Introduction to Islamic Sciences, Part I

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Abstract: Acquiring and possessing knowledge is highly recommended in Islam as God encourages people to seek knowledge as seen in the Qur'an and hadith. Educators and scholars hold a revered position because of their efforts of pursuing knowledge and using it to influence their actions. This article introduces the most important Islamic sciences that have long been studied in Islamic seminaries. A brief definition as well as the nature and history of each of the widely studied disciplines by Islamic scholars will be offered, namely theology (*kalām*), philosophy, mysticism (*irfān*), and jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

Islamic sciences apply to three different types of disciplines:

Knowledge originating from religion: This includes statements that are either mentioned in religious sources or excerpts from sources that religion considers valid. In Islam, such disciplines mostly rely on the Qur'an and Sunnah, or are intellectually understood. Therefore, all of them are deemed Islamic. Some of such disciplines are theology

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(*kalām*)[2], jurisprudence (*fiqh*),[3] Ethics (*akhlāq*)[4] and Mysticism (*irfān*).[5]

Introductory and prerequisite disciplines: teachings that are a preliminary to the above-mentioned disciplines; they are the essential means to understand religious texts and benefitting from sources such as the Qur'an, Sunnah, and reason. For this reason, they are termed 'Islamic.' Examples of such disciplines are logic, Arabic literature, Qur'anic sciences, hadith sciences, and principles of jurisprudence.

Sciences that do not originate from religion: sciences that are not exclusive to Islam or any other religion, although they have developed in Islamic atmospheres and therefore have a particular spirit. For example, philosophy consists of rules and principles far beyond a specific school of thought. However, according to some scholars,[6] development of its rules and principles by Islamic scholars in an Islamic atmosphere makes it possible to speak of 'Islamic philosophy' and label it as a religious discipline.

According to the above-mentioned categorization, some of the most important and widely studied disciplines in the Islamic seminaries will be introduced.

1. Theology (kalām)

Islam has always demanded its followers to have unwavering faith in its revealed teachings while simultaneously insisting on the rational aspect of its instructions. The Qur'an inspires believers to ponder about the divine creation and signs of the Holy Essence of God to

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[2] Islamic theology

[3] Islamic jurisprudence

[4] Islamic ethics, spirituality and moral teachings

[5] Islamic mysticism

[6] 'Abd al-Razzāq, Muṣṭafā, *Zamineh-ye Tarikhi-ye Falssafeh-ye Eslam*i (translated title), trans. by Fathali Akbari, p. 18.

strengthen their faith. In some cases, the Qur'an itself justifies the existence of God. These religious inspirations and giving the opportunity to contemplate the divine signs is a valuable opportunity for Muslim thinkers to discuss religious doctrines and to verity its truth through reasoning. Kalām follows the track of reasoning and benefits from the traditions received from the Imams (a).

The nature of Kalām

Kalām is one of the traditional sciences in Islam that scholars have referred to throughout history with terms such as 'principles of religion',[7] 'greater fiqh,'[8] 'science of religious opinion and reasoning,'[9] 'science of monotheism and attributes,',\ and the 'science of Kalām' (Islamic Theology).[10] The most common term is *kalām* itself which is named thus so in Shi'a narrations.[11]

Religious sciences today are divided into three major categories: beliefs (*kalām*), rulings (*fiqh*), and ethics (*akhlāq*). Beliefs refer to the fundamental and basic issues of a religion that corresponds with Islamic ideology. The issues discussed in beliefs include the existence of God, His attributes and actions, Prophethood, Imamate, the Hereafter and general issues about humankind's destination. Additionally, new questions have been raised in this field that led to a new branch, 'The Modern kalām' or 'Modern Problems of Kalām'.

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[7] Ibn Meytham Baḥrānī who was a scholar of Kalām in the 8th century AH reports from other Kalām scholars call this discipline as 'principles of religion'. *Qawā'id al-Marām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, p. 20.

[8] Taftāzānī, a Sunni scholar of Kalām, has used this term in *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, p. 164.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ḥalabī, *Ali Asghar, Ilm Kalām dar Iran wa Jahān-e Islam*, p. 28.

[11] The hadith narrated by Ibn Abi al-'Awjā' is among such hadiths. He came to Imam Ṣādiq (a) and asked: "Do you allow me to enter the science of Kalām?" Imam (a) allowed him. Ṣadūq, *Al-Tawḥīd*, Ch. 36, hadith no. 4.

Since discussing practical rulings can be meaningless before one's religious beliefs are confirmed, this discipline is also called 'The Greater Fiqh' or 'The Principles of Religion'.

According to the problems, goals, and approaches they have followed, various definitions of this discipline have been offered. By exploring all definitions of kalām, two factors have been common in most of them: 1) proving religious beliefs and 2) defending them against objections raised. Thus, Kalām is a discipline that involves understanding, regulating, explaining, and justifying or proving beliefs through various approaches based on either reason or tradition and is responsible for defending it against any doubt."

The ultimate goal of kalām is to prove the principles of religion and shield it against any doubt. This objective can be achieved in various ways that are not limited to providing demonstrations (*burhān*) and deductive reasoning. Thus, the aim of this discipline is sometimes achieved through providing demonstrations. In some cases, if the addressee is a layman and is not capable of understanding complicated philosophical arguments, to convince him, a theologian may use some of the ideas of the addressee himself or or those which are commonly accepted to prove or disprove his position the addressee's position. The Qur'an also emphasizes on the three approaches of justification i.e. wisdom (illustration or *burhān*), good preaching (*khitābah* of speech) and debate (*jadal* or dialectic) when inviting others towards God and proving the revealed teachings of religion.[12]

History

Theological issues are as old as humanity. For example, all prophets, including Prophet Adam (a), have taught the doctrine of monotheism, which is the most important issue in kalām. Similarly, prophethood

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[12] "*Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best.*" *Qur'an*, (16: 125)

too existed since the beginning of time. The first instruction of the Prophet was 'Oneness of God'. The Qur'an entails a plethora of theological issues about general principles and detailed descriptions of the Oneness of God, Prophethood, and the afterlife. There also have been numerous debates between the Prophet and Jewish and Christian scholars.[13] Such evidences prove that theological discussions and debates existed from the very beginning of Islam. Therefore, the teachings presented by the Prophet (s) triggered the discussion of theological issues. The verses of the Qur'an not only supported raising such issues, but they were essential in forming theological trends. However, the collection of such discussions and debates is not the *discipline* of kalām, although some believe that it is kalām, and those who sought these discussions were called *Mutakallim*.[14] There truly is no proof for this claim. Thus, the grounds for emerging theological discussions or the discipline of kalām are the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet rather than the influx of Greek philosophy, even though Greek philosophy was influential in generating such issues.[15]

Imamate was among the first theological discussions considered as the most important about which Muhammad ibn 'Abdulkarīm Shahristānī (479 – 548 AH) says, "Muslims have not fought over any other issues as much as over this."[16] This issue arose soon after the Prophet (s) passed away, and it led to the emergence Sunnism and Shi'ism, thetwo major Islamic schools of thought. Sunnis believe in the election of a

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[13] Cf. Ṭabarsī, Ahmad ibn Ali, *Al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 1, pp. 14 – 89.

[14] 'Abd al-Ḥalīm, Muhammad, *Kalāmi Qadīm*, trans. by Mohsen Jahāngīrī, cited in *Tārīkh-e Falsafeh-ye Islami*, supervised by Sayyid Husayn Nasr and Oliver Leaman, p. 132.

[15] Fakhrī, Mājid, *Sayr falsafeh fil Islam*, trans. by a group of translators under supervision of Nasrullah Pūr Javādī, Tehran, Markaz Nashr Daneshgahi, 1994, p. 59. However, elsewhere in his book, the author clearly says that emergence of the discipline of Kalām in the second century [A.H] was due to a new questioning spirit in people raised by entering the Greek philosophy in Islamic world. Ibid. p. 221.

[16] Shahristānī, Muhammad ibn 'Abdulkarīm, *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, vol. 1, p. 24.

caliph as that which relies on the counsel of people, just as Abu Bakr was appointed as the caliph. On the other hand, the Shī‘a believe that appointment of the successor of the Prophet (s) must be through Allah, and the sole person qualified for this task was Ali ibn Abi Ṭālib. The concept of Imamate led to debates among scholars that developed over the course of history and led each group to write voluminous treatises and books.

Various methods have been used by kalām scholars of different theological schools of thought. Shī‘a scholars such as Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, Hishām ibn Sālim, and Mu’min al-Ṭāq emphasized on reason as well as tradition; Mu‘tazilite Kalām scholars such as Wāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā’, Abu al-Hudhayl ‘Allāf, Abu ‘Ali and Abu Hishām Jubā’ī – who followed the Sunni school of thought – insisted on using reason. The *People of Hadith* – another Sunni sect – used strict interpretation and ruling to the mere appearance of verses and traditions and would not accept any question about its content and message. This strong opposition encouraged Asharite and Mātrīdite Kalām scholars such as Abu al-Hasan Ash‘arī and Abu Manṣūr Mātrīdī from other Sunni sects to mediate and reconcile the Mu‘tazilites and the *People of Hadith*.

The history of kalām in the following centuries shows that some philosophical issues entered kalām first seen in the works of Sheikh Mufīd (d. 413 A.H.) such as in his *Awā’il al-Maqālāt* and the works of Sayyid Murtaḍā (d. 436 A.H.) such as *Al-Dhakhīrah fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām* among Shi‘ite sources. Later, philosophical issues were seen in the works of Fakhr Rāḍī (d. 606 A.H.) such as *Al-Muḥaṣṣal* and in *Al-Barāhīn fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām* among Sunni sources. It was seen afterwards in the works of Khajeh Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭusī (d. 672 A.H.) such as *Tajrīd al-I‘tiqād* and the works of Ibn Maytham Baḥrānī (d. 699 A.H.) such as *Qawā‘id al-Marām*. This mixture lasted for centuries to the present time when such issues were seen in kalām texts.

Although kalām is among the most essential Islamic science, this discipline has had serious opposition among both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Those who fervently objected to kalām were the *People of Hadith* as they resisted against any interpretation of verses and traditions based on reason.

Accordingly, Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal said, "There are three things that are not found in Islam: *Maghāzī, Malāḥim,* and Kalām."[17] He also declared, "One who knows kalām can never achieve salvation. Kalām scholars are heretical."[18] Abu Hanifa's student, Abu Yūsuf, said, "Anyone who seeks [to understand] religion through kalām is a deviator."[19]

Shāfi'ī said accordingly, "If God afflicts His servant with all great sins except polytheism, it would be far better than He afflicts His servant to learn anything from kalām."[20] He also declared as a ruling, "If a man leaves all his books to another in his will, and a book on kalam is to be found among them, that book could not be left included with other books."[21]

The peak of the Shāfi'īs' opposition with Kalām and its scholars is understood in the following statement: "They [Kalām scholars] must be lashed and taken around among tribes and announce that 'This is the punishment of those who abandon the Qur'an and tradition to learn Kalām.'"[22]

Branches of Kalām

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[17] Cf. *Tafsīr al-Minār*, quoted from Ali Asghar Ḥalabī in *Ilm Kalām dar Iran wa Jahān-e Islam*, pp. 32 and 33.
[18] Ibn Jawzī, Abu al-Faraj, *Tilbīs Iblīs*, p. 87.
[19] Ḥalabī, Ali Asghar, Ibid., p. 33.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Fakhr Rāzī, *Tafsīr Kabīr*, vol. 2, p. 96 quoted by Ali Asghar Ḥalabī, ibid., p. 33.
[22] Ibn Jawzī, Ibid.

Emergence of various branches of Kalām in religion was triggered historical and social factors; however, one of the most important features is the difference of opinions towards the nature of religion, religious texts, their interpretation, and the details of religious issues.[23] In different periods and after each occasion, an ideological and intellectual issue arose which led to formation of different schools. Each group distributed their own ideas and beliefs to attract more followers, and Islamic society ultimately faced the formation of new sects.

Thus, the debate regarding the concept of imamate divided the Islamic society into Shī'as and Sunnis. The important issues that led to the emergence of the Khawārij and Murjī'ah were faith, deeds, and the rulings regarding major sins. The method of interpreting verses and narrations that led to thinking of God as a corporeal being led to the emergence of sects such as Ḥashwīyyah and Kirāmīyyah.

On the whole, the most distinguished sects and schools of kalām in the Islamic world include:

1. *The Shī'a:* Those who believe in the uninterrupted succession of Imam Ali (a) after the Prophet (s). They eventually divided into different groups such as the Zaydīs[24], Ismā'īlīs,[25] and Wāqifīds.[26] The most distinguished Shī'a kalām scholars living contemporary with the Imams (a) were great personalities such as Qays ibn al-Māṣir, Mu'min Ṭāq (d. c. 160 A.H.), Hishām ibn Ḥakam (d. c. 199 A.H.), Hishām ibn Sālim, and Faḍl ibn Shādhān (d. 260 A.H.).

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[23] Ṣābirī, Husayn, *Tārīkh Feraq-e Islami (1)*, p. 31.
[24] The supporters of the imamate of Zayd ibn Ali.
[25] The supporters of the imamate of Ismā'īl ibn Ja'far.
[26] Believers in accomplishment of imamate in Imam al-Kāẓim.

Since the beginning of the Age of Occultation of the Twelfth Imam (a), there have been eminent kalām scholars such as Sheikh Ṣadūq (d. 381 A.H.), Sheikh Mufīd (d. 413 A.H.) Sayyid Murtaḍā ʿAlam al-Hudā (d. 436 A.H.), Khajah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672 A.H.), ʿAllāmah Ḥillī (d. 726 A.H.), and Fāḍil Miqdād (d. 826 A.H.).

2. *The Muʿtazilites*: The Muʿtazilites, whose founder was Wasil ibn ʿAta (d. 131 A.H.) believe in five principles: the Oneness of God, justice, position between positions, reward and punishment, enjoining the good and forbidding the evil.[27] The peak of the Muʿtazilites' power was during the era of Maʾmūn ʿAbbāsī until the ruling of Wāthiq ʿAbbāsī (198 – 232 A.H.). Afterwards, this sect began its decline.[28]

The most renowned kalām scholars of this group were Abu Hudhayl ʿAllāf (d. 227 A.H.), Ibrāhīm ibn Sayyār Naẓẓām (d. 231 A.H.), Abu ʿUthmān Jāḥiẓ (d. 255 A.H.), Abu al-Ḥasan Khayyāṭ (d. c. 300 A.H.), Abu ʿAli Jubāʾī (d. 303 A.H.), Abu Hāshim Jubāʾī (d. 321 A.H.) and Judge ʿAbd al-Jabbār Muʿtazilī (d. 415 A.H.).

3. *The Asharites*: The founder of this sect was Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Ismāʿīl Ashʿarī who began as a Muʿtazilite and later searched to find a way between the Muʿtazilites' rationality and textualism of the *People of Hadith*. Thus, he broke away from them and founded this new school of thought. He presented new theories, among which is the famous 'theory of acquisition (*kasb*)' as opposed to determinism (*jabr*) and "delegation of affairs to humanity" (*tafwiḍ*).

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[27] Cf. Ashʿari, Abu al-Hasan, *Firaq wa Madhahib Kalami*, pp. 276 – 277.
[28] Cf. Rabbānī Gulpāyigānī, Ali, *Firaq wa Madhāhib-e Kalāmī*, pp. 276 & 277.

Nowadays, the most well-known Sunni kalām school of thought is Ashari. Its prominent kalām scholars include Judge Abu Bakr Bāqilānī (d. 403 A.H.), Abu al-Maʿālī ʿAbd al-Malik Juwaynī (d. 478 A.H.) known as Imam al-Ḥaramayn, Abu Ḥāmid Muhammad Ghazzālī (d. 505 A.H.), Muhammad ibn ʿUmar Fakhr Rāzī (d. 606), Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Abi Ali Sayf al-Dīn Āmadī (d. 631 A.H.), Judge ʿAḍud al-Dīn Ījī (d. 756 A.H.), and Saʿd al-Dīn Masʿūd ibn ʿUmar Taftāzānī (722 – 792 A.H.).

4. *Māturīdiyyah*: This sect was founded by Abu Manṣūr Mātirīdī (d. 333 A.H.). He rose in central Asia (Samarqand) – similar to Abu al-Hasan Ashʿarī – with the intention of reforming religious beliefs. His viewpoints were close to the Asharites' although they differed in some issues such as intellectual goodness and badness, where the Shīʿa and Muʿtazilites perspectives are similar in this regard. Prominent Mātirīdī Kalām scholars include Abu Muʿīn Nasafi (d. 508 A.H.), Najm al-Dīn ʿImran Nasafi (d. 537 A.H.), and Abu al-Barakāt Nisfī (d. 701 A.H.).[29]

2. Islamic Philosophy

Philosophy is among the common intellectual sciences among Muslim scholars. Although the time of emergence of philosophical thoughts and issues existed long before Islam and assumed to have emerged in Old Greece, the role of Islamic philosophers in its development is not hidden to anyone so far as Muslim philosophers such as Fārābi and Ibn Sinā are concerned as they are infamous names in the field of philosophy.

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[29] Ṣābirī, Husayn, *Tārīkh Feraq-e Islami (1)*, pp. 303 - 305.

The Nature of Philosophy

The term 'philosophy' termed by Socrates, is a Greek word derived from '*philosophia*' meaning "the lover of knowledge." Philosophy would be the title for three types of sciences: a) all real sciences b) all real and conventional sciences and c) Non-empirical sciences and knowledge.[30]

In a general sense, philosophy includes all rational sciences as opposed to scripture-based sciences. This includes lexicology, hermeneutics, rhetoric, prosody, exegesis, hadith studies, Islamic law, and principles of Islamic law. In this sense, philosophy has been applied to all intellectual sciences including intellectual theology, mathematics, politics, and ethics. But today, the term 'philosophy' is commonly applied to a specific branch of intellectual sciences which studies the 'descriptions of being qua being.' In this application, philosophy can be considered a discipline that independently discusses the concept of being, and general descriptions of it using rational and analogical methods as well as self-evident propositions; it ultimately provides a comprehensive and rational interpretation of the entire world.

History of Islamic Philosophy

When the Islamic territory expanded and included different tribes and nations, many scientific centers were established in these lands. This created the grounds for the exchange of knowledge by scholars of diverse regions. And because the official language of these countries was Arabic, many books from Indian, Hebrew, Latin, Persian and other languages were translated to Arabic to prepare the grounds for Muslim thinkers to become acquainted with philosophical opinions of notable scholars of other regions, especially ancient Greece.[31]

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[30] Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, Muhammad Taqī, *Āmūzesh-e Falsafeh*, p. 65.
[31] Ibid. p. 30.

In doing so, brilliant people such as Fārābī and Avicenna made great endeavors as people who were prolific in all philosophical thoughts of their period and analyzed them selectively using their God-given talent under the light of revelation and sayings the Ahlul Bayt. They founded a philosophical system which although influenced by the views of Plato, Neoplatonists and Aristotle[32], it included novel beliefs which were considered a new system.

Another deep evolution in Islamic philosophy was owing to the endeavors of Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardi (549–587 A.H.). Using the ideas of ancient Iranian philosophers and comparing them with the ideas of Plato, Plotinus, and Stoics, Suhrawardi founded a new school called "The School of Illuminationism" which is mostly influenced by Platonic ideas. However, some Islamic scholars[33] believe that Suhrawardi adopted his illuminationist approach under the influence of Islamic Sufis and mystics. Merging mystical findings with reasoning was his innovation. The main difference between the two illuminationist and peripatetic philosophical schools is that illuminationism does not consider reason and intellectual justifications enough for studying philosophical issues, especially theosophy. It considers the efforts made for the spiritual journey that leads to purification necessary to discover realities, though the peripatetic philosophical school relied on mere reasoning.

In later periods, notable philosophers such as Khājih Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭusī and Muḥaqqiq Dawānī critiqued previous scholars' views and generated new theories that enriched Islamic philosophy; this eventually carried Islamic philosophy to a new age of development.

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[32] Aristotle and his followers were called "peripatetics" with reference to Aristotle's practice of walking to and fro while teaching
[33] Muṭahharī, Murtaḍā, *Āshnā'ī ba 'Ulūm-e Eslāmī*, vol. 1, p. 145. [trans. as "*Understanding Islamic Sciences*", ICAS, 2000: London]

Khājih Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭusī (597 – 672 A.H.) a peripatetic philosopher, revived the philosophy of Ibn Sina, titled "The Chief of Paripatetics," in the 7th century A.H. by compiling notes on Avicenna's *Ishārāt wa Tanbīhāt* and organizing it to eventually preserve Ibn Sina's philosophy.[34] In that book, he answered all major objections issued by Imam Fakhr Rāzī (d. 606 A.H.) who himself had an explanatory book on Avicenna's *Ishārāt wa Tanbīhāt*. The connections between these two explanatory notes on *Ishārāt wa Tanbīhāt* led to discussions between Muslim philosophers of different generations.[35]

Peripatetic philosophy was later led by Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (830 – 908 A.H.) who was a famous philosopher of the 9th century A.H. He had a liking for peripatetic philosophy and so he wrote his comments on one of the explanatory books on Khājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭusī's Al-Tajrīd. His comments, reviewed by Ṣadr al-Dīn Muhammad Dashtakī (d. 903 A.H.), were later called *Ḥāshīyeh-ye Qadīm* or *The Old Comments*. In his second series of comments, Dawānī answered to Dashtakī's objections in his review. Again later, Dashtakī reviewed and critiqued Dawānī's answers and again Dawānī responded to Dashtakī's objections in his third series of comments, later called *Ḥāshīyeh-ye Ajadd* or *The Newer Comments*. All three series of Dawānī's comments and the two reviews by Ṣadr al-Dīn Muhammad Dashtakī are known as a collection called *Ṭabaqāt al-Jalālīyyah wa al-Ṣadrīyyah*.[36]

Ghīyāth al-Dīn Manṣūr Dashtakī Shīrāzī (d. 948 A.H.), son of Ṣadr al-Dīn Muhammad Dashtakī, can be considered as the connecting link with the new era of Islamic philosophy which was called *The School of Isfahan*. He was among the great Shiʿa scholars of the Safavid period

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[34] Sayyid Husayn Naṣr and Oliver Leaman, *History of Islamic Philosophy* trans. by a group of philosophers, vol. 3, p. 39.
[35] Ibid., p. 43.
[36] Ibid., pp. 110 – 111.

in rational sciences as well as fiqh and its principles.[37] He trained students who filled the gap between his period and the time of Mīrdāmād, the founder of the School of Isfahan.

Mīr Burhān al-Dīn Muhammad Bāqir Dāmād is seen as the representatives of the first generation of philosophers during the Safavid period in Iran. He was son of Mīr Shams al-Dīn Dāmād, the son-in-law of Muḥaqqiq Karakī (or the second Muḥaqqiq [meaning "researcher"]) who came to Iran at the beginning of the Safavid period. Mīr Dāmād[38] was born in Astar-Abad. He later moved to Mashhad with his family and afterwards moved to Isfahan. There, he became proficient in both fields of rational and traditional sciences. His works include literature in philosophy, kalām, Prophetic traditions, narrations of the Imams, Shi'ā jurisprudence, Qur'anic exegesis, ethics, mysticism, and logic. Nonetheless, he knew himself as a philosopher by calling himself "The Third Teacher" after Aristotle and Fārābī.[39] His philosophy works include *Al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm wa al-'Ufuq al-Mubīn*, his most important work being *Qabasāt Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn fī Ḥudūth al-'Ālam* or simply, *Qabasāt,* a book about the creation of the world and the possibility of its origination in God. Selected philosophers in Isfahan contemporary with Mīr Dāmād were Sheikh Bahā'ī, Mīr Fendereskī, and Judge Sa'īd Qummi (d. 1103 A.H.) who were considered among the most distinguished personalities of the Isfahan *School of Philosophy*.

Isfahan's main goal was to unite various and sometimes contradictory rational approaches, each of which would have been accepted by a group of Muslims over the course of history and to incorporate all of

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[37] He had a discussion with Muḥaqqiq Karakī on the issue of the accurate calculation of the direction of Qiblah which resulted in correction of direction of Qiblahs in all mosques in Iran. During that discussion, they entered into a dispute and Shah Ṭahmāsb Safavī backed Muḥaqqiq Karakī and took the title and position of Dashtakī as the "Ṣadr al-Dīn" and gave it to Karakī.
[38] Mīr Burhān al-Dīn Muhammad Bāqir Dāmād
[39] Ibid., pp. 130 – 132.

them under the title of Shī'a teachings.[40] Its founder, Mulla Sadra Shirazi, a distinguished student of Mīr Dāmād, mixed the harmonious elements of peripatetic and intuitive philosophy and mystic disclosures and added his own views to present 'transcendental philosophy,' a term well-rooted in Islamic philosophy.

Among the most important measures of Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn[41] in transcendental philosophy was organizing philosophical topics in the order mystics have taught regarding the spiritual journey of the soul. According to Ṣadrā's system, philosophical topics and issues are categorized in four groups of issues: a) Principles and base of issues about monotheism, b) Monotheism, theology, and divine attributes, c) Divine actions and universals in being, and 4) The Hereafter and soul. *The Four Journeys* by Asfār Arba'ah is written according to the mentioned system.[42]

Philosophical issues

As was mentioned before, philosophy is "being qua being" and it is clear that issues discussed in philosophy are about the mentioned subject and its surroundings. Thus, most important issues in philosophy are categorized into four groups[43] of issues that deal with:

a) Existence itself versus non-existence. More specifically, the fundamentality of existence and quiddity.

b) Different types of existence such as necessary being versus contingent being, created being versus eternal being, external being versus mental being.

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[40] Ibid., p. 165.
[41] Byname of Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī
[42] Muṭahharī, Murtaḍā, *Āshnā'ī ba 'Ulūm-e Eslāmī*, vol. 1, p. 157. [trans. as "*Understanding Islamic Sciences*", ICAS, 2000: London]
[43] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 163.

c) General laws of existence such as causality, ontological homogeneity of cause and effect, priority and posteriority, and togetherness in the levels of existence.

d) The affirmation of the levels or realms of existence. Islamic philosophers categorize realms of existence into four groups: The world of nature (*nāsūt)*, the world of analogies (*malakūt)*, the world of intellect (*jabarūt)* and the realm of Divinity (*lāhūt)*.

3. Islamic Mysticism

One of the disciplines that originated and developed in Islamic culture is mysticism (*irfān*). Although some people believe that mysticism and delicate mystical thoughts have been imported from outside of Islam such as the ideas that mysticism is rooted in Christian thought[44], neo-Plutonian[45] belief, or inspired by Upanishadic (Hindu) teachings.[46] However, mysticism in Islam, whether in practical or theoretical aspects, originated from Islamic genuine sources and has later adapted principles accordingly. During the course of its development, it has been influenced by kalām, philosophy, and particularly illuminist philosophy.[47] Islamic culture includes vast theoretical and practical issues as well as spiritual models that motivated Muslims towards mystical issues.[48]

Description of Islamic Mysticism

Lexically, mysticism means 'knowing' and terminologically it is "knowing the monotheistic and spiritual truth of existence in which its

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[44] Badawī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Tārīkh al-Tasawwuf al-Islamī*, p. 32.
[45] Ibid., p. 40.
[46] Ibid., p. 35.
[47] Muṭahharī, Murtaḍā, *Āshnā'ī ba 'Ulūm-e Eslāmī*, vol. 2, p. 84. [trans. as "Understanding Islamic Sciences", ICAS, 2000: London]
[48] Amīnī Nejād, Ali, *Āshnā'ī ba Majmū'eh-ye 'Irfān-e Eslāmī*, p. 62.

origin includes a simple, general, obscure, and subconscious quality and in an internal-knowing process, that origin turns to an intuitive, distinctive, clear, and definite knowledge."[49] This unique knowledge cannot be grasped through sensation, experience, reason, or tradition, and is attained through internal intuition and spiritual perception.[50]

As a cultural and scientific system, mysticism has theoretical and practical aspects:

a) Theoretical mysticism is the knowledge of that which the mystic achieves through his intuition at the end of his spiritual journey. This includes knowing God and the manifestations of His Names and Attributes, as well as His relation with plurality. A mystic's monotheism is the ultimate point of the perfection where the he or she comprehends that everything other than God is a mere image; there is actually nothing but God. The rest are manifestations and aspects of the Truth. Scholars of theoretical mysticism claim that they grasp these truths through intuition and they are taught in the form of analytical knowledge and words. They would make efforts to benefit from similes, metaphors, and allegories to create even an ambiguous and incomplete image from those truths in the minds and hearts of their listeners.[51]

Accordingly, subjects of theoretical mysticism are categorized into three groups:

1. Mystical theology (or specific unity of existence)

2. Mystical cosmology (or the order of creation)

3. Mystical anthropology (or the notion of perfect man)

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[49] Muvaḥḥidīyān ʿAṭṭār, Ali, *Mafhūm-e Irfān*, p. 433.
[50] Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, Muhammad Taqī, *Dar Justujūy-e Irfān-e Eslāmī*, p.33.
[51] Ibid., p. 38.

In fact, mystical issues revolve around the origination and circulation of plurality from the essential unity of God, the relation between this plurality with that essential unity, and the explanation of manifestations of Divine Names and Attributes.[52]

  b) Practical mysticism is the relation of a person with himself, the world, and with God. This is about the traveler's journey, that is, his starting point, the steps he must take, the states of heart experienced within each step, and the position attained after each step for a traveler on the spiritual path to rach the highest level of perfection i.e. Unity.[53] In practical mysticism, mystics take heed to the heart and its actions. The meaning of actions is broader than the mere actions of limbs; it includes the actions of the heart as well and practical steps are taken to improve it.[54] Overall, practical mysticism paves the way of spiritual journey for the mystic to ultimately reach his or her final goal.

The mystical journey, like any common developmental stage, is a spiritual movement that begins from the lower and superficial levels of the soul and ends with profound levels. These phases correspond with the spiritual stations that the traveler experiences:

  a) The initial stages of the spiritual journey that correspond to the traveler's soul.

  b) The middle of the way towards God that correspond to the traveler's soul; the traveler enters after he passes the stations of the self.

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[52] Yathribī, Sayyid Yaḥyā, *Irfān-e Naẓarī*, p. 218.

[54] Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, ibid.

c) The final stations of the mystical journey that correspond to the most interior aspect of human being, i.e. his 'inner self' (*sirr*).[55]

Each of above stages includes particular stations and each of those stations includes positions that comprise of one hundred stations and positions the traveler must pass. Khajih 'Abdullah Anṣārī's *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* (or *the Hundred Stations*) a prominent work in the field of mysticism, elucidates the hundred mentioned stations in detail.

History

Islamic mysticism traces back to the first century after hijrah. Although the development of Sufism and Irfān and the groups attributed to them did not exist in the first century A.H., the existence of theoretical and practical concepts of Irfān in the first century confirms that all that the mystics achieved in the following centuries can be found in the teachings of the Prophet (s), Imams (a) and in their companions' acts.[56] From the beginning of Hijrah, people such as Abu Dhar al-Ghiffari and Salmān Fārsī, who were trained in comprehending Islamic rulings, spread the message and taught people how to purify their souls. People such as Kumayl ibn Zīyād Nakha'ī and Uways Qaranī (d. 37 A.H.) as well as many Sufis followed Abu Dhar and Salman.[57]

Centuries after them, Sufi historians listed mystics such as Ḥasan Baṣrī (d. 110 A.H.), Mālik ibn Dīnār (d. 131 A.H.), Ibrāhīm ibn Ad-ham (d. 166 A.H.), Rābi'ah 'Adwīyyah (d. 135 or 185 A.H.), Fuḍayl ibn 'Ayāḍ (d. 187 A.H.) and Shaqīq Balkhī (d. 194 A.H.). However, Islamic Irfān bloomed in the beginning of the third century A.H.

Islamic Irfān entered a new stage during the beginning of the third century A.H. until the beginning of the seventh century A.H. In this

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[55] Amīnī Nejād, Ibid., p. 403.
[56] Ibid., p. 87.
[57] Ibid., p. 88.

period, mystics became prolific authors in their field as great mystical works were published. The specific Irfān terminology was adopted mostly from Islamic concepts and sometimes from philosophy and kalām (Islamic theology). Practical Irfān, the base of Islamic Irfān until the seventh century A.H., reached its peak. In that period, organization, group hierarchy, traditions, and Sufi rituals were fully developed.[58] Renowned mystics of that period indluded Ḥārith Muḥāsibī (d. 243 A.H.), Dhu al-Nūn Miṣrī (d. 245 A.H.), Bā Yazīd Basṭāmī (d. 261 A.H.), Junayd Baghdādī (d. 297 A.H.), Husayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 306 or 309 A.H.), Abu Saʿīd Abu al-Khayr (d. 440 A.H.), Abu al-Qāsim Qushayrī (d. 465 A.H.), Khajeh Abullah Anṣārī (396 – 481 A.H.), and Abu Ḥāmid Muhammad Ghazzālī (450 – 505 A.H.).

The evolutionary process of Islamic Irfān continued until the seventh century, making it the turning point of Islamic irfan. Practical Irfān reached its peak although theoretical Irfān was also frequently discussed in their works. Through Sheikh Akbar and Muhammad ibn Ali Muḥy al-Dīn Arabī (560 – 638 A.H.), theoretical Irfān became independent and about which an independent book was written. Muḥy al-Dīn organized topics in Irfan. He also explained the details of topics in theoretical Irfān which were often seen in the works of previous mystics.[59]

Muḥy al-Dīn Arabī's two important works are *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and *Futūḥāt Makkīyyah*. The latter is like an encyclopedia of theoretical and practical Irfān. Regarding *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Muḥy al-Dīn claimed it to have been bestowed on him by the holy Prophet (s) in a dream.[60]

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[58] Ibid., pp. 99-100
[59] Yazdān-Panāh, Seyyed Yadullah, *Mabānī wa Uṣūl Irfān Naẓarī*, p. 26.
[60] Muḥy al-Dīn, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, p. 47.

Muḥy al-Dīn's efforts in Irfān resulted in three achievements: 1. Irfān was drawn near to philosophy and philosophers and mystics became better friends; 2. Discussions on the concept of the perfect man drew Muḥy al-Dīn's school close to the school of Shi'ism and Imamate. 3. Religious law (i.e. all religious beliefs) was drawn near to Irfān.

Muḥy al-Dīn's Irfān was adopted from religious law as he benefited from the verses of the Qur'an and narrations in *Futūḥāt Makkīyyah*.[61]

After Muḥy al-Dīn, his school of Irfān was developed and promoted through his students, at the top of whom was Muhammad ibn Isḥāq Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (603 - 773 A.H.). In the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries, his school reached its height through great personalities such as Abd al-Razzāq Qāsānī (d. 716 or 730 A.H.), Dāwūd ibn Maḥmūd Qayṣarī (d. 751 A.H.), Abu Ḥāmid Muhammad ibn Turkah, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 783 A.H.), Ali ibn Muhammad Turkah (d. 835 A.H.), Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad Jāmī (d. 898 A.H.). But from the 10th century A.H. on, theoretical Irfān declined as less researchers in Irfān were available. With Mullā Ṣadrā in the 11th century, Irfān and Islamic thought entered a new era.

Mullā Ṣadrā helped promote its progress which Muḥy al-Dīn had begun in the 7th century A.H. in drawing reason, heart, philosophy, and Irfān to its perfection and full agreement with philosophy. He enriched the language of philosophy and the usage of precise terminology to simplify matters in Irfān. Mullā Ṣadrā also made understanding theoretical Irfān easy for those after him without having to have embarked on a spiritual journey, even though being on one would prove beneficial in understanding truths in Irfān.[62]

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[61] Yazdān-Panāh, Ibid., pp. 54 – 56.
[62] Ibid. pp. 58-59.

From among Mullā Ṣadrā's other efforts was separating genuine Islamic Irfān from the Sufi movement of his time which was going astray. Mulla Sadra's *Asnam al-Jāhiliyyah* critiqued the Sufi order that did not coincide with Islamic mysticism and instead promoted heterodox beliefs, limiting performance only to the rituals, and paying less attention to religious practices and law. One of the results of such efforts is differentiation in the meaning of the terms Sufi and 'Ārif [mystic], in a way that Sufi and Sufism had negative connotations and they were used to distinguish false movements of Irfān from the genuine Islamic Irfān. Since then, true great mystics did not accept Sufi orders and instead gradually made a certain chain of order like a purified sapling which benefitted Shi'a with great fruits and blessings. Some luminaries after Mullā Ṣadrā, have been the fruits of the mentioned sapling such as: Mullā Muḥsin Feyḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091 A.H.), Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī (d. between 1107 and 1100 A.H.), Mullā Ali Nūrī Māzandarānī (d. 1246 A.H.), Mullā Hādī Sabzwārī (d. 1289 A.H.), Ākhūnd Mullā Husayn Qulī Hamadānī (d. 1311 A.H.), Sayyid Ali Āqā Qāḍī Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1366 A.H.) and Muhammad Taqī Bahjat Fūmanī (d. 1430 A.H.).

Stations and positions in Islamic Irfān

Mystics believe that without passing the stations of true mysticism, one would not reach true irfān. As said before, according to some mystics like Khwajah Abdullah Ansari, there are one hundred stations. In what follows, we refer to some of the major stations along with the outcomes of passing through them as explained by Ayatollah Murtada Mutahhari.[63]

The first station: This is 'desire,' a kind of inclination and liking that befalls a person as a result of thinking, worshipping, or having faith;

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[63] Muṭahharī, Murtaḍā, *Āshnā'ī ba 'Ulūm-e Eslāmī*, vol. 2, p. 124. [trans. as "*Understanding Islamic Sciences*", ICAS, 2000: London]

this occurs when a person's soul moves towards the truth. This desire is in fact a kind of awakeness and incentives will be created in it to enable it to answer the truth.

The second station: Action, self-discipline, and asceticism. The goals of ascetics are three: a) driving out all but God that is actualized through an ascetic life, b) controlling the soul which tempts people towards vices and its control can be achieved through worship and presence of the heart, c) to soften and purify the soul to foster awareness through true love together with reserve and constraint.

The third station: The mystical trances[64] that the traveler experiences. At the beginning, this state is transient, unless the traveler continues his or her asceticism. It is quite possible that a mystic looks at something and then quickly recalls the realm of the Holy. In mystical terminology, it is called 'the time' (*waqt*).

The fourth station: A continuation of the mystical raptures. Transient attractions turn into continued and ever-following raptures so that the mystic would be familiar with the Truth. In other words, it is as if he has always been together with the Truth and has experienced it with it, while becoming distressed when he distances himself from Him.

The fifth station: The mystic is drawn to seeing the truth while it is no more under his control. He would see God behind anything he sees and he would detach himself from anything other than God. At such a state, his conscience is a clear and unclouded mirror that reflects the Truth. In a way which cannot be descrbied by words, spiritual pleasures cast

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[64] "About the state of trance, some mystics have said that: Upon the encounter with the heavenly souls, the soul of the mystic receives impacts enabling him to learn about incidences in the future. He would receive such impacts in his dreams while sleeping as well as while he is awake. Whatever he sees while he is asleep are truthful dreams and whatever he sees while he is awake are visionary disclosures and whatever he experiences between sleep and wakefulness is trance." Cf. Sajjādī, Jaʿfar, *Farhang-e Maʿārif Islāmī*, vol. 2, p. 929.

upon the mystic, which shuttles between two views: a view towards the Truth and a view towards his self [as the mirror]. He would sometimes look into the One reflected in the mirror and sometimes look into the mirror itself which reflects that One.

In the next stage, the mystic becomes [ignored from and] invisible to himself and sees only God. This is when the mystic is connected with the Truth and the mystic's journey from the self to the Truth ends.

After finishing this journey, the mystic makes a journey in the Creator Himself. This means that he becomes familiar with the Divine Names and Attributes and tries to manifest them in himself as much as possible.

In his next journey, the mystic returns to the people without disconnecting himself from the Truth. While he is with the Truth, he turns to people to help and guide them.

Finally, the mystic's last journey is among people of the Truth in which he is with people and among them and tries to direct their affairs in the way that they can be directed towards God.