

**ESSAYS  
ON ISLAM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649091744

Essays on Islam by E. Sell

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**E. SELL**

**ESSAYS  
ON ISLAM**



# ESSAYS ON ISLAM.

BY THE

REV. E. SELL, B.D., M.R.A.S.,

FELLOW OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS.

AUTHOR OF "THE FAITH OF ISLAM," "THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE QURAN."

MADRAS: S. P. C. K. DEPÔT.

LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO.

1901.

[*All rights reserved.*]

## CONTENTS.

---

	<i>Pages</i>
I.	
THE MYSTICS OF ISLĀM... ..	1—45
II.	
THE BĀB AND THE BĀBĪS ... ..	46—98
III.	
THE RELIGIOUS ORDERS OF ISLĀM ... ..	99—146
IV.	
THE KHALIF ĤĀKIM AND THE DRUSES ... ..	147—184
V.	
THE STATUS OF THE ZIMMIS ... ..	185—197
VI.	
ISLĀM IN CHINA ... ..	198—217
VII.	
THE RECENSIONS OF THE QURĀN ... ..	218—241
VIII.	
THE ĤANĪFS ... ..	242—250
APPENDIX ... ..	251—267



## THE MYSTICS OF ISLÁM.

---

### I.

THE religious Orders of Islám are not organized with the same regularity, nor are they under a discipline so strict, as the monastic Orders of Christianity have been; but they surpass them in number and in influence. They are all based on the same general ideas, though each has its own mysteries, and its special and peculiar methods for arriving at the ecstatic state. The basis of all is Şúfiism.

Writers with mystical tendencies appeared in the first century after the Hijra. Among the earliest mystics were Rabi'a, a woman who lived in Palestine and was buried in Jerusalem, and Abú Háshim, who died 150 A.H., soon after which a monastery was erected at Ramla in Palestine. Rabi'a taught the excellence of divine love, but did not enter into all the subtleties of later Şúfi teaching. The real founder of Şúfiism is said to have been Abú Said bin Abú'l Khair, who lived at the end of the second century A.H. His disciples wore a woollen garment, and from the word *şúf*, which means wool, they obtained the name of Şúfis. The phrase, *labasa-ş-şúfa*<sup>1</sup>—he donned wool—is used of a person who enters upon a monastic or contemplative life. In the next century two branches were founded, one under Bustáni, who died 261 A.H., and one under Junaid, who died 297 A.H. The



similarity of the views propounded by the Şúfis to those of the Neo-Platonic philosophy proved attractive to the Shi'ahs, amongst whom there was a strong Gnostic element : so Şúfism made great progress in Persia, which to this day is its home.

It was a reaction from the burden of a dry monotheism, of a rigid law and a stiffened ritual. The orthodoxy of the Faithful did not meet the needs of the more imaginative minds of some of the Eastern races, and Şúfism, supplying this want, found a home amongst them. Again, the great political movements and the tribal factions in the early history of Islám gathered round divergent religious dogmas, a fact plainly seen in the very distinct theology of the Shi'ahs, the followers and the partisans of the Khalif 'Ali. Şúfism lent itself readily to the cause of the 'Aliyites, to whom the notion of the infusion of divine attributes into 'Ali and into the Imáms, his successors, was a most welcome idea. The allegorical explanation of religious duties and principles, ceremonial and moral, sometimes went so far as to substitute for these duties absolute devotion to the Imám, and to the sacred cause of the Shi'ahs. This was carried to its greatest extent under the mad Khalif Hákím and in the sect of the Ismá'ilians, the Bátinis, and others. The preachers of this new doctrine travelled far and wide and mixed with men of all sorts and conditions. In this way ideas gleaned from Zoroastrians, Hindus, and Gnostics may have entered into Şúfism and largely affected it. The third century found the Zindiq and the Mutazala controversies at their height. It was an earnest attempt to bring reason to bear on religious matters and resulted in a system of scholasticism. But from all this the Persian mind revolted. Reason and logic were no substitute for revelling in the sense of the beautiful, or for meditating on the love of God and the union of the soul with the divine.

The hard and fast system of Islám, with its clear-cut dogmas and its idea of finality in doctrine and law, would seem the most unlikely place in which to find a system such as Şúfism ; but the Qurán and the Traditions contain its germs. "At one time they represent Alláh as having created the world once for all and as now removed to His seat in the 'arsh, or highest heaven, having

left His creatures to work out their own salvation or condemnation by their own free will, according to the lights given them by the prophets; at another time they represent Him as the 'Subtle Being', immanent and ever working in His creatures, the sum of all existence, the fulness of life, whereby all things move and exist, the omnipresent, not only predestinating, but originating all actions, dwelling in and communing with each individual soul."<sup>1</sup> The Śūfis gathered up ideas like these and taught that this closer communion with God, this looking behind the veil, this cultivation of the 'inner eye',<sup>2</sup> would enable them to see and understand much which was hidden from those who held that there was no real existence except that which was plain and evident to reason and sight.

The Arabian philosophers made known to their readers the Neo-Platonic philosophy, and the Śūfis adapted Qurānic terms to the new ideas they thus gained. "The world of phenomena and man, everything else in fact but Allāh, they identified with Not-being, absolute nonentity, which like a mirror reflects Being, and by thus borrowing particles of Being, rises to the rank of Contingent Being, a kind of Being which partakes both of existence and non-existence. This Not-being is a sort of Manichæan Ahriman, which solves all practical difficulties attaching to their speculative system. According to their theory the Infinite includes all Being, evil as well as good; but as this is not consistent with the goodness of the Allāh of the Qurān, evil is said to proceed from Not-being."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to Whinfield's *Gulshan-i-Rāz*, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup> دل یافت دیدۀ که مقیم هوای نیت The heart hath gotten an eye, always desiring Thee.—*Divān-i-Shams-i-Tabrīz*.

<sup>3</sup> Introduction to *Gulshan-i-Rāz*, p. vii. Some of the early Christian Mystics held that "Evil has no substance." "There is nothing," says Gregory of Nyssa, "which falls outside of the Divine Nature, except moral evil alone. And this, we may say paradoxically, has its being in not-being. For the genesis of moral evil is simply the privation of being. That which, properly speaking, exists, is the nature of the good." *Christian Mysticism*, by W. R. Inge, p. 25. So also in the *Gulshan-i-Rāz*, we read "Being is purely good in whatever it be; if it contains evil it proceeds from other."—*line 178. وجود آنجا که باشد محض خیرست اگر هری ست دروی آن ز خیرست.*

As in man there is some spark of real Being, he would seem to be above all law, but this difficulty is got over by saying that he is now in the state of Contingent Being and so needs the discipline and restriction of law. The natural outcome, however, of all this was, in some cases, a spirit of indifference to the leading principles of Islām, which when not openly attacked were indirectly assailed, for all revelations were believed to be but rays of one eternal light. This was also often accompanied by a low moral life. Still, the great majority of Şūfis, those who had not attained to the higher grades of the mystic life, were attached to religion, though with a devout ritual practice they united their allegorical notions. They thus adapted to their own peculiar views the Qurānic teaching of the creation of man, his fall, and banishment from Paradise. In their opinion the union of the soul and the body and their exile to this lower world were the necessary consequences of an eternal decree, the reason of which was known only to God. According to the Şūfis, souls existed before bodies, in which they are now imprisoned and in which condition, being separated from the joy they had in a pre-existent state, they look forward to the death of the body for their full manifestation, and the full fruition of all their aspirations. The Şūfis are fertile in reasons for eluding the authority of the text of the Qurān, as regards the resurrection of the body, a dogma which conflicts with their view of the return of the soul to God. When a Şūfi says that God and he are one, he does not mean that the divine enters into the human by a kind of infusion (ḥalūl),<sup>1</sup> nor does he say that two substances combine to make one (itihād), but that God and the soul are one in the sense that all that exists is God and nothing exists apart from Him.

“ ‘I’, ‘We’, ‘Thou’, ‘He’ are all one thing,  
For in Unity is no duality.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> حلول و اتحاد اینجا محالست *Gulshan-i-Rāz*, line. 451.

<sup>2</sup> من و ما و تو و او است يك چيز \* كه در وحدت نباهد هيچ تمثيل<sup>2</sup>

*Gulshan-i-Rāz*, line 449.