

# ISLAM



Islam is a major world religion that originated in the Middle East after JUDAISM and CHRISTIANITY; it was promulgated by the Prophet MUHAMMAD in Arabia in the 7th century CE. The Arabic term *islām*, “surrender,” illuminates the fundamental religious idea of Islam—that the believer (called a Muslim, from the active participle of *islām*) accepts “surrender to the will of ALLĀH.” Allāh (Arabic: “God”) is viewed as the sole God—the creator, sustainer, and restorer of the world. The will of Allāh, to which humankind must submit, is made known through the sacred SCRIPTURES, the QUR’AN (Koran), which Allāh revealed to his messenger, Muhammad. In Islam Muhammad is considered the last of a series of prophets (including ADAM, ABRAHAM, MOSES, JESUS CHRIST, and others), and his message simultaneously consummates and abrogates the revelations attributed to earlier prophets.

Retaining its emphasis on an uncompromising MONOTHEISM and a strict adherence to certain essential religious practices, the religion, which was first taught by Muhammad to a small group of followers, spread rapidly through the Middle East to Africa, Europe, the Indian subcontinent, the Malay Peninsula, and China. Although Islam encompasses many different ethnicities and many sectarian movements have arisen within it, all Muslims are ideally bound by a common faith and a sense of belonging to a single community.

## THE LEGACY OF MUHAMMAD

From the very beginning of Islam, Muhammad inculcated a sense of communal identity and a bond of faith among his followers that was intensified by their experiences of persecution as a nascent community in Mecca. The conspicuous socioeconomic content of Islamic religious practices cemented this bond of faith. In 622 CE, when the Prophet migrated to MEDINA, his preaching was soon accepted, and the community-state of Islam emerged. During this early period, Islam acquired its characteristic ethos as a religion uniting in itself both the spiritual and temporal aspects of life and seeking to regulate not only an individual’s relationship to God (through that individual’s conscience) but human relationships in a social setting as well. Thus, there is not only an Islamic religious institution but also an Islamic law, state, and other institutions governing society. Not until the

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*The way of the pilgrims to the Ka’ba in Mecca, ceramic tiles from İznik, Turkey, Ottoman period; in the Louvre, Paris*

Erich Lessing—Art Resource

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20th century were the religious (private) and the secular (public) distinguished by some Muslim thinkers and separated formally, as in Turkey.

This dual religious and social character of Islam, expressing itself as a religious community commissioned by God to bring its own value system to the world through the *Jihad* ("holy war" or "holy struggle"), explains much of the astonishing success of the early generations of Muslims. Within a century after the Prophet's death in 632 CE they had brought a large part of the globe—from Spain across Central Asia to India—under a new Arab Muslim empire.

The period of Islamic conquests and empire building marks the first phase of the expansion of Islam as a religion. Islam's essential egalitarianism within the community of the faithful and its official discrimination against the followers of other religions won rapid converts. Jews and Christians were assigned a special status as communities possessing scriptures and called the "people of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) and, therefore, were allowed religious autonomy. They were, however, required to pay a per capita tax called *jizya*. Members of other faiths were required either to accept Islam or to die. The same status of the people of the Book was later extended to Zoroastrians and Hindus, but many people of the Book eventually joined Islam in order to escape the disability of the *jizya*. A much more massive expansion of Islam after the 12th century was inaugurated by the Sufis (Muslim mystics), who contributed significantly to the spread of Islam in India, Central Asia, Turkey, and sub-Saharan Africa.

Besides the *jihad* and Sufi missionary activity another factor in the spread of Islam was the far-ranging influence of Muslim traders, who not only introduced Islam quite early to the Indian east coast and South India but who proved as well to be the main catalytic agents (besides the Sufis) in converting people to Islam in Indonesia, Malaya, and China. Islam was introduced to Indonesia in the 14th century, hardly having time to consolidate itself there politically before coming under Dutch colonial domination.

The vast variety of cultures embraced by Islam (estimated to total some 1,300,000,000 persons worldwide) has produced important internal differences. All segments of Muslim society, however, are bound by a common faith and a sense of belonging to a single religious community. Despite the loss of political power during the period of Western colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries, the concept of the Islamic community (*umma*) became stronger. Islam inspired various Muslim peoples in their struggles to gain political freedom in the mid-20th century, and the idealized unity of the community contributed to later attempts at political solidarity.



## SOURCES OF ISLAMIC DOCTRINAL AND SOCIAL VIEWS

Islamic doctrine, law, and thinking in general are based on four sources, or fundamental principles (*uṣūl*): (1) the Qur'an, (2) the SUNNA (traditions), (3) IJMĀ' (consensus), and (4) IJTIHĀD (individual thought).

The Qur'an ("Reading," or "Recitation") is regarded as the Word, or Speech, of God delivered to Muhammad by the angel GABRIEL. Divided into 114 SŪRAS (chapters) of unequal length, it is the fundamental source of Islamic teaching. The *sūras* revealed at Mecca during the earliest part of Muhammad's career are concerned with ethical and spiritual teachings and the Day of Judgment. The *sūras* revealed to the Prophet at Medina at a later period are concerned with social legislation, worship, and the politico-moral principles for constituting and ordering the community. The word sunna ("a well-trodden path") was used by pre-Islamic Arabs to denote their tribal or common law; in Islam it came to mean the example of the Prophet; *i.e.*, his words and deeds as recorded in compilations known as HADITH.

Hadith (a "Report," or collection, of sayings attributed to the Prophet and members of the early Muslim community) provides written documentation of the words and deeds of the Prophet and his followers. Six Hadith collections, compiled in the 9th century CE, or the 3rd century AH (*Anno Hegirae*, meaning "in the year of the HĪJRA"; see below Sacred places and days: Holy days), came to be regarded as especially authoritative by the largest branch of Islam, the SUNNI. Another large branch, the SHI'ITE, has its own Hadith collections, in which, in addition to the Prophet, the IMAMS are of central importance.

The doctrine of *ijmā'*, or consensus, was introduced in the 2nd century AH (8th century CE) in order to standardize legal theory and practice and to overcome individual and regional differences of opinion. Though conceived as a "consensus of scholars," in actual practice *ijmā'* was a more fundamental operative factor. From the 3rd century AH points on which consensus was reached in practice were considered closed and further substantial questioning of them prohibited. Accepted interpretations of the Qur'an and of the actual content of the sunna (*i.e.*, Hadith and theology) all rest finally on the *ijmā'*.

*Ijtihād*, meaning "to endeavor," or "to exert effort," was required to find the legal or doctrinal solution to a new problem. In the early period of Islam, because *ijtihād* took the form of individual opinion (*ra'y*), there was an abundance of conflicting and chaotic opinions. In the 2nd century AH *ijtihād* was replaced by QIYĀS (reasoning by strict analogy), a formal procedure of deduction based on the texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith. The transformation of *ijmā'* into a conservative mechanism and the acceptance of a definitive body of Hadith virtually closed the "gate of *ijtihād*" in the Sunni tradition. Nevertheless, certain outstanding Sunni thinkers (*e.g.*, AL-GHAZĀLĪ, d. 1111 CE) and many Shi'ite jurists continued to claim the right of new *ijtihād* for themselves, and reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries, because of modern influences, have caused this principle once more to receive wider acceptance.

## DOCTRINES OF THE QUR'AN

**God.** The doctrine concerning God within the Qur'an is rigorously monotheistic: God is one and unique; he has no partner and no equal. Muslims believe that there are no intermediaries between God and the creation that he brought into being by his sheer command: "Be." Although his presence is believed to be everywhere, he does not inhere in anything. He is the sole creator and the sole sustainer of the universe, wherein every creature bears witness to his unity and lordship. But he is also just and merciful: his justice ensures order in his creation, in which nothing is believed to be out of place, and his mercy is unbounded and encompasses everything. His creation and ordering of the universe is viewed as the act of prime mercy for which all things sing his glories. The God of the Qur'an, while described as majestic and sovereign, is also a personal God; whenever a person in need or distress calls to him, he responds. Above all, he is the God of guidance and shows everything, particularly human beings, the right way, "the straight path."

*The arrival of the Prophet, Persian miniature, in the Free Library of Philadelphia*

Scala—Art Resource

This picture of God—wherein the attributes of power, justice, and mercy interpenetrate—is related to Judaism and Christianity, whence it is derived with certain modifications, and also to the concepts of pre-Islamic Arabia, to which it provided an effective answer. One traditional Arabic RELIGIOUS BELIEF had been in a blind and inexorable fate over which human beings had no control. For this powerful but insensible fate the Qur'an substituted a provident and merciful God

while rejecting IDOLATRY and all divinities that the Arabs worshiped in their sanctuaries (HARAMS), the most prominent of which was the KA'BA in Mecca itself.

**The universe.** In order to prove the unity of God, the Qur'an lays frequent stress on the design and order in the universe. There are no gaps or dislocations in nature. Order is explained by the fact that every created thing is endowed with a definite and defined nature whereby it falls into a pattern. This nature, though it allows every created thing to function as part of a whole, sets limits; and this idea of the limitedness of everything is one of the most fixed points in both the COSMOLOGY and theology of the Qur'an. The universe is viewed as autonomous, in the sense that everything has its own inherent laws of behavior, but not as autocratic, because the patterns of behavior have been endowed by God and are strictly limited. Thus, every creature is limited and "measured out" and hence depends on God, who alone reigns unchallenged in the heavens and the earth, is unlimited, independent, and self-sufficient.

**The human condition.** According to the Qur'an, God created two apparently parallel species of creatures, humans and JINN, the one from clay and the other from fire. About the *jinn*, however, the Qur'an says little, though it is implied that the *jinn* are endowed with reason and responsibility but are more prone to evil than humans. It is with the human being that the Qur'an, which describes itself as a guide for the human race, is centrally concerned (e.g., Q 2:185). The Jewish and Christian

story of the Fall of Adam (the first man) is accepted, but the Qur'an states that God forgave Adam his act of disobedience, which is not viewed in the Qur'an as ORIGINAL SIN (Q. 20:122–123).

In the story of human creation, angels, who protested to God against such creation, lost in a competition of knowledge against Adam (Q 2:30–34). The Qur'an, therefore, declares humans to be the noblest creatures of all creation—those who bore the trust (of responsibility) that the rest of God's creation refused to accept. The Qur'an thus reiterates that all nature has been made subservient to humans: nothing in all creation has been made without a purpose, and people themselves have not been created "in sport," their purpose being service and obedience to God's will.

Despite this lofty station, however, human nature is frail and faltering. Whereas everything in the universe has a limited nature, and every creature recognizes its limitation and insufficiency, humans are viewed as rebellious and full of pride, arrogating to themselves the attributes of self-sufficiency. Pride is thus viewed as the cardinal sin of humankind, because by not recognizing in itself essential creaturely limitations humankind becomes guilty of ascribing to itself partnership



A page from the Qur'an, on paper, Arabia, 16th century

The Pierpont Morgan Library—Art Resource

with God (a form of *SHIRK*, or associating a creature with the Creator) and of violating the unity of God. True faith (*īmān*) thus consists in belief in the immaculate Divine Unity, and Islam in submission to the Divine Will.

**Satan, sin, and repentance.** The being who became SATAN (Shayṭān, or IBLĪS) had previously occupied a high station but fell from divine grace by his act of disobedience in refusing to honor Adam when he, along with other angels, was ordered to do so; his act of disobedience is construed by the Qur'an as the sin of pride (Q 2:34). Since then, his work has been to beguile humans into error and sin. Satan's machinations will cease only on the Last Day.

The whole universe is replete with signs of God; the human soul itself is viewed as a witness to the unity and grace of God. The messengers and prophets of God have, throughout history, been calling humankind back to God. Yet very few have accepted the truth; most have rejected it and have become disbelievers (*kāfir*, plural *kuffār*: "ungrateful"—*i.e.*, to God), and when a person becomes so obdurate, his or her heart is sealed by God. Nevertheless, it is always possible for a sinner to repent (*tawba*) and to achieve redemption by a genuine conversion to the truth. Genuine repentance has the effect of removing all sins and restoring people to the state of sinlessness in which they started their lives.

**Prophecy.** Prophets are specially elected by God to be his messengers. The Qur'an requires recognition of all prophets as such without discrimination, yet they are not all equal, some of them being particularly outstanding in qualities of steadfastness and patience under trial. Abraham, NOAH, Moses, and Jesus were such great prophets. As vindication of the truth of their mission, God often vested them with miracles: Abraham was saved from fire, Noah from the deluge, and Moses from the Pharaoh. Not only was Jesus born from the Virgin MARY but, in Islamic belief, God also saved him from CRUCIFIXION at the hands of the Jews.

All prophets are human and never part of divinity (except in Islamic THEOSOPHY and PANTHEISM); they are simply recipients of revelation from God. God never speaks directly to a human: he sends an angel messenger to him, makes him hear a voice, or inspires him. Muhammad is accepted as the last prophet in the series and its greatest member, for in him all the messages of earlier prophets were consummated. He had no miracles except the Qur'an, the like of which no human can produce. (Soon after the Prophet's death, however, a plethora of miracles was attributed to him by Muslims.) The angel Gabriel brought the Qur'an down to the Prophet's heart. Gabriel is represented by the Qur'an as a spirit, but the Prophet could sometimes see and hear him. According to early traditions, the Prophet's revelations occurred in a state of trance, when his normal consciousness was in abeyance. This phenomenon at the same time was accompanied by an unshakable conviction that the message was from God, and the Qur'an describes itself as the transcript of a heavenly "Mother Book" (Q 43:3–4) written on a "Preserved Tablet" (Q 85:21–22).

**Eschatology.** Because not all requital is meted out in this life, a final judgment is necessary to bring it to completion. On the Last Day, when the world will come to an end, the dead will be resurrected, and a judgment will be pronounced on every person in accordance with his deeds. Although the Qur'an in the main speaks of a personal judgment, there are several verses that speak of the RESURRECTION of distinct communities that will be judged according to "their own book" (Q 45:27–29). The actual evaluation, however, will be for every individual, whatever the terms of reference of his performance. Those condemned will burn in hellfire, and those who are saved will enjoy the abiding pleasures of paradise. Besides suffering in physical fire, the damned will also experience fire "in their hearts"; similarly, the blessed, besides physical enjoyment, will experience the greatest happiness of divine pleasure.

**Social service.** Because the purpose of human existence, as for every other creature, is submission to the divine will, God's role is that of the commander. Whereas the rest of nature obeys God automatically, humans alone possess the choice to obey or disobey. With the deep-seated belief in Satan's existence, the human's fundamental role becomes one of moral struggle, which constitutes the essence of human endeavor. Recognition of the unity of God does not simply rest in

the intellect but also entails consequences in terms of the moral struggle, which consists primarily in freeing oneself of narrowness of mind and smallness of heart. One must go outside of oneself and expend one's best possessions for the sake of others.

The doctrine of social service, in terms of alleviating suffering and helping the needy, constitutes an integral part of the Islamic teaching. Praying to God and other religious acts are deemed to be a mere facade in the absence of active welfare service to the needy. It is Satan who whispers into people's ears that by spending for others they will become poor. God, on the contrary, promises prosperity in exchange for such expenditure, which constitutes a credit with God and grows much more than money that is invested in usury. Hoarding of wealth without recognizing the rights of the poor invites the most dire punishment in the hereafter and is declared to be one of the main causes of the decay of societies in this world. The practice of usury is forbidden.

With this socioeconomic doctrine cementing the bond of faith, the idea of a closely knit community of the faithful who are declared to be "brothers unto each other" emerges (Q 49:10). Muslims are described as "the middle community bearing witness on mankind" (Q 2:143), "the best community produced for mankind," whose function it is "to enjoin good and forbid evil" (Q 3:110). Cooperation and "good advice" within the community are emphasized, and opponents from within the community are to be fought and reduced with armed force if issues cannot be settled by persuasion and arbitration.

Because the mission of the community is to "enjoin good and forbid evil" so that "there is no mischief and corruption" on earth, the doctrine of jihad is the logical outcome. For the early community it was a basic religious concept. The object of jihad is not the forced conversion of individuals to Islam but rather the gaining of political control over the collective affairs of societies to run them in accordance with the principles of Islam. Individual conversions occur as a by-product of this process when the power structure passes into the hands of the Muslim community. In fact, according to strict Muslim doctrine, conversions "by force" are forbidden, and it is also strictly prohibited to wage wars for the sake of acquiring worldly glory, power, and rule. With the establishment of the Muslim empire, however, the doctrine of the jihad was modified by the leaders of the community. Their main concern became the consolidation of the empire and its administration, and thus they interpreted the teaching in a defensive rather than in an expansive sense. The KHĀRIJITES, who held that "decision belongs to God alone," insisted on continuous and relentless jihad, but they were virtually destroyed during internecine wars in the 8th century.

Distinction and privileges based on tribal rank or race were repudiated in the Qur'an and in the celebrated "Farewell Pilgrimage Address" of the Prophet shortly before his death. All men are therein declared to be "equal children of Adam," and the only distinction recognized in the sight of God is said to be based on piety and good acts. The age-old Arab institution of intertribal revenge (*tha'r*)—whereby it was not necessarily the killer who was executed but a person equal in rank to the slain person—was rejected. The pre-Islamic ethical ideal of manliness was modified and replaced by a more humane ideal of moral virtue and piety.

#### FUNDAMENTAL PRACTICES AND INSTITUTIONS OF ISLAM

**The five pillars.** During the earliest decades after the death of the Prophet, certain basic features of the religio-social organization of Islam were singled out to serve as anchoring points for the community's life. They were formulated as the "Pillars of Islam" (for a fuller exposition *see* ISLAM, PILLARS OF; SHAHĀDA; ṢĀLĀT; ZAKĀT; ṢĀWM; HAJJ).

*The shahāda, or profession of faith.* The first pillar is the profession of faith: "There is no god but God; Muhammad is the prophet of God," upon which depends the membership in the community. The profession of faith must be recited at least once in one's lifetime, aloud, correctly, and purposively, with an understanding of its meaning and with an assent from the heart. From this fundamental belief are derived beliefs in (1) ANGELS (particularly Gabriel, the Angel of Revela-

tion), (2) the revealed books (the Qur'an and the sacred books of Jewish and Christian revelation described in the Qur'an), (3) a series of prophets (among whom figures of the Jewish and Christian tradition are particularly eminent—although it is believed that God has sent messengers to every nation), and (4) the Last Day (Day of Judgment).

**Prayer.** The second pillar consists of five daily prayers, *ṣalāt*, performed facing toward the Ka'ba in Mecca. These prayers may be offered individually if one is unable to go to the mosque. The first prayer is performed before sunrise, the second just after noon, the third later in the afternoon, the fourth immediately after sunset, and the fifth before retiring to bed. Before a prayer, ABLUTIONS, including the washing of hands, face, and feet, are performed. The noon prayer on Fridays is the chief congregational prayer.

**The zakāt.** The third pillar is the obligatory tax called *zakāt* ("purification," indicating that such a payment makes the rest of one's wealth religiously and legally pure). This is the only permanent tax levied by the Qur'an and is payable annually on food grains, cattle, and cash after one year's possession. *Zakāt* is collectable by the state and is to be used primarily for the poor, but the Qur'an mentions other purposes: ransoming Muslim war captives, redeeming chronic debts, paying tax collectors' fees, jihad (and, by extension, education and health), and creating facilities for travelers.

**Fasting.** The obligation to fast (*ṣawm*) during the month of RAMAḌĀN, laid down in the Qur'an (2:183–185), is the fourth pillar of the faith. Fasting begins at daybreak and ends at sunset, and during the day eating, drinking, and smoking are forbidden. The elderly and the incurably sick are exempted through the daily feeding of one poor person.

**The hajj.** The fifth pillar is participation in the annual pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca prescribed for every Muslim once in a lifetime—"provided one can afford it" and provided there are enough provisions for the family in the pilgrim's absence. A special service is held in the Sacred Mosque on the 7th of the month of Dhū al-Hijja (last in the Muslim year). Pilgrimage activities begin by the 8th and conclude on the 12th or 13th. The principal activities consist of walking seven times around the Ka'ba, a shrine within the mosque; kissing and touching the Black Stone (al-Ḥajar al-Aswad); and ascending and running between Mt. Ṣafā and Mt. Marwa (which are now, however, mere elevations) seven times. At the second stage of the ritual pilgrims proceed from Mecca to Minā, a few miles away; from there they go to 'Arafāt, where they must hear a sermon and spend one afternoon. The last rites consist of spending the night at Muzdalifa (between 'Arafāt and Minā) and offering sacrifice on the last day of *iḥrām*, which is the 'ĪD ("festival") of sacrifice.

By the early 21st century the number of visitors to Mecca on the occasion was estimated to be about 2,000,000, approximately half of them from non-Arab countries. All Muslim countries send official delegations, a fact that is being increasingly exploited for organizing religio-political congresses. At other times in the year it is considered meritorious to perform the lesser pilgrimage ('UMRA), which is not, however, a substitute for the hajj pilgrimage.

**Sacred places and days.** The most sacred place for Muslims is the Sacred Mosque at Mecca, which contains the Ka'ba, the object of the annual pilgrimage and the site toward which Muslims direct their daily prayers. It is much more than a mosque; it is believed to be "God's Sacred House," where heavenly bliss and power touch the earth directly. The Prophet's mosque in Medina, where Muhammad and the first CALIPHS are buried, is the next in sanctity. Jerusalem follows in third place as the first QIBLA (*i.e.*, direction in which the Muslims faced to offer prayers, before the *qibla* was changed to the Ka'ba) and as the place from where



*A schematic view of Medina, second holiest city in Islam, ceramic tile from the Mamlūk period, 16th century; in the Museum of Islamic Arts, Cairo*

Werner Forman Archive—Art Resource

Muhammad, according to tradition, made his ascent (MI'RĀJ) to heaven. For the Shi'ites, KARBALĀ' in Iraq (the place of martyrdom of 'Alī's son, Ḥusayn) and MASHHAD in Iran (where Imam 'ALĪ AL-RIDĀ is buried) constitute places of special veneration where the Shi'ites make pilgrimages.

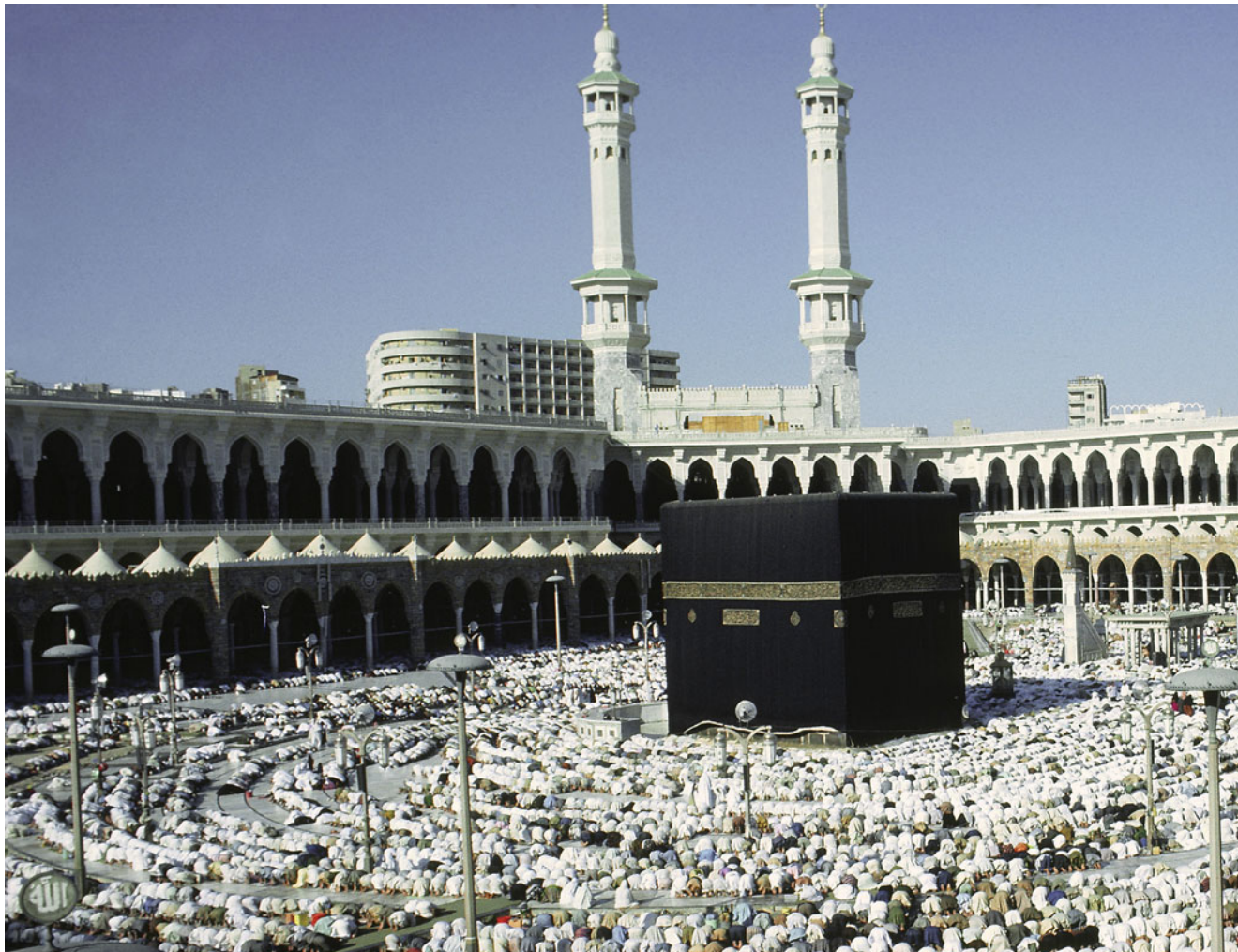
*Shrines of Sufi saints.* For Muslims in general, shrines of Sufi saints are particular objects of reverence and even veneration. In Baghdad the tomb of the most venerated Sufi saint, 'ABD AL-QĀDIR AL-JĪLĀNĪ, is visited every year by large numbers of pilgrims from all over the Muslim world. The shrine of Mu'in al-Dīn Chisti in Ajmer (northern India) draws thousands of pilgrims annually, including Hindus and Christians as well as Muslims.

*The mosque.* General religious life is centered around the mosque, and in the days of the Prophet and early caliphs the mosque was the center of all community life. Small mosques are usually supervised by the imam (one who administers the prayer service) himself, though sometimes also a MUEZZIN (prayer-time announcer) is appointed. In larger mosques, where Friday prayers are offered, a *khaṭ-īb* (one who gives the *khuṭba*, or sermon) is appointed for Friday service. Many large mosques also function as religious schools and colleges.

*Holy days.* The Muslim calendar (based on the lunar year) dates from the emigration (hijra) of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. Subsequent dates

*Pilgrims surround the Ka'ba in the Great Mosque in Mecca*

Mehmet Biber—Photo Researchers





are designated AH, *Anno Hegirae*. The two feast days in the year are the *ʿīds*, *ʿĪd al-Fiṭr* (the feast of breaking the fast), celebrating the end of the month of Ramaḍān, and *ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā* (the feast of sacrifice), marking the end of the pilgrimage. Other sacred times include the “night of determination” (*Laylat al-Qadr*, believed to be the night in which God makes decisions about the destiny of individuals and the world as a whole) and the night of the ascension of the Prophet to heaven (*Laylat al-Isrāʾ waʾl-Miʿrāj*). The Shiʿites observe the 10th of Muḥarram (the first month of the Muslim year) to mark the day of the martyrdom of Ḥusayn. Muslims also celebrate the birth/death anniversaries of various saints in a festival called *mūlid* (“birthday”), or *ʿurs* (“nuptial ceremony”). The saints are believed to reach the zenith of their spiritual life on this occasion.

### ISLAMIC THOUGHT

Islamic theology (*KALĀM*) and philosophy (*falsafa*) are two traditions of learning developed by Muslim thinkers who were engaged, on the one hand, in the rational clarification and defense of the principles of the Islamic religion (*mutakal-limūn*) and, on the other, in the pursuit of the ancient (Greco-Roman) sciences (*falāsifa*). These thinkers took a position that was intermediate between the traditionalists, who remained attached to the literal expressions of the primary

sources of Islamic doctrines (the Qurʾan and the Hadith) and who abhorred reasoning, and those whose reasoning led them to abandon the Islamic community altogether. The status of the believer in Islam remained in practice a juridical question, not a matter for theologians or philosophers to decide. Except in regard to the fundamental questions of the existence of God, Islamic revelation, and future reward and punishment, the juridical conditions for declaring someone an unbeliever or beyond the pale of Islam were so demanding as to make it almost impossible to make a valid declaration of this sort about a professing Muslim. In the course of Islamic history representatives of certain theological movements, who happened to be jurists and who succeeded in converting rulers to their cause, made those rulers declare in favor of their movements and even encouraged them to persecute their opponents. Thus there arose in some localities and periods a semblance of an official, or orthodox, doctrine.

**Origins, nature, and significance of Islamic theology.** The beginnings of theology in the Islamic tradition in the second half of the 7th century are not easily distinguishable from the beginnings of a number of other disciplines—Arabic philology, Qurʾanic interpretation, the collection of the sayings and deeds of the prophet Muhammad, jurisprudence, and historiography. During the first half of the 8th century a number of questions centering on God’s unity, justice, and other attributes and relevant to man’s freedom, actions, and fate in the hereafter formed the core of a more specialized discipline, which was called *kalām* (“speech”). The term *kalām* has come to include all matters directly or indirectly relevant to the establishment



*The Mosque of Omar (Dome of the Rock) in Jerusalem, built in the 7th century on the site where the Prophet Muhammad is said to have ascended to heaven*

Michael Freeman—Digital Vision/  
Getty Images



and definition of religious beliefs. Despite various efforts by later thinkers to fuse the problems of *kalām* with those of philosophy (and MYSTICISM), theology preserved its relative independence from philosophy and other nonreligious sciences. It remained true to its original traditional and religious point of view, confined itself within the limits of the Islamic revelation, and assumed that these limits as it understood them were identical with the limits of truth.

The pre-Islamic and non-Islamic legacy with which early Islamic theology came into contact included almost all the religious thought that had survived and was being defended or disputed in Egypt, Syria, Iran, and India. It was transmitted by learned representatives of various Christian, Jewish, Manichaean, Zoroastrian, Indian (Hindu and Buddhist, primarily), and Šābian communities and by early converts to Islam conversant with the teachings, sacred writings, and doctrinal history of the religions of these areas.

By the 9th century Islamic theology had coined a vast number of technical terms, and theologians (*e.g.*, al-Jāhīz, d. c. 868) had forged Arabic into a versatile language of science; Arabic philology had matured; and the religious sciences (jurisprudence, the study of the Qur'an, Hadith, criticism, and history) had developed complex techniques of textual study and interpretation. The 9th-century translators availed themselves of these advances to meet the needs of patrons. Apart from demands for medical and mathematical works, the translation of Greek learning was fostered by the early 'Abbāsid caliphs (8th–9th century) and their viziers as additional weapons (the primary weapon was theology itself) against perceived threats from Manichaeanism and other ideas that went under the name *zandaqa* ("heresy" or "atheism").

**Theology and dissent.** Despite the notion of a unified and consolidated community, serious differences arose within the Muslim community immediately after the Prophet's death. According to the sunnis, or traditionalist faction—who today constitute the majority of Islam—the Prophet had designated no successor. Thus, the Muslims at Medina decided to elect their own chief. Because he would not have been accepted by the QURAYSH tribe of Mecca, the Prophet's own tribe, the *umma*, or Muslim community, would have disintegrated. Therefore, two of Muhammad's fathers-in-law, who were highly respected early converts as well as trusted lieutenants, prevailed upon the Medinans to join the rest of the Muslim community in electing a single leader, and the choice fell upon Abū Bakr, father

of the Prophet's favored wife, 'Ā'isha. All of this occurred before the Prophet's burial (under the floor of 'Ā'isha's hut, alongside the courtyard of the mosque).

According to the Shi'ites, or "Partisans," of 'Alī, the Prophet had designated as his successor his cousin and son-in-law, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, husband of his daughter FĀṬĪMA and father of his only surviving grandsons, ḤASAN and ḤUSAYN. His preference was general knowledge; yet, while 'Alī and the Prophet's closest kinsmen were preparing the body for burial, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and Abū 'Ubayda from Muhammad's Companions in the Quraysh tribe met with the leaders of the Medinans and agreed to elect the aging Abū Bakr as the successor (*khalīfa*, hence "caliph") of the Prophet. 'Alī and his kinsmen were dismayed but agreed for the sake of unity and because 'Alī was still young to accept the *fait accompli*.

After the murder of 'Uthmān, the third caliph, 'Alī was invited by the Muslims at Medina to accept the caliphate. Thus 'Alī became the fourth caliph (reigned 656–661), but the disagreement over his right of succession brought about a major SCHISM in Islam, between the Shi'ites—those loyal to 'Alī—and the Sunnis, or traditionalists. Although their differences were in the first instance primarily political, arising out of the question of leadership, significant theological differences developed over time.

During the reign of the third caliph, 'Uthmān, certain rebellious groups had accused the caliph of nepotism and misrule, and the resulting discontent had led to his assassination. The rebels then recognized 'Alī as ruler, but they later deserted him and fought against him, accusing him of having committed a grave sin in submitting his claim to the caliphate to arbitration. The word *khāraju*, from which *khārijī* is derived, means "to withdraw"; thus the rebels, who believed in active secession from or dissent against a state of affairs they considered to be gravely impious, became known as the Khārijites.

The basic doctrine of the Khārijites was that a person or a group who committed a grave error or sin and did not sincerely repent ceased to be Muslim. Mere profession of the faith—"there is no god but God; Muhammad is the prophet of God"—did not make a person a Muslim unless this faith was accompanied by righteous deeds. In other words, good works were an integral part of faith and not extraneous to it. The second principle that flowed from their aggressive idealism was militancy, or jihad, which the Khārijites considered to be among the cardinal principles, or pillars, of Islam.

Because the Khārijites believed that the basis of rule was righteous character and piety alone, any Muslim, irrespective of race, color, or sex, could, in their view, become ruler—provided he or she satisfied the conditions of piety. This was in contrast to the claims of the Shi'ite sect (the party of 'Alī) that the ruler must belong to the family of the Prophet and follow the sunna (the Prophet's way) and that the head of state must belong to the Prophet's tribe, *i.e.*, the Quraysh.

As a consequence of translations of Greek philosophical and scientific works into Arabic during the 8th and 9th centuries and the controversies of Muslims with thinkers from GNOSTICISM, MANICHAËNISM, BUDDHISM, and Christianity, a more powerful movement of rational theology emerged; its representatives are called the MU'TAZILA ("those who stand apart," a reference to the fact that they dissociated themselves from extreme views of faith and infidelity). On the question of the relationship of faith to works, the Mu'tazila—who called themselves "champions of God's unity and justice"—taught, like the Khārijites, that works were an essential part of faith but that a person guilty of a grave sin, unless he repented, was neither a Muslim nor yet a non-Muslim but occupied a "middle ground." They further defended the position, as a central part of their doctrine, that humans were free to choose and act and were, therefore, responsible for their actions. They claimed that human reason, independent of revelation, was capable of discovering what is good and what is evil, although revelation corroborated the findings of reason. Revelation had to be interpreted, therefore, in conformity with the dictates of rational ethics.

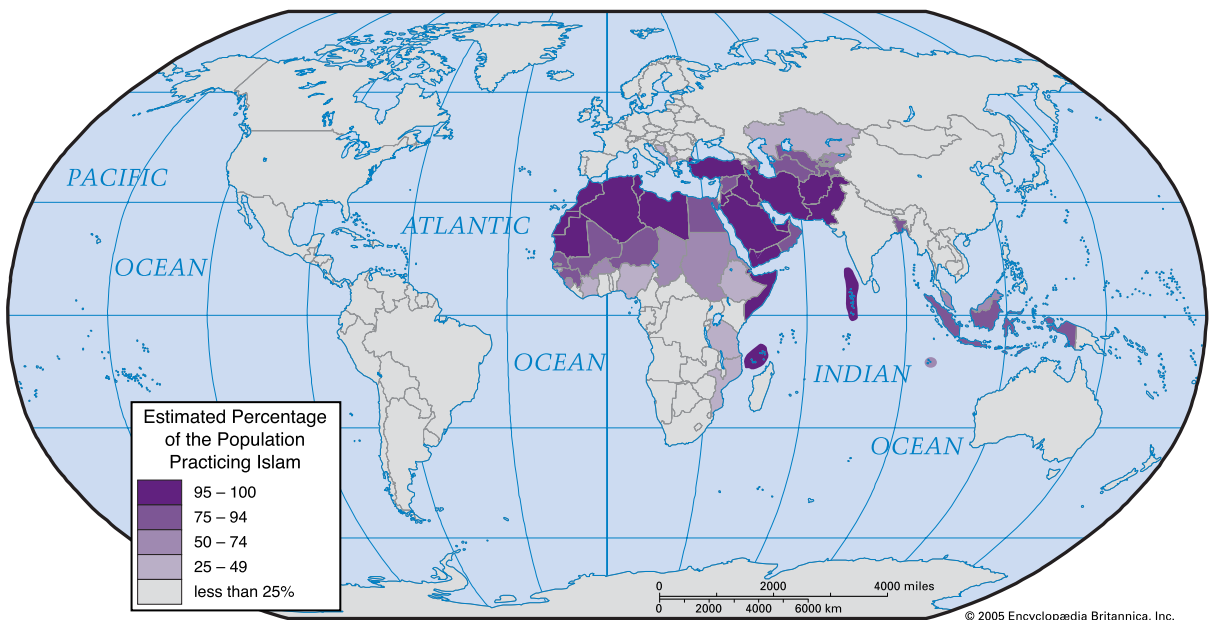
In the 10th century a reaction began against the Mu'tazila that culminated in the formulation and subsequent general acceptance of another set of theological propositions that became Sunni, or orthodox, theology. The concept of the com-

munity so vigorously pronounced by the earliest doctrine of the Qur'an gained both a new emphasis and a fresh context with the rise of Sunnism. An abundance of tradition (Hadith) came to be attributed to the Prophet to the effect that Muslims must follow the majority's way, that minority groups are all doomed to hell, and that God's protective hand is always on (the majority of) the community, which can never be in error. Under the impact of the new Hadith, the community, which had been charged by the Qur'an with a mission and commanded to accept a challenge, now became transformed into a privileged one that was endowed with infallibility. The dominant Sunni theological school, the Ash'ariya (named after ABŪ AL-HASAN AL-ASH'ARĪ, d. c. 935/936) displaced the Mu'tazila and successfully refuted key points of their theology. As a result Sunni theology became identified with the views that Muslim sinners remain Muslims, that GOOD AND EVIL alike are from God but that humans nevertheless acquire responsibility for their actions, that the Qur'an is the uncreated word of God, and that the qualities ascribed to God and the hereafter by the Qur'an are real—*i.e.*, they cannot be reasoned away as the Mu'tazila argued.

At the same time, while condemning schisms and branding dissent as heretical, Sunnism also developed the opposite trend of accommodation, catholicity, and synthesis. A putative tradition of the Prophet that says "differences of opinion among my community are a blessing" was given wide currency. This principle of toleration ultimately made it possible for diverse sects and schools of thought—notwithstanding a wide range of differences in belief and practice—to recognize and coexist with each other.

Besides the Sunni, the Shi'ite sect is the only important surviving sect in Islam. As noted above, initially it was a movement of protest against Umayyad hegemony. Gradually, however, Shi'ism developed a theological content for its political stand. Probably under Gnostic (esoteric, dualistic, and speculative) and old Iranian (dualistic) influences, the figure of the political ruler, the imam (exemplary "leader"), was transformed into a metaphysical being, a manifestation of God and the primordial light that sustains the universe and bestows true knowledge on man. Through the imam alone the hidden and true meaning of the Qur'anic revelation could be known, because the imam alone was infallible. The Shi'ites thus developed a doctrine of esoteric knowledge that was adopted also, in a modified form, by the Sufis, or Islamic mystics (*see* SUFISM). The predominant Shi'ite com-

#### Worldwide distribution of Islam



munity, the Ithna ‘Asharīya (Twelvers), recognizes 12 such imams, the last (Muhammad al-Mahdī al-Ḥujja) having disappeared in the 9th century. Since that time, the *mujtahids* (i.e., the Shi‘ite jurists) have been able to interpret law and doctrine under the putative guidance of the imam, who will return near the end of time to fill the world with truth and justice.

On the basis of their doctrine of imamology, the Shi‘ites emphasize their idealism and transcendentalism in conscious contrast with Sunni pragmatism. Thus, whereas the Sunnis believe in the *ijmā‘* (consensus) of the community as the source of decision making and workable knowledge, the Shi‘ites believe that knowledge derived from fallible sources is useless and that sure and true knowledge can come only through contact with the infallible imam.

Besides the main body of Twelver Shi‘ites, Shi‘ism has produced a variety of other sects, the most important of them being the ISMĀ‘ĪLĪS. Instead of recognizing Mūsā as the seventh imam, as did the main body of the Shi‘ites, the Ismā‘īlīs upheld the claims of his elder brother Ismā‘īl. One group of Ismā‘īlīs, called Sevener (Sab‘īya), considered Ismā‘īl the seventh and last of the imams. The majority of Ismā‘īlīs, however, believed that the imamate continued in the line of Ismā‘īl’s descendants.

In Ismā‘īlite theology, the universe is viewed as a cyclic process, and the unfolding of each cycle is marked by the advent of seven “speakers”—messengers of God with scriptures—each of whom is succeeded by seven “silents”—messengers without revealed scriptures; the last speaker (the Prophet Muhammad) is followed by seven imams who interpret the will of God to man and are, in a sense, higher than the Prophet because they draw their knowledge directly from God and not from the Angel of Revelation. During the 10th century certain Ismā‘īlī intellectuals formed a secret society called the Brethren of Purity, which issued a philosophical encyclopedia, *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, aiming at the liquidation of the particular religions in favor of a universalist spirituality.

Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, emerged out of early ascetic reactions on the part of certain religiously sensitive personalities against the general worldliness that had overtaken the Muslim community and the purely “externalist” expressions of Islam in law and theology. These persons stressed the Muslim qualities of moral motivation, contrition against excessive worldliness, and “the state of the heart” as opposed to the legalist formulations of Islam. For a complete exposition of Sufi history, beliefs, and practices, see SUFISM.

For religions based on Islam or Islamic in nature, see *also* DRUZE; YAZĪDĪ; BĀBISM; BAHĀ’Ī FAITH; AḤMADĪYA; ISLAM, NATION OF; QARMATIANS.

**Islamic philosophy.** The origin and inspiration of philosophy in Islam are quite different from those of Islamic theology. Philosophy developed out of and around the nonreligious practical and theoretical sciences; it recognized no theoretical limits other than those of human reason itself; and it assumed that the truth found by unaided reason does not disagree with the truth of Islam when both are properly understood. Islamic philosophy was not a handmaid of theology. The two disciplines were related, because both followed the path of rational inquiry and distinguished themselves both from traditional religious disciplines and from mysticism, which sought knowledge through practical, spiritual purification.

The first Muslim philosopher, AL-KINDĪ, who flourished in the first half of the 9th century, was a diligent student of Greek and Hellenistic authors in philosophy, and his conscious, open, and unashamed acknowledgment of earlier contributions to scientific inquiry was foreign to the spirit, method, and purpose of the theologians of the time. Devoting most of his writings to questions of natural philosophy and mathematics, al-Kindī was particularly concerned with the relation between corporeal things—which are changeable, in constant flux, and as such unknowable—on the one hand and the permanent world of forms (spiritual or secondary substances)—which are not subject to flux yet to which man has no access except through things of the senses—on the other. He insisted that a purely human knowledge of all things is possible through the use of various scientific devices, the study of mathematics and logic, and the assimilation of the contribu-



*Muslim men in the upper gallery of the main mosque in Delhi, India, at prayer for the holiday of 'Īd al-Fiṭr*

Reuters—Corbis—Bettmann

tions of earlier thinkers. The existence of a supernatural way to this knowledge in which all these requirements can be dispensed with was acknowledged by al-Kindī: God may choose to impart it to his prophets by cleansing and illuminating their souls and by giving them his aid, right guidance, and inspiration; and they, in turn, communicate it to ordinary men in an admirably clear, concise, and comprehensible style. This is the prophets' "divine" knowledge, characterized by a special mode of access and style of exposition. In principle, however, this very same knowledge is accessible to human beings without divine aid, even though "human" knowledge may lack the completeness and consummate logic of the prophets' divine message.

Reflection on the two kinds of knowledge—the human knowledge bequeathed by the ancients and the revealed knowledge expressed in the Qur'an—led al-Kindī to pose a number of themes that became central in Islamic philosophy: the rational-metaphorical EXEGESIS of the Qur'an and the Hadith; the identification of God with the first being and the first cause; creation as the giving of being and as a kind of causation distinct from natural causation and Neoplatonic emanation; and the immortality of the individual soul.

The philosopher whose principal concerns, method, and opposition to authority were inspired by the extreme Mu'tazila was the physician Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (9th–10th century). He was intent on developing a rationally defensible theory of creation that would not require any change in God or attribute to him responsibility for the imperfection and evil prevalent in the created world. To this end, he expounded the view that there are five eternal principles—God; Soul; prime matter; infinite, or absolute, space; and unlimited, or absolute, time—and explained creation as the result of the unexpected and sudden turn of events (*falta*). *Falta* occurred when Soul, in her ignorance, desired matter and the good God eased her misery by allowing her to satisfy her desire and to experience the suffering of the

material world, then giving her reason to make her realize her mistake and to deliver her from her union with matter, the cause of her suffering and of all evil.

AL-FĀRĀBĪ (9th–10th century) saw that theology and the juridical study of the law were derivative phenomena that function within a framework set by the prophet as lawgiver and founder of a human community. In this community, revelation defines the opinions that the members of the community must hold and the actions that they must perform if they are to attain the earthly happiness of this world and the supreme happiness of the other world. Philosophy could not understand this framework of religion as long as it concerned itself almost exclusively with its truth content and confined the study of practical science to individualistic ethics and personal salvation.

In contrast to al-Kindī and al-Rāzī, al-Fārābī recast philosophy in a new framework analogous to that of the Islamic religion. The sciences were organized within this philosophical framework so that logic, physics, mathematics, and metaphysics culminated in a political science whose subject matter was the investigation of happiness and how it could be realized in cities and nations. Philosophical cosmology, psychology, and politics were blended by al-Fārābī into a political theology whose aim was to clarify the foundations of the Islamic community and to defend its reform in a direction that would promote scientific inquiry and encourage philosophers to play an active role in practical affairs.

In al-Fārābī's lifetime the fate of the Islamic world was in the balance. The Sunni caliphate's power extended hardly beyond Baghdad, and it appeared quite likely that the various Shi'ite sects, especially the Ismā'īlīs, would finally overpower it and establish a new political order. Of all the movements in Islamic theology, Ismā'īlī theology was the one that was most clearly and extensively penetrated by philosophy. Yet its Neoplatonic cosmology, revolutionary background, ANTINOMINISM (antilegalism), and general expectation that divine laws were about to become superfluous with the appearance of the *qā'im* (the imam of the "resurrection") all militated against the development of a coherent political theory to meet the practical demands of political life and present a viable alternative to the Sunni caliphate. Al-Fārābī's theologico-political writings helped point out this basic defect of Ismā'īlī theology. Under the Fāṭimids in Egypt (969–1171), Ismā'īlī theology modified its cosmology in the direction suggested by al-Fārābī, returned to the view that the community must continue to live under the divine law, and postponed the prospect of the abolition of divine laws and the appearance of the *qā'im* to an indefinite point in the future.

One indicator of al-Fārābī's success is the fact that his writings helped produce a philosopher of the stature of IBN SĪNĀ (also spelled Avicenna; d. 1037), whose versatility, imagination, inventiveness, and prudence shaped philosophy into a powerful force that gradually penetrated Islamic theology and mysticism and Persian poetry in eastern Islam. Following al-Fārābī's lead, Ibn Sīnā initiated a full-fledged inquiry into the question of being, in which he distinguished between essence and existence. He argued that the fact of existence cannot be inferred from or accounted for by the essence of existing things and that form and matter by themselves cannot interact and originate the movement of the universe or the progressive actualization of existing things. Existence must, therefore, be due to an agent-cause that necessitates, imparts, gives, or adds existence to essence. To do so, the cause must be an existing thing and must coexist with its effect. The universe consists of a chain of actual beings, each giving existence to the one below it and responsible for the existence of the rest of the chain below it. Because an actual infinite is deemed impossible by Ibn Sīnā, this chain as a whole must terminate in a being that is wholly simple and one, whose essence is its very existence, and who is therefore self-sufficient and not in need of something else to give it existence.

By the 12th century the writings of al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and al-Ghazālī, a Sufi theologian who offered a critical account of the theories of Ibn Sīnā and other Muslim philosophers, had found their way to the West. A philosophical tradition emerged, based primarily on the study of al-Fārābī. It was critical of Ibn Sīnā's philosophical innovations and not convinced that al-Ghazālī's critique of Ibn Sīnā

touched philosophy as such, and it refused to acknowledge the position assigned by both to mysticism. The survival of Islamic philosophy in the West required extreme prudence, emphasis on its scientific character, abstention from meddling in political or religious matters, and abandonment of the hope of effecting extensive doctrinal or institutional reform.

IBN BĀJJA (Avempace; d. 1138/39) initiated this tradition with a radical interpretation of al-Fārābī's political philosophy that emphasized the virtues of the perfect but nonexistent city and the vices prevalent in all existing cities. He concluded that the philosopher must order his own life as a solitary individual, shun the company of nonphilosophers, reject their opinions and ways of life, and concentrate on reaching his own final goal by pursuing the theoretical sciences and achieving intuitive knowledge through contact with the Active Intelligence. The multitude lives in a dark cave and sees only dim shadows. The philosopher's duty is to seek the light of the sun (the intellect). To do so, he must leave the cave, see all colors as they truly are and see light itself, and finally become transformed into that light. Philosophy, he claimed, is the only way to the truly blessed state, which can be achieved only by going through theoretical science, even though it is higher than theoretical science.

To IBN RUSHD (Averroës; d. 1198) belongs the distinction of presenting a solution to the problem of the relation between philosophy and the Islamic community in the West. The intention of the divine law, he argued, is to assure the happiness of all members of the community. This requires everyone to profess belief in the basic principles of religion as enunciated in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the *ijmā'* (consensus) of the learned and to perform all obligatory acts of worship. Beyond this, the only just requirement is to demand that each pursue knowledge as far as his natural capacity and makeup permit. The divine law directly authorizes philosophers to pursue its interpretation according to the best—*i.e.*, demonstrative or scientific—method, and theologians have no authority to interfere with the conduct of this activity or to judge its conclusions. Thus, theology must remain under the constant control of philosophy and the supervision of the divine law, so as not to drift into taking positions that cannot be demonstrated philosophically or that are contrary to the intention of the divine law.

*See also* IBN TUFAYL.

These philosophical developments were in time met with a resurgent traditionalism, which found effective defenders in men such as IBN TAYMĪYA (13th–14th century), who employed a massive battery of philosophical, theological, and legal arguments against every shade of innovation and called for a return to the beliefs and practices of the pious ancestors. These attacks, however, did not deal a decisive blow to philosophy as such. Philosophy was rather driven underground for a period, only to re-emerge in a new garb. Contributing to this development was the renewed vitality and success of the program formulated by al-Ghazālī for the integration of theology, philosophy, and mysticism into a new kind of philosophy called wisdom (*ḥikma*). It consisted of a critical review of the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā, preserving its main external features (its logical, physical, and, in part, metaphysical structure, and its terminology) and introducing principles of explanation for the universe and its relation to God based on personal experience and direct vision.

The critique of Aristotle that had begun in Mu'tazilī circles and had found a prominent champion in Abū Bakr al-Rāzī was provided with a far more solid foundation in the 10th and 11th centuries by the Christian theologians and philosophers of Baghdad, who translated the writings of the Hellenistic critics of Aristotle (*e.g.*, John Philoponus) and made use of their arguments both in commenting on Aristotle and in independent theological and philosophical works. In the 12th century their theologically based anti-Aristotelianism spread among Jewish and Muslim students of philosophy, such as Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. c. 1175) and Fakhr ad-Dīn al-Rāzī. These theologians continued and intensified al-Ghazālī's attacks on Ibn Sīnā and Aristotle. They suggested that a thorough examination of Aristotle had revealed to them, on philosophical grounds, that the fundamental disagreements between Aristotle and the theologies based on the revealed



religions represented open options and that Aristotle's view of the universe was in need of explanatory principles that could be readily supplied by theology. This critique provided the framework for the integration of philosophy into theology from the 13th century onward.

Although it made use of such theological criticisms of philosophy, the new wisdom took the position that theology did not offer a positive substitute for and was incapable of solving the difficulties of Aristotelian philosophy. It did not question the need to have recourse to the Qur'an and the Hadith to find the right answers; it did, however, insist (on the authority of a long-standing mystical tradition) that theology concerns itself only with the external expressions of this divine source of knowledge. The inner core was reserved for the adepts of the mystic path, whose journey leads to the experience of the highest reality in dreams and visions. Only the mystical adepts are in possession of the one true wisdom, the ground of both the external expressions of the divine law and the phenomenal world of human experience and thought.

AL-SUHRAWARDĪ (12th century), the first master of the new wisdom, called it the "Wisdom of Illumination." He concentrated on the concepts of being and nonbeing, which he called light and darkness, and explained the gradation of beings according to the strength, or perfection, of their light. This gradation forms a single continuum that culminates in pure light, self-luminosity, self-awareness, self-manifestation, or self-knowledge, which is God, the light of lights, the true One. The stability and eternity of this single continuum result from every higher light overpowering and subjugating the lower, and movement and change along the continuum result from each of the lower lights desiring and loving the higher.

Al-Suhrawardī's doctrine claims to be the inner truth behind the exoteric (external) teachings of both Islam and Zoroastrianism, as well as the wisdom of all ancient sages, especially Iranians and Greeks, and of the revealed religions as well. This neutral yet positive attitude toward the diversity of religions was to become one of the hallmarks of the new wisdom. Different religions were seen as different manifestations of the same truth, their essential agreement was emphasized, and various attempts were made to combine them into a single harmonious religion meant for all humankind.

The account of the doctrines of IBN AL-'ARABĪ (12th–13th century) belongs properly to the history of Islamic mysticism. Yet al-'Arabī's impact on the subsequent development of the new wisdom was in many ways far greater than that of al-Suhrawardī. This is true especially of his central doctrine of the "unity of being" and his distinction between the absolute One, which is undefinable truth (*haqq*), and his self-manifestation (*zuhūr*), or creation (*khalq*), which is ever new (*jadīd*) and in perpetual movement, a movement that unites the whole of creation in constant renewal. At the very core of this dynamic edifice stands nature, the "dark cloud" (*'amā*) or "mist" (*bukhār*), as the ultimate principle of things and forms: intelligence, heavenly bodies, and elements and their mixtures that culminate in the perfect man. This primordial nature is the "breath" of the merciful God in his aspect as Lord. It flows throughout the universe and manifests truth in all its parts. It is the first mother through which truth manifests itself to itself and generates the universe. And it is the universal natural body that gives birth to



The Scribe, detail of a miniature in an Arabic manuscript, 13th century, Baghdad

The Granger Collection

the translucent bodies of the spheres, to the elements, and to their mixtures, all of which are related to that primary source as daughters to their mother.

After Ibn al-ʿArabī, the new wisdom developed rapidly in intellectual circles in eastern Islam. Commentators began the process of harmonizing and integrating the views of the masters. Great poets made them part of every educated man's literary culture. Mystical fraternities became the custodians of such works, spreading them into Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent and transmitting them from one generation to another. Following the Mongol khan Hülagü's entry into Baghdad (1258), the Twelver Shi'ites were encouraged by the Il Khanid Tatars and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (the philosopher and theologian who accompanied Hülagü as his vizier) to abandon their hostility to mysticism. Mu'tazilī doctrines were retained in their theology. Theology, however, was downgraded to "formal" learning that must be supplemented by higher things, the latter including philosophy and mysticism, both of earlier Shi'ite (including Ismā'īlī) origin and of later Sunni provenance. Al-Ghazālī, al-Suhrawardī, Ibn al-ʿArabī, and Ibn Sīnā were then eagerly studied and (except for their doctrine of the imamate) embraced with little

or no reservation. This movement in Shi'ite thought gathered momentum when the leaders of a mystical fraternity established themselves as the Ṣafavid dynasty (1501–1732) in Iran, where they championed Twelver Shi'ism as the official doctrine of the new monarchy. During the 17th century Iran experienced a cultural and scientific renaissance that included a revival of philosophical studies. There, Islamic philosophy found its last creative exponents. The new wisdom as expounded by the masters of the school of Eṣfahān (Iṣfahān) radiated throughout eastern Islam and continued as a vital tradition until modern times. *See also* MĪR DĀMĀD; MULLĀ ṢADRĀ.

The new wisdom lived on during the 18th and 19th centuries, conserving much of its vitality and strength but not cultivating new ground. It attracted able thinkers such as Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi and Hādī Sabzevārī and became a regular part of the program of higher education in the cultural centers of the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and the Indian subcontinent, a status never achieved by the earlier tradition of Islamic philosophy. In collaboration with its close ally Persian mystical poetry, the new wisdom determined the intellectual outlook and spiritual mood of educated Muslims in the regions where Persian had become the dominant literary language.

*The Sankore Mosque in Timbuktu, Mali, an important center for Islamic studies from the 14th century*

Stephenie Hollyman—Photo Researchers



The wholesale rejection of the new wisdom in the name of simple, robust, and more practical piety (which had been initiated by Ibn Taymiya and which continued to find exponents among jurists) made little impression on its devotees. To be taken seriously, reform had to come from the devotees' own ranks and be espoused by thinkers such as the eminent theologian and mystic of Muslim India Aḥmad Sirhindī (16th–17th century)—a reformer who spoke their language and attacked Ibn al-ʿArabī's "unity of being" only to defend an older, presumably more orthodox form of mysticism. Despite some impact, however, attempts of this kind remained isolated and were either ignored or reintegrated into the mainstream until the coming of the modern reformers. The 19th- and 20th-century reformers JAMĀL AL-DĪN AL-AFGHĀNĪ, MUHAMMAD ʿABDUH, and MUHAMMAD IQBĀL were initially educated in this tradition, but they rebelled against it and advocated radical reforms.

The modernists attacked the new wisdom at its weakest points; that is, its social and political norms, its individualistic ethics, and its inability to speak intelligently about social, cultural, and political problems generated by a long period of intellectual isolation and further complicated by the domination of the European powers. Unlike the earlier tradition of Islamic philosophy from al-Fārābī to Ibn Rushd, which had consciously cultivated political science and investigated the political dimension of philosophy and religion and the relation between philosophy and the community at large, the new wisdom from its inception lacked genuine interest in these questions, had no appreciation for political philosophy, and had only a benign toleration for the affairs of the world.

None of the reformers was a great political philosopher. They were concerned with reviving their nations' latent energies, urging them to free themselves from foreign domination, and impressing on them the need to reform their social and educational institutions. They also saw that all this required a total reorientation, which could not take place so long as the new wisdom remained not only the highest aim of a few solitary individuals but also a social and popular ideal as well. Yet as late as 1917, Iqbāl found that "the present-day Muslim prefers to roam about aimlessly in the valley of Hellenic-Persian mysticism, which teaches us to shut our eyes to the hard reality around, and to fix our gaze on what is described as 'illumination.'" His reaction was harsh: "To me this self-mystification, this nihilism, *i.e.*, seeking reality where it does not exist, is a physiological symptom, giving me a clue to the decadence of the Muslim world."

To arrest this decadence and to infuse new vitality into a society in which they were convinced religion must remain the focal point the modern reformers advocated a return to the movements and masters of Islamic theology and philosophy antedating the new wisdom. They argued that these, rather than the "Persian incrustation of Islam," represented Islam's original and creative impulse. The modernists were attracted in particular to the views of the Muʿtazila: affirmation of God's unity and denial of all similarity between him and created things; reliance on human reason; emphasis on man's freedom; faith in man's ability to distinguish between good and bad; and insistence on man's responsibility to do good and fight against evil in private and public places. They were also impressed by the traditionalists' devotion to the original, uncomplicated forms of Islam and by their fighting spirit, as well as by the Ashʿarīs' view of faith as an affair of the heart and their spirited defense of the Muslim community from extreme expressions of RATIONALISM and sectarianism alike. In viewing the scientific and philosophical tradition of Eastern and Western Islam prior to the Tatar and Mongol invasions, they saw an irrefutable proof that true Islam stands for the liberation of human spirit, promotes critical thought, and provides both the impetus to grapple with the temporal and the demonstration of how to set it in order. These ideas initiated what was to become a vast effort to recover, edit, and translate into the Muslim national languages works of earlier theologians and philosophers, which had been long neglected or known only indirectly through later accounts.

The modern reformers insisted, finally, that Muslims must be taught to understand the real meaning of what had happened in Europe, which in effect meant the understanding of modern science and philosophy, including modern social

and political philosophies. Initially, this challenge became the task of the new universities in the Muslim world. In the latter part of the 20th century, however, the originally wide gap between the various programs of theological and philosophical studies in religious colleges and in modern universities narrowed considerably. See AL-AZHAR UNIVERSITY; ALĪGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY.

### SOCIAL AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

**Family life.** A basic social teaching of Islam is the encouragement of marriage, and the Qur'an regards CELIBACY as something definitely exceptional, to be resorted to only under economic stringency. Thus, MONASTICISM as a way of life is severely criticized by the Qur'an. Many Sufis, on the other hand, prefer celibacy, and some even regard women as an evil distraction from piety, although marriage remains the normal practice also with Sufis.

Polygamy, which was practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia, is permitted by the Qur'an, which, however, limits the number of simultaneous wives to four, and this permission is made dependent on the condition that justice be done among co-wives (Q 4:3). Medieval law and society regarded this "justice" to be primarily a private matter between a husband and his wives, although the law did provide redress in cases of gross neglect of a wife. The right to divorce was also vested basically in the husband, who could unilaterally repudiate his wife, although the woman could also sue her husband for divorce before a court on certain grounds.

The virtue of chastity is regarded as of prime importance by Islam. The Qur'an advances its universal recommendation of marriage as a means to ensure a state of chastity (*iḥṣān*), which is held to be induced by a single free wife. The Qur'an states that those guilty of adultery are to be severely punished with 100 lashes (Q 24:2). Tradition has intensified this injunction and has prescribed this punishment for unmarried persons, while married adulterers are to be stoned to death. A false accusation of adultery is punishable by 80 lashes.

The general ethic of the Qur'an considers the marital bond to rest on "mutual love and mercy," and the spouses are said to be "each other's garments" (Q 2:187). The detailed laws of inheritance prescribed by the Qur'an also tend to confirm the idea of a central family—husband, wife, and children, along with the husband's parents (Q 4:7–12). Easy access to polygamy (although the normal practice in Islamic society has always been that of monogamy) and easy divorce on the part of the husband led, however, to frequent abuses in the family. In recent times most Muslim countries have enacted legislation to tighten marital relationships.

The right of parents to good treatment is stressed in Islam, and the Qur'an extols FILIAL PIETY, particularly tenderness to the mother, as an important virtue (Q 46:15–17). One who murders his father is automatically disinherited. The tendency of the Islamic ethic to strengthen the immediate family on the one hand and the community on the other at the expense of the extended family or tribe has not prevailed, however. With urbanization, the nuclear family bond has become more prominent, but tribal identities still prevail in the Arabian Peninsula and areas of Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and North Africa. So strong, indeed, has been the patriarchal family group ethos that in most Muslim societies daughters are not given the inheritance share prescribed by the sacred law in order to prevent disintegration of the joint family's patrimony.

**The state.** Because Islam draws no absolute distinction between the religious and the temporal spheres of life, the Muslim state is by definition religious. The main differences between the Sunni, Khārijite, and Shi'ite concepts of rulership have already been pointed out. Although the office of the Sunni caliph is religious, he has no authority either to define dogma or to legislate. He is the chief executive of a religious community, and his primary function is to implement the sacred law and to work in the general interests of the community. He himself is not above the law and if necessary can even be deposed, at least in theory.

Sunni political theory is essentially a product of circumstance—an after-the-fact rationalization of historical developments. Thus, while Shi'ite legitimism restricted rule to 'Alī's family and Khārijite democratism allowed rulership to anyone, even to "an Ethiopian slave," Sunnism held the position that "rule belonged

to the Quraysh" (the Prophet's tribe)—the condition that actually existed. Again between the extremes represented by the Khārijites, who demanded rebellion against what they considered to be unjust or impious rule, and the Shi'ites, who raised the imam to a metaphysical plane of infallibility, the Sunnis took the position that a ruler has to satisfy certain qualifications but that his rule cannot be upset by small issues. Indeed, in reaction to the civil wars started by the Khārijites, Sunnism drifted more and more toward conformism and actual toleration of injustice.

The first step taken in this direction by the Sunni was the enunciation that "one day of lawlessness is worse than 30 years of tyranny." This was followed by the principle that "Muslims must obey even a tyrannical ruler." Soon the SULTAN (ruler) was declared to be the "shadow of God on earth." No doubt the principle was also adopted—and insisted upon—that "there can be no obedience to the ruler in disobedience of God"; but there is no denying the fact that the Sunni doctrine came to be more and more heavily weighted on the side of political conformism. This change is also reflected in the principles of legitimacy. Whereas early Islam had confirmed the pre-Islamic democratic Arab principle of rule by consultation (SHŪRĀ) and some form of democratic election of the leader, that practice gave way to dynastic rule with the advent of the Umayyads. The *shūrā* was not developed into an institutionalized form but was, indeed, quickly discarded. Soon the principle of "might is right" came into being, and later theorists frankly acknowledged that actual possession of effective power is one method of the legitimization of power.

Despite this development, the ruler could not become absolute, as a basic restraint was placed on him by the SHARĪ'A (the Islamic legal and moral code) under which he held his authority and which he was bound to execute and defend dutifully. When, in the latter half of the 16th century, the Mughal emperor AKBAR in India wanted to arrogate to himself the right of administrative-legal absolutism, the strong reaction of the religious conservatives thwarted his attempt. In general, the *'ulamā'* (religious scholars and jurists) jealously upheld the sovereign position of the Sharī'a against political authority.

The effective shift of power from the caliph to the sultan was, again, reflected in the redefinition of the functions of the caliph. It was conceded that, if the caliph administered through *wazīrs* (viziers or ministers) or subordinate rulers (*amīrs*), it was not necessary for him to embody all the physical, moral, and intellectual virtues theoretically insisted upon earlier. In practice, however, the caliph was no more than a titular head from the middle of the 10th century onward, when real power passed to self-made and adventurous *amīrs* and sultans, who used the caliph's name merely for legitimacy.

**Education.** Muslim educational activity began in the 8th century, primarily in order to disseminate the teaching of the Qur'an and the sunna of the Prophet. The first task in this endeavor was to record ORAL TRADITIONS and collect written manuscripts. This information was systematically organized in the 8th–9th century CE, and by the 9th–early 10th century CE a sound corpus was agreed upon. This vast activity of "seeking knowledge" (*ṭalab al-'ilm*) resulted in the creation of specifically Arab sciences of tradition, history, and literature.

When the introduction of the Greek sciences—philosophy, medicine, and mathematics—created a formidable body of lay knowledge, its reaction with the traditional religious base resulted in the rationalist theological movement of the Mu'tazila. Based on the Greek legacy, from the 9th to the 12th century CE a brilliant philosophical movement flowered and presented a challenge to the emerging Sunni consensus on the issues of the eternity of the world, the doctrine of revelation, and the status of the Sharī'a.

Sunni scripturalists met the challenge positively by formulating a religious dogma. At the same time, however, for fear of HERESY, they began to draw a sharp distinction between religious and secular sciences. The custodians of the Sharī'a developed an unsympathetic attitude toward the secular disciplines and excluded them from the curriculum of the MADRASA (college) system. This exclusion proved fatal, not only for those disciplines but, in the long run, for religious thought in

general because of the lack of intellectual challenge and stimulation. A typical *madrassa* curriculum included logic, Arabic literature, law, Hadith, Qur'an commentary, and theology. Despite sporadic criticism from certain quarters, the *madrassa* system remained impervious to change.

One important feature of Muslim education was that primary education (which consisted of Qur'an reading, writing, and rudimentary arithmetic) did not feed candidates to institutions of higher education, and the two remained separate. In higher education, emphasis was on books rather than on subjects and on commentaries rather than on original works. This, coupled with the habit of learning by rote (which was developed from a tradition that encouraged learning more than thinking), impoverished intellectual creativity still further.

Despite these grave shortcomings, however, the *madrassa* produced one important advantage. Through the uniformity of its religio-legal content, it gave the 'ulama' the opportunity to effect that overall cohesiveness and unity of thought and purpose that, despite great variations in local Muslim cultures, has become a palpable feature of the world Muslim community. This uniformity has withstood even the tensions created against the seats of formal learning by Sufism through its distinctive disciplines and its own centers.

In contrast to the Sunnis, the Shi'ites continued seriously to cultivate philosophy, which developed a strong religious character. Indeed, philosophy has enjoyed an unbroken tradition in Persia down to the present and has produced some highly original thinkers. Both the Sunni and the Shi'ite medieval systems of learning, however, have come face to face with the greatest challenge of all—the impact of modern education and thought from the West.

The organization of education as an institution developed naturally in the course of time. Evidence exists of small schools already established in the first century of Islam that were devoted to reading, writing, and instruction in the Qur'an. These schools of "primary" education were called *kuttābs*. The well-known governor of Iraq at the beginning of the 8th century, the ruthless al-Ḥajjāj, had been a schoolteacher in his early career. When higher learning in the form of tradition grew in the 8th and 9th centuries, it was centered around learned men to whom students traveled from far and near and from whom they obtained a certificate (*ijāza*) to teach what they had learned. Women were excluded from *madrassas*, but in urban areas they had access to learning at mosques. Women in scholarly families sometimes became renowned teachers, especially of Hadith. Through the munificence of rulers, princes, and even wealthy female patrons, large private and public libraries were built, and schools and colleges arose. In the early 9th century a significant incentive to learning came from translations of scientific and philosophical works from the Greek (and partly Sanskrit) at the famous *bayt al-ḥikmah* ("house of wisdom") at Baghdad, which was officially sponsored by the caliph al-Ma'mūn. The Fāṭimid caliph AL-ḤĀKIM set up a *dār al-ḥikmah* ("hall of wisdom") in Cairo in the 10th–11th century. With the advent of the Seljuq Turks, the famous vizier Niẓām al-Mulk created an important college at Baghdad, devoted to Sunni learning, in the latter half of the 11th century. One of the world's oldest surviving universities, al-Azhar at Cairo, was originally established by the Fāṭimids, but Saladin (Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Ayyūbī), after ousting the Fāṭimids, consecrated it to Sunni learning in the 12th century. Throughout subsequent centuries, colleges and quasi-universities arose throughout the Muslim world from Spain (whence Islamic philosophy and science were transmitted to the Latin West) across Central Asia to India.

In Turkey a new style of *madrassa* came into existence; it had four wings, for the teaching of the four schools of Sunni law. Professorial chairs were endowed in large colleges by princes and governments, and residential students were supported by college endowment funds. A myriad of smaller centers of learning were endowed by private donations.

**Cultural diversity.** Underneath unity of law and creed, the world of Islam harbours a tremendous diversity of cultures, particularly in the outlying regions. The expansion of Islam can be divided into two broad periods. In the first period of the Arab conquests the assimilative activity of the conquering religion was far-reach-

ing. Although Persia resurrected its own language and a measure of its national culture after the first three centuries of Islam, its culture and language had come under heavy Arab influence. Only after Şafavid rule installed Shi'ism as a distinctive creed in the 16th century did Persia regain a kind of religious autonomy. The language of religion and thought, however, continued to be Arabic.

In the second period, the spread of Islam was not conducted by the state with *'ulamā'* influence but was largely the work of Sufi missionaries. The Sufis, because of their latitudinarianism, compromised with local customs and beliefs and left a great deal of the pre-Islamic legacy in every region intact. Thus, among the Central Asian Turks, shamanistic practices were absorbed, while in Africa the holy man and his *barakah* (an influence supposedly causing material and spiritual well-being) survive. In India there are large areas geographically distant from the Muslim religio-political centre of power in which customs are still Hindu and even pre-Hindu and in which people worship a motley of saints and deities in common with the Hindus. The custom of SATĪ, under which a widow burned herself alive along with her dead husband, persisted in India even among some Muslims until late into the Mughal period. The 18th- and 19th-century reform movements strove to "purify" Islam of these accretions and superstitions.

Indonesia affords a striking example of this phenomenon. Because Islam arrived late and soon came under the influence of European colonialism, Indonesian society has retained its pre-Islamic world view beneath an overlay of Islamic practices. It has kept its customary law (called *adat*) at the expense of the Sharī'a; many of its tribes are still matriarchal, and culturally the Hindu epics RĀMĀYAṆA and MAHĀBHĀRATA hold a high position in national life. Since the 19th century, however, orthodox Islam has gained steadily in strength because of fresh contacts with the Middle East.

Apart from regional diversity, the main internal division within Islamic society is between urban and village life. Islam originated in the two cities of Mecca and Medina, and as it expanded its peculiar ethos appears to have developed mainly in urban areas. Culturally, it came under a heavy Persian influence in Iraq, where the Arabs learned the ways and style of life of their conquered people. The custom of veiling women (the PURDAH, which originally arose as a sign of aristocracy but later served the purpose of segregating women from men), for example, was acquired in Iraq.

Another social trait derived from outside cultures was the disdain for agriculture and manual labor in general. Because the people of the town of Medina were mainly agriculturists, this disdain could not have been initially present. In general, Islam came to appropriate a strong feudal ethic from the peoples it conquered. Also, because the Muslims generally represented the administrative and military aristocracy and because the learned class (the *'ulamā'*) was an essential arm of the state, the higher culture of Islam became urban based.

This city orientation explains and also underlines the traditional cleavage between the orthodox Islam of the *'ulamā'* and the folk Islam espoused by the Sufi orders of the countryside. In the modern period, the advent of education and rapid industrialization threatened to make this cleavage still wider. With the rise of a strong and widespread fundamentalist movement in the second half of the 20th century, this dichotomy has decreased.

*Women in Jakarta, Indon., at prayer as a child looks on, at the end of the holy month of Ramaḍān*

Reuters/Supri/Archive Photos

