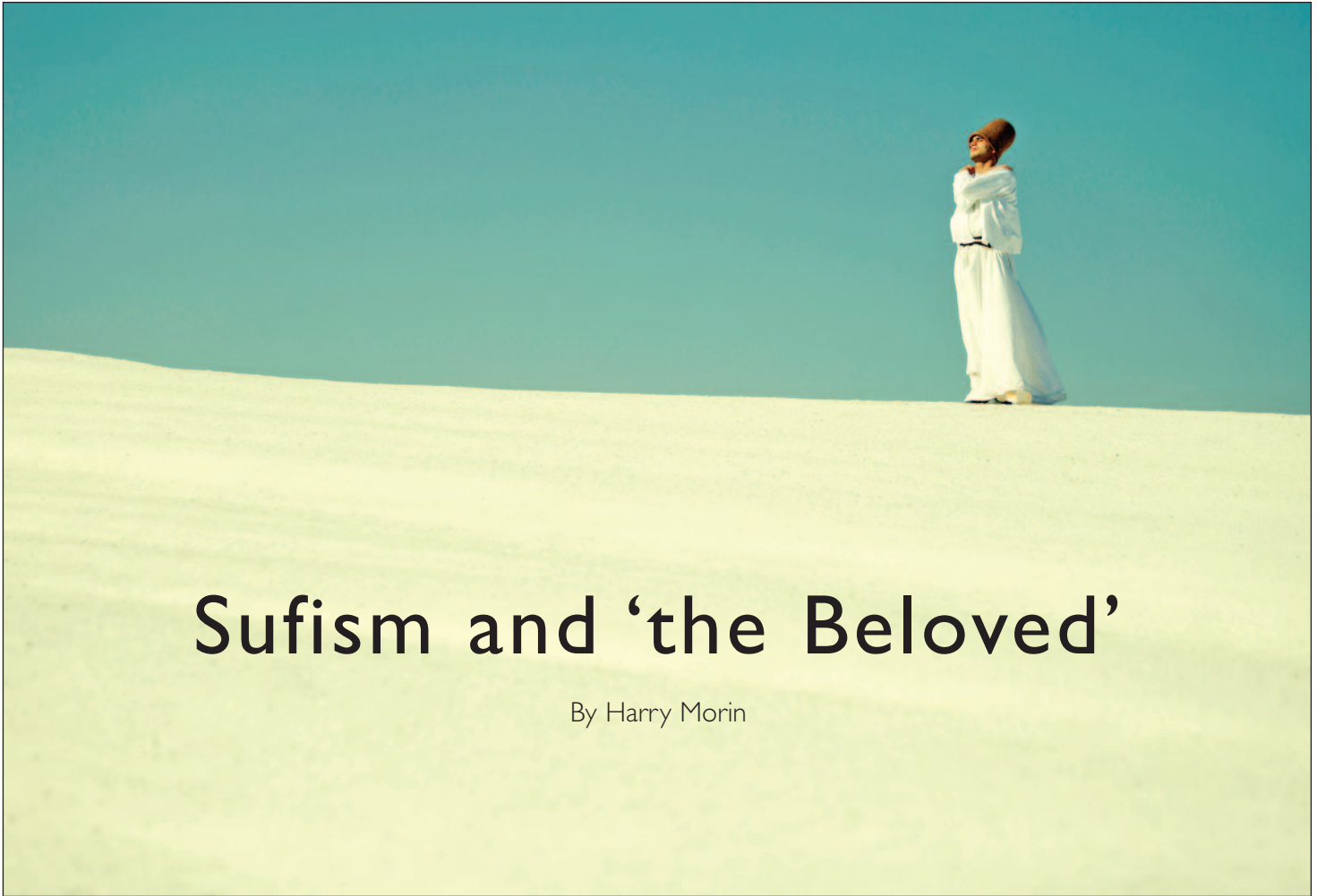




INTERCEDE

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Sufism and 'the Beloved'

By Harry Morin

*L*a ilaha illallah, la ilaha illallah, la ilaha illallah (there is no deity but Allah) ... on and on flow the words of the Arabic chant in cadence with the rhythmic heartbeat of the Sufi Muslim who is enthralled by the prospect of connecting with God. A Sufi Muslim is well acquainted with the practice of Islamic chanting known as *dhikir*. It is the defining characteristic of a Muslim who has embraced Sufism.

Sufism is the mystical version of a Muslim's religion. It ignites the experiential flame in Islam just as Pentecostalism does in Christianity. However, it differs from mainstream orthodox Islam in several ways. Under the umbrella of Islam, Sufism speaks more of a religious experience to be yearned for than a religious regimen to be observed. Sufism focuses on purity of heart vs. purity of ritual. It stresses closeness to God vs. God's aloofness. Sufism speaks of a spiritual pil-

grimage to God vs. a literal pilgrimage to Mecca. Sufism speaks of God's love as opposed to God's wrath.

Proponents of Sufism claim that this version of Islam was in vogue ever since the time of Islam's prophet, Muhammad, in the seventh century. However, Sufism appeared to take shape about twenty-five years after his death, following the rule of the third caliph, Uthman. Some Muslims regarded Uthman as an irreligious ruler who was more concerned about spreading power and wealth than spreading the moral teachings of Islam. They became dissatisfied at what they deemed to be a corrupting influence for the Muslim community. As a result, two reactionary movements emerged. Some Muslims advocated for a stricter form of religion which would focus on the external obligations of worship, such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

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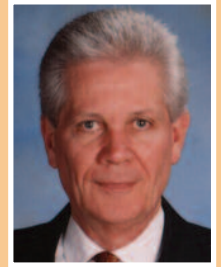


Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Jim Bennett

Global Initiative:
Reaching Muslim Peoples



Sufism: One purpose of *Intercede* is to inform our readership about Islam. Most Christians are aware of Sunni Islam and Shia Islam, but few know of the enormous influence of Sufism within Islam. Any major bookstore will have several attractive volumes on Sufism displayed in the religion section. An amazon.com search of “Sufism books” produced 2,524 volumes. Located within the first 10 titles were the following:

- Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam
- Sufism: The Transformation of the Heart
- The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam’s Mystical Tradition
- Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam




- Al-Ghazali’s Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error and Five Key Texts

These books are nicely packaged and reveal a strong theme of mysticism. “New agers” and others with a proclivity for mysticism are enticed to taste and see. The author of our lead article on Sufism provides an important piece of advice — “Lest a Christian become enamored to Sufism, it is critical to realize that Sufis have a completely different view of Jesus.” I recall a brilliant and godly British Anglican priest in the Middle East saying “As you study Islam, be careful that you are not lured by Satan into believing that certain parts are OK to embrace as revealed truth. I almost became a Muslim — and one of the strongest attractions for me was the mystical fascination of Sufism.”

The ultimate goal of Sufism is to achieve blissful union with ultimate reality (Allah). Several techniques have developed to assist in the process, including *dhikr* (remembrance, mention of God) and *sama’* (hearing/listening). *Dhikr* may involve reciting characteristics of God until one feels a certain union with God. Special forms of breathing supposedly aid concentration and help attain an ecstatic state. During *sama’* poetry, music and dance are used as an aid to reaching the ecstatic state.

As followers of Christ, we need to do two things: (1) Recognize the subtlety of Satan and be prepared to engage in spiritual warfare, and (2) Walk in the full power of the Holy Spirit and allow the gift of discernment to be a part of our spiritual weaponry. I hope you will read the lead article of this issue with these two things in mind.

Biblical Translation: A current issue that vitally concerns our ministry is the use of non-familial words in Muslim language translations of the Scripture. In short, this primarily means substituting alternative words for Father and Son in the text, then placing the words Father and Son in the paratext, with explanation. Our ministry has expressed strong opposition to this practice. Thank you for praying that the integrity of Scripture will be preserved in all ways in all translations. 



Muslim World News

Iran

Churches end Farsi worship

Iran's Ministry of Intelligence has ordered the last two churches holding Friday Farsi-language services in Tehran to discontinue — Emmanuel Protestant Church and St. Peter's Evangelical Church.

The services attracted converts to Christianity as well as Muslims interested in Christianity, as Friday is most Iranians' day off during the week. Authorities told the churches they can hold the services on Sunday, a working day when most Iranians are not able to attend.

Because the churches belong to minority groups, the government can't stop them from operating but is doing what it can to limit them and the spread of Christianity. "Authorities want church operations to stop, but because these churches are established by Armenians and Assyrians and their leaders are Armenian and Assyrian, they can't stop them," the source said, "but they can stop the Farsi-speaking services." — *Compass*

Egypt

Christian protestors killed

The killing of Christian protestors, and far-fetched denials have left citizens enraged. The Egyptian army's killing of 27 people — including at least 23 Christians — who were protesting the burning of a church building has removed any respect most Egyptians had for the transitional military government.

The activists, along with members of Egyptian churches, said that the attack and the subsequent denial of any wrongdoing by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has taken away any credibility the army had among Christians, moderate Muslims and "secularists."

Instead of assuming any responsibility for the killings, the military instead blamed unidentified "enemies of the nation." Wagih Jacoub, a Coptic human rights activist who was injured during the attack, was enraged at the assault and subsequent denial of responsibility. "They are absolutely lying," he said. — *Compass*

Nigeria

Churches targeted in bomb attack

Suspected Islamic extremists detonated a bomb outside a church building, two months after Boko Haram Islamists killed 44 Christians and blinded seven in a church bombing in nearby Madalla.

The blast in Suleja, in front of Christ Embassy Church during their morning worship, injured five people, one seriously, sources said. The bomb, planted in a parked car, was left by suspected members of Boko Haram, which seeks to impose *sharia* throughout Nigeria.

Triumphant Ministries Church is also near the site of the explosion. Peter Osema, a rescue worker with Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency, told *Compass* that the bomb was likely meant to affect both churches, and indeed *Compass* learned that at least one of those injured belongs to the Triumph Ministries church. The blast occurred a few minutes after the worship service began at 10 a.m. — *Compass*

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This impulse gave rise to a more formal study of the Quran and Islamic tradition which eventually branched out into the four major schools of Islamic Law. The other reactionary movement advocated for a purer form of religion which would focus on the internal experiences of worship. These Muslims claimed that the ongoing practice of Islam failed to meet certain basic needs in the heart of the believer.

For example, high on the list was the need to feel God's presence. Without it, worship remained mechanical and lifeless. There was a need to worship God simply out of love. To worship God out of fear was really the worship of self. One woman Sufi (Rabi-al Adawiya, eighth century) expressed it this way in one of her prayers: *Oh Allah, if I worship You only to escape hell, then throw me into the flames. If I worship You only to enter Paradise, then forbid me entry. But if I worship You for who You are, then do not withhold from me Your eternal beauty.* These God-seeking Muslims also recognized the potential for intimacy with God. For them, this necessitated purity of heart and an abandonment of all worldly possession, desires and influences.

In search of fulfilling these spiritual needs, a growing number of Muslims became caught up in a purification movement. It was a movement that witnessed individual involvement in spiritual formation disciplines such as fasting, renunciation of the world, and long-term meditation. These Muslims became ascetically inclined. They traded their silken worldly attire for coarse woolen rags, from which many scholars believe comes the word "sufi" — one who wears wool.

As more Muslims embraced the path of Sufism, certain spiritual themes became prominent: God the Beloved; God the Friend; Nearness to God; Becoming one with God; Seeking God's Face; Being the object of God's Eyes; Spiritual journey to God; Purity of heart; and Remembrance of God. Here are some verses from the Quran which Sufis use to address these themes:

- In their hearts is a disease. (2:10)
- Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God. (2:115)
- Sanctify My house. (2:125)
- Remember Me; I will remember you. (2:152)
- To God we belong and to Him we return. (2:156)
- God loves those who put their trust in Him. (3:159)
- Seek the means of approach to God. (5:35)



- Truly on the friends of God there is no fear. (10:62)
- Only he will prosper who brings to God a sound heart. (26:89)
- God is nearer to man than his jugular vein. (50:16)
- The ark of Noah floats under God's eyes. (54:14)
- To God is the final goal. (64:3)
- You shall surely travel from stage to stage. (84:19)
- The only desire is to seek God's face. (92:20)

As increasing numbers of Muslims became attracted to these Sufi themes and began their spiritual journey to God, Sufism morphed from an individual movement to a sophisticated brotherhood movement made up of Sufi followers led by Sufi masters. These brotherhoods became well established by the thirteenth century, and some of them exist to this day. Each Sufi brotherhood (*tariqa*) promoted its own version of what the stages of one's spiritu-

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al journey should be. In general they included long-term seclusion, self-denial, community service, devotional worship, meditation, spiritual illumination, and spiritual ecstasy. The Sufi's ultimate goal is to become so consumed by love for God that he becomes one with God in will and purpose. Some Sufis speak in terms of becoming so “intoxicated” by love for God and union in Him that they lose all self-identity; they become completely annihilated into God. This extreme view reflects a pantheistic mindset in which all things originate from God and all things return back into God.

As Sufi masters focused more on the spiritual plane of religion, they began to delve into the spirit realm and connected with spirit powers that led to counterfeit miracles. As a result, through the centuries and still today, certain Sufi masters became known more for their miracles than

their teaching. They have been alleged to have not only power to perform specific miracles, but also the power to bestow an aura of blessing on their followers. This power of miracles and blessing is known as *baraka*, and it is the potential for *baraka* that makes the Sufi master most appealing to the masses. The greater the power of *baraka*, the greater the Sufi master's credibility. Miracles were seen as a sign of God's approval. When these miracle-workers of the early centuries died, their followers elevated them to sainthood and transformed their gravesites into beautiful shrines. Muslims flock to these shrines and pray to the Muslim saint, hoping for his intercession and for a bestowal of *baraka*.

Still today, Sufi masters regularly meet with their disciples at these shrines to teach and to bestow blessing. These meetings are often marked by fervent singing, clapping, dancing, and are particularly characterized by the traditional rhythmic chant, the *dhikir*. The word *dhikir* means remembrance, and is used in the Quran to remind believers to remember God and celebrate His praises: “remembrance of God is the greatest (thing in life) without doubt” (29:45); and “O ye who believe! Celebrate the praises of God and do this often” (33:41). Sufi Muslims chant the phrase, *la ilaha illallah* (there is no deity but Allah), followed by names of God in Arabic which speak of His attributes.

Often it is during this chanting ritual of *dhikir* that worshipers work themselves into a trance and even a frenzy. It is this altered state of consciousness which supposedly marks one's exit from the physical world into the spiritual realm to encounter God. Of course, outside the path of Christ, one cannot enter the realm of the Holy Spirit, which means that one's entry is into a realm of unholy spirits. This is the realm where Sufi Muslims engage in spiritual ecstasy. Other means for entering this spirit realm include drugs, hypnosis, and fervent music with dancing, such as seen in the ritual dances of the whirling dervishes. Sufi masters teach their disciples by parables, allegories, stories, and poetry. They are quick to expose the hypocrisy and deadness of formal Islam which has its own version of “the Scribes and the Pharisees.”

From the overall discussion on Sufism, it is easy to see why Sufi Muslims are attracted to Jesus. Some of them even regard Jesus as the greatest among Muslim

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saints. For Muslims who prefer to keep religion separate from political ideology and free of mechanical ritual, Sufism offers an attractive and more palatable alternative.

Lest a Christian become enamored to Sufism, it is critical to realize that Sufis have a completely different view of Jesus. The Bible views Jesus as the divine becoming one with man. Sufis view Jesus as a man becoming one with the divine. They see Jesus as a true seeker of God who succeeded in becoming so intimate with God that he was able to claim that he and God had become one. There are other critical differences. The Sufi's message is God-centered. The Christian's message is Christ-centered. The Sufi seeks to be absorbed into God. The Christian seeks to find fulfillment in Christ and become transformed into his likeness (2 Col.3:18). Most critical of all, Sufism sees no need for Jesus to die a death of atonement on the cross. God's love is enough to erase all sin. However, the Bible is clear regarding the justice of God which requires the penalty of atonement. There must be the shedding of blood for the remission of sins and the only one whose blood fulfills the need for justification is Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Orthodox Islam views Sufism as a religious innovation guilty of heresy and blasphemy. Through the centuries, serious attempts have been made to eradicate this version of Islam, but Sufism has survived for one special reason: it offers two essential provisions for which Muslims desperately yearn: a source of power to bless, and a mediator to intercede. This critical observation leads us to a concluding question, "Why is it important to know about Sufism?"

First of all, we can well identify with many of the Sufi themes in this article because they address issues common to all people. These themes provide bridges that lead to Biblical truths. Yes, there is a way to get closer to God. Yes, there is a way to purify the heart. Yes, there is a way to know God as "the Beloved." And that way is Jesus the Messiah. Furthermore, we now realize that we hold in our hearts the very things Muslims crave: a source of power and a mediator. Because Jesus is the Holy One, we know that the spirit realm from which Jesus performs miracles is the Kingdom of God. And we know there is only one mediator between man and God, and he too is Jesus the Holy One. May God help us to do all we can to direct Muslims to Jesus who alone can guide the true seeker on a pilgrimage leading to the eternal embrace of the Loving Father! 

People Focus: *The Ansari of India*

The Ansaris reside in most countries of South Asia. The primary population of 9,923,00 lives in India. They are predominately artisans by trade and are mostly poor and illiterate. Ansaris are Muslims who practice folk Islam which incorporates many superstitions into their observance of the religion. There are almost no followers of Christ among the Muslim Ansaris. The friendliness of the Ansaris can open doors for believers to develop closeness with them and opportunities to share the gospel. In recent years numerous teams have begun working in north India among the Ansaris.

- Pray that Indian Christians would reach out to the Ansaris.
- Pray for Christian compassion ministries that are serving the Ansaris.
- Pray that a "Cornelius" will be raised up from the Ansaris.
- Pray that visas for cross-cultural workers will be obtained.





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Facebook. Please join today.*



“Fuel Your Passion for God and His Mission”

Would you like to attend the largest Arabic festival in the U.S.?

Most missions conferences are very challenging, but provide little or no opportunity to interact with the people whom the missionaries represent. For this reason we have timed this conference with the annual "Arab International Festival" in Dearborn, Michigan. Participants can attend the conference AND the festival. It is a unique opportunity to visit the "mission field" in our nation's backyard.

This year's conference is about "Missions, Muslims and the Heart of God." For information about this special missions conference in Dearborn during June 14-16, 2012, please visit www.dearbornlegacyconference.org.

Friday, May 4, 2012. Please pray

- ...for Muslims in Libya* where despite calls for freedom, *sharia* may be adopted as principal law.
- ...for religious freedom in Tunisia.* Despite appearances of reform, Islamists have gained control in recent elections.
- ...that Muslims in Turkey* will hear witness of Jesus Christ, despite hardline Islam that is threatening the political balance.

Friday, May 11, 2012. Please pray

- ...for Muslims in Egypt* to hear about the love of Jesus Christ, despite growing Islamic unrest.
- ...for Christian pastors across the Muslim world.* Pray that through divine intervention, windows of opportunity would open allowing indigenous pastors to openly preach about the love of Jesus Christ.
- ...for Muslim women in Somalia.* They are often subject to *sharia* law and have little opportunity to learn about Jesus Christ.

Friday, May 18, 2012. Please pray

- ...for MBBs (Muslim Background Believers) in Pakistan.* Christian persecution continues and was very harsh in 2011.
- ...for Muslim students in American universities* to receive witness of Jesus Christ.
- ...for Muslims in Syria.* The country remains on edge with protests, arrests, imprisonment and many deaths. Also, if the Assad regime falls, Syrian Christians could face waves of persecution.

Friday, May 25, 2012. Please pray

- ...for God to work a miracle* in the lives of Europe's Muslims.
- ...for Muslims in Sudan.* Despite hostility toward Christianity, pray that Sudan's Muslims would come to know Jesus Christ.
- ...for Christian believers in Bangladesh* to be filled with wisdom and the vision to share Christ with friends and neighbors.



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now on Facebook.
Please join today.*



Friday, June 1, 2012. Please pray

...for millions of Muslims attending mosques today. Pray that the Lord would reveal His love to them in miraculous ways.
...for Chinese Kazakh Muslims to have opportunity to learn about Jesus.
...for approximately 10 million Ansari Muslims in India. Pray that Indian Christians would reach out to the Ansari.

Friday, June 8, 2012. Please pray

...for violence to end in Iraq. In 1991, there were approximately 1 million Christians in Iraq. Estimates now put the number of Christians there at 350,000 to 400,000.
...for Somali's Muslims to be free from the yoke of the al Shabaab Islamic militia. Al Shabaab continues to wreak havoc across Somalia..
...for Sufi Muslims across the Islamic world seeking to know more about God.

Friday, June 15, 2012. Please pray

...for the Muslims of Kuwait to have witness of Jesus Christ. Government legislation has been drawn up banning construction of churches and non-Islamic places of worship.
...for Muslims in the Maldives as unrest continues and the country moves toward *sharia* law.
...for Christian missionaries across the Muslim world. Pray for their protection and encouragement.

Friday, June 22, 2012. Please pray

...that God would continue to strengthen the underground Church in Iran.
...for Muslims living in the West. Pray that through their conversions and testimonies, the gospel of Jesus Christ will be spread into the Islamic world.
...for God to fill the hearts of Malaysian Muslims with a strong desire for progress and liberty, so that the present trend towards Islamization might be reversed.

Friday, June 29, 2012. Please pray

...for God to protect and sustain the persecuted Church in Bangladesh.
...for expatriate Christian workers in the UAE to gain opportunities to witness about Jesus. A large percentage of the UAE's population is made up of foreign workers.
...for MBBs in Chechnya. Muslim Chechens cannot change their religion publicly.

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