the Qur'an attributes three different divine names to God from this root, *al-ghafur*, *al-ghaafir*, and *al-ghaffar*, and subtle distinctions are often drawn to differentiate the different modes of `forgiveness' which they imply. More importantly the root meaning of *maghfira* is `to cover over', `to veil', `to conceal'. Hence the `Forgiver' is He who veils human sins and inadequacies. In Arabic the literal sense of saying `I pray forgiveness from God' is `I ask God for concealment.' Most people may understand that they are asking God to conceal their `sins', but `those brought near to God' will see that they have need for the concealment of something much deeper and more radical since it is inherent to every created thing.

When the Prophet or Imam Zayn al-'Abidin ask God to `forgive their sins, they are perfectly sincere in this request, but this does not necessarily imply that their sins lie at the same level as our own. As Islamic texts frequently remind us, *qiyas bi l-nafs*, `judging others by one's own self', is always misleading, especially if the others happen to have been the recipients of God's special favours.

Spiritual Attitudes And Names of God

Muslim thinkers have often divided the names of God into two broad categories by contrasting attributes such as wrath (*ghadab*) and mercy (*rahma*), justice (*adl*) and bounty (*fadl*), severity (*qahr*) and gentleness (*lutf*), majesty (*jalal*) and beauty (*jamaal*), or majesty and munificence (*ikram*). The `names of wrath' are connected to God's distance and transcendence, while the `names of mercy' are connected to His nearness and immanence. The Shari'a and *kalam* (dogmatic theology) tend to emphasize God's severity and incomparability (*tanzih*), while Islamic spirituality and the devotional literature put more stress on His gentleness and similarity (*tashbih*).

The Shari'a is not particularly concerned with speaking about God, since its function is to set down guidelines for the domain of activity. To the extent that God is taken into account, He is conceived of primarily as the Commander and the Lawgiver. In respect of laying down the Law, He is a monarch who must be obeyed. A monarch – and especially the Eternal King – stands far above his subjects, who are in fact his slaves, and he enforces his edicts by means of scourges, dungeons, and executions. Hence the Shari'a naturally calls to mind the God of transcendence and justice, and the `jurists' (*fuqaha'*), generally speaking, present Islam with a stern and severe countenance.

The God of the jurists shares many of the attributes of the God described by the proponents of *kalam*, who concerned themselves mainly with bolstering the authority of the Shari'a while employing the tools of rational thought. Moreover, *kalam* has never played the same important role in Islam that theology plays in Christianity, since its concerns are far overshadowed by the dedication of all Muslims to the

Shari'a. *Kalam* sets out to defend the Shari'a and the tenets of the faith against rational criticisms, so the theologians have approached their subject by employing reason (*`aql* or *al-nazar al-'aqli*).

As a result, they singled out for their consideration certain subjects which were of no interest to the community at large. For most people, it makes no difference if the Qur'an is eternal or created, so long as God speaks to them through it. Though *kalam* performs a necessary function in the Islamic universe, the vast majority of the faithful had no knowledge of the rational criticisms against which *kalam* was defending them, so they had no use for *kalam*. It was simply irrelevant to the religious life of most people.

Since the theologians called upon reason to bear witness to their endeavors, they affirmed God's transcendence with great fervour. Reason cannot accept the literal sense of many details of the Qur'an and the hadith, such as God's face, eyes, hand, feet, sitting, laughter, smiling, wavering, yearning, joy at man's repentance, surprise at the lack of sensual desire in a young man of piety, and so on. Hence the theologians felt compelled to explain such descriptions in terms of abstract qualities.

Thus, for example, God's 'hand' is interpreted as a reference to an impersonal quality such as power. This is not to question the validity of these interpretations, only to point out that the relatively concrete words and images found in the Qur'an and the hadith provide food for the imagination; through them human beings gain the ability to think about God in personal terms and establish an intimate, inward relationship with their Lord. An inconceivable God – or a God who can only be known through abstract creedal statements – is of no use to the vast majority of people.

Imagination feeds upon the concrete, not the abstract. When God speaks in a language that appeals to the imagination, He thereby addresses all the faithful, bypassing reason and appealing to something far more universal in human hearts. But when the theologians employ a disciplined rational methodology, they are addressing intellectuals like themselves.

As a result, the faithful found spiritual nourishment not in the dry and abstract depictions of a far-away God provided by *kalam* but in the warm and concrete imagery of the Qur'an, the hadith, and the spiritual authorities. No one could love the God of the theologians.

In short, by the nature of their disciplines, the jurists and the theologians lay stress on the God of remoteness and transcendence. In contrast, the spiritual authorities speak of the God described in the Qur'an and the hadith as He describes Himself, not neglecting His nearness to all creatures. Since the God of the Qur'an is pre-dominantly a God of mercy and tenderness, a God of intimacy and concern, the spiritual authorities emphasize the personal dimension of the human/divine relationship. They stress God's nearness and immanence, and they often remind us of Qur'anic verses such as,

Whithersoever you turn – there is the face of God (2:115);

He is with you wherever you are (57:3);

We indeed created man; We know what his soul whispers within him; and We are nearer to him than the jugular vein (50: 16).

Since the Shari'a concerns itself basically with activity, it is directed toward the outward affairs which are governed by the laws of the remote King. *Kalam* is polemical and rational, concerning itself mainly with the divine attributes of the transcendent God, not with the human dimensions of the relationship with a God who is also immanent.

The Qur'an and the hadith provide the seeds from which the Shari'a and *kalam* grew up, but they also provide the seeds for the subsequent attention that was paid by the spiritual authorities to all the dimensions of the soul. Devotional literature addresses this inward domain in an eminently practical way, attempting to shape the soul according to the revealed models.

There is, of course, no contradiction between thinking of God as transcendent and perceiving Him as immanent, any more than there is a contradiction between perceiving Him as Merciful and as Wrathful. God reveals Himself under a variety of guises, and these in turn demand different rational perceptions and psychological responses.

One cannot think in exactly the same terms about the Glorified (*al-subbuh*), who transcends everything that man can conceive, and the Near (*al-qarib*), who is closer than the jugular vein; nor can one feel the same toward the Gentle, the Kind, and the Compassionate as one feels toward the Vengeful and the Severe in Punishment. Once codified and institutionalized, the human responses to God's self-revelations in the Qur'an came to emphasize certain divine attributes rather than others.

One response was called 'jurisprudence', another '*kalam*', another 'Sufism', and so on. All of these points of view coexist in the great representatives of Islam, just as they coexist in the Qur'an and in the soul of the Prophet. But in the early period, it is difficult to disentangle the different strands, since the institutional forms which highlight them have not yet come into existence. However, it is easy to see that certain manifestations of early Islam tend in one direction or another. The particular characteristic of the devotional literature such as the Sahifa is to emphasize the personal quality of God's relationship with His servants and His all-pervading love.

The Predominance of Mercy

Some modern day Muslims and many Western scholars have looked at the Qur'an wearing the eyeglasses of the jurists and theologians. As a result, they see a God who is a just and stern Commander, concerned only with beating His servants into shape so that they will follow His Law. They tend to ignore the fact that practically every chapter of the Qur'an begins with the words, In the name of God, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate, and that the Qur'an mentions God's names of mercy, compassion, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, and love about ten times as often as it mentions His names of wrath and severity. The overwhelming Qur'anic picture is that of a God deeply concerned with

the well-being of His creatures and ready to forgive almost anything, if only they will repent and acknowledge His sovereignty.

Faced with the reality of both mercy and wrath, the worshiper seeks out the one and does everything he can to avoid the other. This is a constant theme in the devotional literature in general and the Sahifa in particular. The Prophet set the pattern in his well-known supplication: 'I seek refuge in Thy good pleasure from Thy displeasure and in Thy pardon from Thy punishment. I seek refuge in Thee from Thee.' God is both He who becomes pleased and He who becomes displeased, He who pardons and He who punishes.

Hence the worshiper prays to God for protection against God Himself, since there is no other significant threat. Moreover, the servant can be confident that God's mercy will in fact overcome His wrath, since God is essentially merciful and only accidentally wrathful. The Qur'an tells us in two verses that God's mercy **embraces all things** (7: 156, 40:7), but it never suggests that His wrath is so universal. According to a famous *hadith qudsi*, God says: 'My mercy precedes My wrath', or 'has precedence over My wrath', or 'predominates over My wrath.'

God appears to His creatures as harsh and domineering only in certain circumstances and for specific purposes – purposes which themselves are defined by mercy. The Prophet expressed this point with his remark: 'Hellfire is a whip with which God drives His servants to Paradise.' God's mercy is so overwhelmingly real that He will certainly overlook the sins of those who open themselves up to it.

Padwick refers to the 'mosaic' quality of Muslim supplications. She writes: 'While the prayers of some of the great saints show a spiritual individuality, the great mass of these devotions is built up of well-trying small items arranged in ever new patterns – traditional prayers of the Prophet, Qur'an verses, blessings of the Prophet, forgiveness-seeking, cries of praise, all on known and authorized forms.' The Sahifa is strongly marked by the individuality of the Imam, while also displaying this mosaic quality. But this quality itself reflects the Qur'an, which is a mosaic of God's names and activities, stories of the prophets, legal injunctions, and promises and warnings about the Last Day.

It was said above that one of the purposes of supplication is to shape the imagination of the worshiper in accordance with Islamic norms. A well-known hadith tells us that Muslims can know the 'character' (*khuluq*) of the Prophet through studying the Qur'an. By following the Prophet's *sunna* the worshiper absorbs the Qur'an on all levels of his being, and in turn he is absorbed by the Qur'an, the Divine Word and the divine model of his own soul.

If some early authorities referred to the Sahifa as the 'Sister of the Qur'an', part of the reason for this may lie in the fact that its mosaic quality expresses a variety of spiritual attitudes that reflect accurately the Qur'anic and prophetic model for human perfection. Every element in the Sahifa's mosaic corresponds to elements of the Qur'anic text and the Prophet's soul.

The connection between the spiritual attitudes expressed in the Sahifa and the Qur'anic statements

about God and His relationship to His servants can most clearly be perceived in the Imam's constant recourse to God's names and his always appropriate expression of the corresponding human attitude. On the one hand the Imam places great emphasis upon his own inadequacy and sinfulness, acknowledging that he deserves nothing but God's wrath. On the other, he repeatedly takes refuge in God's mercy and in God's own Qur'anic statements concerning the primacy of forgiveness, asking God to do with him as is worthy of such a merciful Being, not as he himself deserves.

Act toward me with the forgiveness and mercy of which Thou art worthy! Act not toward me with the chastisement and vengeance of which I am worthy! (73.3)

In short, through the mosaic of the supplication, the worshiper moves from viewpoint to viewpoint in keeping with the different relationships which exist between himself and God as described in the Qur'an. Man's point of view changes because each of the divine names points to a different face of God turned toward him. Yet all are faces of God, and 'There is no god but God', so the apparent multiplicity of names and faces dissolves into the divine Unity.

Human inadequacy and sin are real enough on their own level, and the Sahifa among others shows a remarkable awareness of the depth of human imperfection. But the great spiritual authorities of Islam hold that in responding to human weakness, God's overwhelming mercy takes charge and the divine wrath pales by comparison.

The more that human beings admit to their own inadequacy, the more they call down upon themselves God's pity and commiseration. Supplication and pleading are the natural human response to the *shahada* the fact that man is nothing compared to God, and that God – who is fundamentally mercy – is the only true reality. Supplication responds to God's command,

Despair not of God's mercy! Surely God forgives all sins (39:53).

A hadith is related concerning Imam Zayn al-'Abidin which is worth recounting because it is so completely in character with the Sahifa's emphasis upon God's mercy and forgiveness. One day he was told that Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728), the famous ascetic, had said: 'It is not strange if a person perishes as he perishes. It is only strange that a person is saved as he is saved.' The Imam replied, 'But I say that it is not strange if a person is saved as he is saved; it is only strange that a person perishes as he perishes, given the scope of God's mercy.'

The supplicant who responds to the God of the Qur'an never forgets the wrath of God, but he remains confident that God's essential nature will show itself, in spite of his own weaknesses. Padwick was so struck with the devaluation of human sins that seems to result from this attitude that she displays a rare instance of Christian bias, objecting that it 'leads to a certain moral shallowness in some forgiveness-seeking prayers' and is unable 'to attribute any moral cost to God's forgiveness', alluding here and in the rest of the passage to the Christian doctrine of atonement. Among three examples of 'moral shallowness' she cites the following lines from Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, found in Al-Sahifat al-khamisa:

My God my sins do not harm Thee and Thy pardon does not impoverish Thee. Then forgive me what does not harm Thee and give me what Thou wilt not miss.

In order to understand the attitude expressed here, one needs to put it into its larger context. The specific attitude expressed by the Imam corresponds precisely to the reality of God's infinite mercy and forgiveness as revealed in various Qur'anic verses. Many passages from the Sahifa present the same point of view. Moreover, when the Imam says: 'Thou art the Generous Lord for whom the forgiveness of great sins is nothing great' (31.10), or 'Pardoning great sin is nothing great for Thee, overlooking enormous misdeeds is not difficult for Thee, putting up with indecent crimes does not trouble Thee' (12.13), he is merely echoing the command of the Prophet mentioned above: The worshiper 'should be firm and make his desire great, for what God gives is nothing great for Him.'

In any case, the context of these prayers shows that the accompanying moral attitude is hardly shallow, since it demands 'refraining from arrogance, pulling aside from persistence [in sin], and holding fast to praying forgiveness' (12.13). Moral shallowness could only follow if the worshiper remembered God's mercy and forgot His wrath, but both are always kept in view.

The Sahifa And Islamic Spirituality

In spite of studies that have rejected the idea, many people in the West still believe that 'true Islam' lies in simplicity, austerity, legalism, formalism, and a God perceived as Just and Transcendent. Hence those elements of Islamic civilization which demonstrate complexity, subtlety, warmth, love, inwardness, spirituality, and a God of mercy, compassion, and immanence are seen as largely extraneous to or reactions against Qur'anic Islam.

Scholars such as Massignon have pointed out that a person of spiritual sensitivity only needs to read the Qur'an for such ideas to be dissolved. But few people who have adopted the old stereotypes possess this sort of sensitivity or would be interested in changing their preconceived ideas, lest sympathy be stirred up in their hearts. It is not my aim here to reject, as so many have done before me, these common biases concerning the nature of 'true Islam', but I would like to point out that a work like the Sahifa brings out an inward dimension of Islam which may be much more difficult to perceive in other early texts.

When scholars and other outsiders look at Islam, they naturally perceive what can be seen at first glance, that is, events, written reports and records, social relationships, and so on. It is not easy to look into people's hearts or to investigate their personal relationship with God, nor are most people interested in doing so. If there is a way into hearts, it must come by studying the most inward concerns of individuals as reflected in their outward activities and writings. But those dimensions of Islam which have caught the most attention of outside observers are external and obvious, and they also happen to be relatively devoid of the love and warmth normally associated in the West with spirituality.

Islamic civilization as a whole is much like a traditional Muslim city: The outer walls make it appear dull and sombre, and it is not easy to gain access to the world behind the walls. But if one becomes an intimate with the city's inhabitants, one is shown into delightful courtyards and gardens, full of fragrant flowers, fruit trees, and sparkling fountains.

Those who write about Islamic history, political events, and institutions deal with the walls, since they have no way into the gardens. Some of the gardens are opened up through the study of Sufism, art and architecture, poetry, and music, but since all of these have appeared in specific historical forms influenced by the surrounding environment, their deep Islamic roots can easily be lost to sight. The most traditional and authentic gardens of the city, and the most difficult of access, are the hearts of the greatest representatives of the civilization. It is here that the supplications handed down from the pillars of early Islam can open up a whole new vision of Islam's animating spirit, since they provide direct access to the types of human attitudes that are the prerequisite for a full flowering of the Islamic ideal.

Other Dimensions

This introduction may seem to be suggesting that the Sahifa deals exclusively with Islamic spirituality. But the Sahifa deals with other domains as well. As was pointed out above, the great representatives of Islam bring together all levels of Islamic teachings, just as these are brought together by the Qur'an and the hadith. If spirituality has been emphasized in discussing the Sahifa, this has to do with the fact that the work is a collection of supplications, and these presuppose certain attitudes toward the Divine Reality which cannot be understood outside spirituality's context.

But the Sahifa also provides teachings that are applicable on many different levels, from the theological (in the broadest sense of the term) to the social. A thorough analysis of these would demand a book far longer than the Sahifa itself. It is hoped that the publication of this translation will encourage scholars to study the content of the prayers contained in the Sahifa (as well as the prayers left by other pillars of early Islam, the Shi'ite Imams in particular) to bring out the whole range of teachings they contain. The most that can be done here is to allude to some of the other important topics touched upon by the Sahifa and mention a few of the significant questions which these bring up.

Islam is an organic reality possessing three basic dimensions: practice or the Shari'a (*al-islam*) faith (*al-iman* which includes doctrine and intellectual teachings), and spirituality (*al-ihsan*). In the lived experience of the community, these dimensions are intimately interrelated, even if various institutional forms tend to deal with them separately. The earliest sources, such as the prophetic hadith or `Ali's Nahj al-balagha deal with all three of these dimensions, though different passages can be isolated which stress one specific epic rather than another.

But a work like the Nahj al-balagha converges profoundly from the Sahifa in that it brings together sayings on all sorts of matters, from metaphysics, to the nature of correct government, to the personal flaws of some of `Ali's contemporaries. There is no stress on spirituality, since this is clearly one

dimension of Islam among others, though a deep spirituality and holiness underly everything that 'Ali says.

In contrast, the Sahifa by its supplicatory form and content, stresses the innermost dimension of Islam. But at the same time, it also touches upon Islam's other dimensions. For example, the traditional category of 'faith' is concerned with God, the angels, the prophets, the scriptures, the Last Day, and the 'measuring' (*qadar*) of both good and evil.

These objects of faith form the basic subject matter of most of Islamic thought as developed in *kalam* philosophy, and theoretical Sufism. Imam Zayn al-'Abidin discusses all of these in the Sahifa sometimes briefly and sometimes in detail. Thus he often mentions the angels, while his 'Blessing upon the Bearers of the Throne' (3) provides the best available summary of Muslim beliefs concerning them.

The Imam also refers frequently to the domain of Islamic practices, or the Shari'a in the wide sense. He emphasizes the absolute necessity of following God's guidelines as set down in the Qur'an and the hadith in both individual and social life. Hence the Sahifa provides many specific social teachings as well as general injunctions, such as the necessity of establishing justice in society.

But since the social teachings deal with the domain of practice, the outermost dimension of Islam, they need to be viewed within the context of the Imam's doctrinal and spiritual teachings. As he makes eminently clear in his 'Treatise on Rights', a hierarchy of priorities must always be observed: The individual comes before the social, the spiritual before the practical, and knowledge before action. Each human being has a long series of social duties, but these depend upon his more essential duties, which are first, faith in God, and second, placing one's own person into the proper relationship with the Divine Reality.

The Translation

The present translation of the Sahifa follows the Arabic original with as much literal accuracy as could be contrived while maintaining a readable and understandable English text. I have kept Arberry's Koran Interpreted in view as the model of how this might be done. I have been particularly concerned with maintaining consistency in rendering terms and preserving the concreteness of the original terminology, feeling that the 'meaning' of the text cannot be grasped without due regard for its form.

It has already been suggested that one of the virtues of the early devotional literature is its ability to speak in a relatively concrete, pre-theological language of great universality. As a result, any move in the direction of rendering concrete terms abstractly, by paying attention to the rational meaning rather than the images conjured up by the linguistic form, will take us in the direction of *kalam* and away from the universe of the Qur'an, the hadith and the intimacy of the supplications themselves. This explains why I have usually preferred more literal terms such as 'Garden' to relatively abstract terms such as 'Paradise'.

Where difficulties arose in interpreting the meaning of the text, I have followed the commentary of Sayyid 'Alikhan Shirazi. I have also profited from the excellent Persian translation and commentary by 'Ali Naqi Fayd al-Islam and the less useful Persian translation of Mirza Abu l-Qasim Sha'rani. I have not tried to be exhaustive in the notes, aiming only to identify proper names, clarify obscurities, and point to a few of the Qur'anic references in order to suggest how thoroughly the text is grounded in the revealed book. In a few cases I have mentioned relevant hadith or discussed the different interpretations offered by the commentators.

The translation of the Sahifa is followed by a translation of Imam Zayn al-Abidin's 'Treatise on Rights', which is the only work attributed to him other than supplications or relatively short sayings and letters. This treatise is especially important for the manner in which it deals with many of the same themes as the Sahifa in a different style and language.

The Arabic text printed here was copied from the Sha'rani edition by Tehzib Husayn Naqvi. It was proof-read by the dedicated and diligent efforts of S. Ata Muhammad Abidi Amrohvi. Agha Ahsan Abbas is also to be thanked for his efforts in coordinating the production of the Arabic text.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my dear friend Wing Commander (ret'd) Qasim Husain, the moving spirit behind the Muhammadi Trust. He caught me in a weak moment and pushed me into accepting a project which I never would have undertaken otherwise. His gentle but always firm and forceful pressure has made it possible for me to complete the translation practically on schedule. Without his intervention I would have been deprived of the opportunity to gain an intimate acquaintance with one of the deepest veins of Islamic spirituality.

Anyone who comes to appreciate the contents of the Sahifa through the present work would do well to offer a prayer of thanks for the sake of Commander Husain. I also thank Sayyid Ali Mohammad Naqvi, who read the translation and offered a number of useful suggestions for its improvement, and Sayyid Muhammad Husain al-Husaini al-Jalali, who placed at my disposal a useful bibliography of works concerning the Sahifa.

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