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Islamic Sufism in America: The Philosophy and Practices of the Oveyssi Tariqa

Golzar Sepehri

A Thesis in the Field of Middle Eastern Studies

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

The Sufis bridge the divide between the societal development of religions and the individualistic journey of the self in understanding God by teaching the Islamic concepts of peace, including tawhid (unity with all), prayer, and respect towards others. These spiritualists have existed since the beginning of time. This paper looks into the notions of Sufism, its historical and contemporary existence in the United States, and the beliefs of one specific tariqa, the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order. Ethnographic research with participant observation from November-December 2018 in the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi khaneghah of Dallas details numerous activities and practices, which illustrate the core teachings of the order and its uniqueness amongst all others.

This thesis serves as an introduction to the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi School of Islamic Sufism in the United States. In the following pages, this order is initiated to the academic discourse with an exploration of how Islamic Sufism is practiced in contemporary America. It is my hope that the readers come to better understand the spiritual dimensions of Islam through this study.

Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my teacher, His Holiness Hazrat Salaheddin Ali Nader Shah Angha, for selflessly sharing His wisdom and knowledge with students like myself, so that we, too, may obtain the treasures of Absolute Knowledge.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my parents for their infinite support. Their strength, values, and confidence have guided me here. Everything that I have accomplished has been due to their support.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Don Ostrowski for his never-ending support and patience over the last two years. Thank you for guiding me and helping me breathe life into my research proposal.

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List of Definitions

Aqtab: literally: pole, axis

Aslama: literally: to submit

Dhikr: Remembrance of God

Fana': spiritual self-annihilation and merging with God

Fajr: prayer before sunrise

Fatiha: the opening verses of the Qur'an

Haqq: Truth

Hijab: veil; separation; headscarf worn by some Muslim women

Islam: submission and surrender to God's will

Khaneghah: Sufi school or center

Murid: student of a shaykh, literally: one who is willing

Pir: "light of the path"; Sufi Master

Safa: purity

Salat: prayer

Sama': collective Sufi worship style accompanied by singing and dancing

Sawm: fasting; Pillar of Faith

Shahada: Muslim declaration of faith

Shaykh: Sufi teacher, high spiritual station, also called *murshid* or *pir*.

Silsila: spiritual lineage of an order

Suf: wool

Tariqa: way, Sufi order

Tawhid: oneness of God

Wudu: ritual cleaning before religious devotions; ablution

Murid: student of a shaykh

Maqamat: place, spiritual station

Introduction

Aims of Study

The academic field of Sufism in America is relatively new and although it is still developing, there are several aspects that could benefit from greater attention. In particular, it has not been common to study the living tradition and document contemporary spiritual teachers (*shaykhs, pirs, murshid)* and disciples (*students*, *murid, salek, seekers*) in America. Almost no scholars have conducted detailed studies on specific orders (*tariqas)* and provided in-depth coverage. As Geaves, Dressler, and Klinhammer observe, "Comprehensive work on distinct Sufi traditions is almost nonexistent. Such studies…based on fieldwork, are of crucial importance for a broader picture."[1] Moreover, as J. Spencer Trimingham states in his book, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, "Sufism has received much attention from Western scholars, yet the study of the development, writings, beliefs, and practices of the orders which are its objective expression has scarcely been attempted."[2] The inconsistent treatment by edited books has left many Sufi movements unrecognized, including the Oveyssi order. There is also not much academic writing that delves into the question of whether Sufi orders in the United States merge Islamic and Western concepts in their practice. Conducting detailed

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[1] Markus Dressler, Ron Geaves, and Gritt Klinkhammer, *Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality* (London: Routledge, 2013), 3.

[2] Spencer J. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2.

research on contemporary orders and living Sufi Masters is critical for expanding this field of study.

This study aims to explore how Islamic Sufism is implemented among the Maktab Tarighat Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order in the United States. It does this by inquiring three central points:

1. How is Sufism regarded in the West and particularly in the United States?
2. What is the history of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order?
3. What are the practices and philosophies of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order?

The first question this study investigates is what Sufism is, it's origin, and how it is different from other spiritual philosophies. Further, I investigated the Oveyssi order to understand how this specific school was established, who its previous Sufi Masters were, and what their practices and beliefs are. I do this by way of literature review and ethnographic field work. Lastly, the study researches whether the principles and practices of the order play an integral role in the attraction of their diverse population. While a number of Sufi orders in the West consist of mainly homogenous ethnicities, either immigrant or local identities, this community is a combination of American, European, and African individuals.

The second area of inquiry delves into how this order was established and the historical and contemporary lineage of the school. This study explores the development of the Oveyssi order and explores the question of how other orders were established and whether they all stemmed from one common Sufi Master. In order to surmise an answer,

this study will also explore other prominent Islamic Sufi orders in the United States and their history and practices.

The third aim is to investigate the practices and philosophies of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order and understand what sets them apart from all of the other orders in the U.S. This study initially explores the theoretical ideologies present in this order's teachings and publications. Then, it incorporates my ethnographic fieldwork to measure conversion of the theoretical into experiential understanding.

The Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order provides an ideal example by which to study the phenomenon of Islamic Sufism in contemporary America. This order is unique among Sufi communities due to its embrace of members with varying religious backgrounds and the fact that no formal conversion to Islam is required to join the school.[3]

Throughout my paper, I may refer to a student by using masculine pronouns. The use of the masculine pronouns is for linguistic harmony and convenience. Furthermore, for the sake of uniformity, I will refer to students as 'seekers,' the Sufi Master by either 'pir,' 'shaykh,' or 'murshed,' depending on the specific order's terminology.

Justification

Hazrat Salaheddin Nader Shah Angha, whom I will refer to as Hazrat or Professor Nader Angha, brought the Oveyssi order to Los Angeles, CA, in the early 1980s. The participants include Caucasians and Persians who come from Christian, Jewish, and

[3] Liyakatali Takim, *Shiism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 45.

Muslim religious backgrounds, in addition to a few European and African immigrants. This study explores the occurrence of Sufism in contemporary America by focusing on the philosophy and practices of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order in this country. This community is unique among Sufi communities due to its large number of American-born members, its ethnically diverse membership, and its required adherence to Islam. The required adherence to Islam however, does not include formal conversion. Case studies, despite being somewhat limited in applicability, have the potential to provide significant insight into a phenomenon and its larger implications. This study is particularly useful for exploring how individuals practice Sufism and have religious lifestyles in a modern, Western setting. Closer study of this religious community shed light on the debate of religion's role in society and the lives of individuals. It also expanded understanding of the cultural and social significance of alternative religions in the West. This includes how these alternatives reflect new trends in religion and the interaction between mainstream and alternative religions.

The Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order is scarcely mentioned in academic literature. The Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order is briefly mentioned in a few publications. The first is by Kathryn Spellman in her book, *Religion and Nation: Iranian Local and Transnational Networks in Britain* where she interviewed several Iranians in the Oveyssi Order in London.[4] The second book *Spirituality, Religion, and Peace Education* edited by Edward J. Brantmeier, Jing Lin, and John P. Miller broadly introduces the Sufi conception of peace and mentions a brief historical overview of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order.[5]

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[4] Kathryn Spellman, *Religion and Nation: Iranian Local and Transnational Networks in Britain* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 122.

[5] Edward J. Brantmeier, Jing Lin, and John P. Miller, *Spirituality, Religion, and Peace Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2010), 30.

Lastly, the publication *New Horizons of Muslim Diaspora* by Nora Ettahi is the most comprehensive collection denoting the history of the tariqa, its foundational structures, practices, and activities.[6] However, the information provided by these scholars is still limited in scope and barely introduces the tariqa's methods, practices, and difference in comparison to other Sufi communities.

The Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order has an established publications center which has produced the works of previous and the current pir as well as students of the order who have conducted research on the varying topics of science, philosophy, and psychology. The publications are grouped into four categories: advanced Sufism, poetry, Sufism and science, and the history of the order. Additionally, the publications center allows for different methods of accessing the information such as through audiobook, hardback, journals, or paperback. Interested parties are able to obtain these texts or audio sets in various languages including Arabic, Danish, English, Italian, Persian, Spanish, French, German, Swedish, and Urdu. Almost all of the materials are available for purchase either through the local Oveyssi centers (*khaneghahs)* or Amazon.

Studying the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order is crucial for understanding other issues involving the relationship between Islam and the Western world. Globalization has merged the "East" and "West" in extraordinary ways, resulting in both positive and negative developments. Communities that bridge the "Western" and "Islamic" identities may be useful for creating more positive relationships and lessening the misunderstandings in this conflict, which is often oversimplified into "East vs West." It is also worth investigating the ideas of "peace" and "justice" from a Sufi Islamic

[6] Moha Ennaji, *New Horizons of Muslim Diaspora in North America and Europe* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 64.

perspective. Sufism has been acknowledged as a more tolerant and acceptable form of Islam, particularly by Western politicians, and it can be found in war-torn areas such as Pakistan.[7] Therefore, this study has implications for international relations and policy makers. Furthermore, as an example of minority religious communities in the United States, the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order offers insight into contemporary religious tolerance and Islamophobia. Additionally, the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order is important to study and incorporate into the academic literature because of intrinsic qualities. The diversity of its membership is one factor that sets this tariqa apart from many other Sufi movements. The order's students are from an eclectic variety of religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. By incorporating this community into the literature on Sufism in America, it will help increase knowledge and expand understanding of this phenomenon and the implications of contemporary religious lifestyles in the Western world.

Literature Review

Sufism in America

Alternative religious movements are exponentially growing and establishing themselves as unconventional options for individuals who are dissatisfied with traditional religious institutions but do not reject the notion of or belief in God. One of these alternatives is Sufism, which is often described as the mystical tradition in Islam. Sufism has demonstrated adaptability and resilience, and it has established itself in the West.

[7] Akbar Ahmed, *Journey into Islam: Crisis of Globalization* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2007), 123.

Spiritual themes shared in Sufism and popular Sufi writings, including Rumi's thirteenth-century poetry and Idries Shah's anecdotal stories, are found throughout American culture.[8] Furthermore, a number of Islamic Sufi orders (*tariqas*) that trace their spiritual lineage (*silsila*) back to the time of the Prophet Mohammad are established across the continent.

Contemporaneous expressions of Sufism have received limited attention from academic scholarship until recently, and Sufism in America was barely mentioned prior to the mid-1990s. A number of reasons explain this lack of attention. First, the study of Sufism, as well as general awareness of the complexities and diversities in Islam, has been discouraged by the tendency of scholars to consider Sufism a "neo-Platonic mystical theosophy" that is separate from Islam.[9] It was common, particularly among Orientalists, to dismiss Islamic Sufism practices and instead describe its origins, rise, impact, and subsequent decline.[10] Historically, Islamic Sufism was often mistakenly seen as discordant with the desirable qualities of rational, modern society by many reformers and modernist thinkers both inside and outside of Islam and considered to be limited to immigrant populations.[11]

Second, the study of Islam in America was fairly undeveloped until the 1990s, and Sufism, as a minority in Islam was additionally neglected. This was condensed by the

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[8] Idries Shah, The Way of the Sufi (London: The Octagonal Press, 1980).

[9] Ron Geaves, *The Sufis of Britain: An Exploration of Muslim* Identity (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 2000), 3.

[10] Juan Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1989), 153.

[11] Martin Van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 7.

actions of many Muslims in America, who portrayed Sufism as being "peripheral to the concerns of most Muslims living in the United States and irrelevant in terms of impacting American culture and institutions."[12] Third, the noticeable arrival of Sufism with the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s led to the consideration that it was merely part of a religious phase that would decrease over time and, therefore, was not worth studying. However, the continued presence and emergence of Sufi movements has proven otherwise.

Over the last two decades, substantially more literature has emerged that recognizes contemporary Sufism in the West and presents it as a lived religion important for both immigrant and non-immigrant populations. In particular, collections of articles have emphasized its vibrancy and diversity in America. *Muslim Communities in North America*, edited by Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith, includes discussions on two Sufi communities – the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship by Gisela Webb and Baba Rexheb's Bektashi tariqa by Francis Trix.[13] David Westerlund demonstrated different ways Sufism has been acculturated to Western societies in a book he edited entitled *Sufism in Europe and North America*, which has a chapter by Marcia Hermansen on the unique characteristics of Sufism in America.[14] Often, Inayat Khan's Sufi Order International is

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[12] Marcia Hermansen, "Hybrid Identity Formations in Muslim America: The Case of American Sufi Movements," *Muslim World* 90, no. 1/2 (2000): 158-197.

[13] Gisela Webb, "Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary American Islamic Spirituality: The Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship," in *Muslim Communities in North America*, ed. Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith (Albany: State University of NewYork, 1994), 75-108; and Frances Trix, "Bektashi Tekke and the Sunni Mosque of Albanian Muslims in America," in *ibid*., 359-380.

[14] David Westerlund, Sufism in Europe and North America. (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

proposed as a modern, Western version of Sufism, as seen in Celia Genn's chapter in *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam*.[15] Also, *Sufis in Western Society*, edited by Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler, and Gritt Klinkhammer (2009), addresses the impacts of globalization on Sufism.[16] It includes a chapter written by Markus Dressler on how Sufis in New York are negotiating the American cultural context after the events of September 2001.

Another book which contributes to this topic is *Sufism Today*, edited by Catharina Raudvere and Leif Stenberg as it approaches Sufism as an everyday, lived reality and notes how tariqas are negotiating tradition and globalization through their interactions with other Muslim groups in the West.[17] In particular, two studies conducted by Margaret Rausch and Oluf Schönbeck discuss the American context. Margaret Rausch's research investigates the two branches of the Halwati-Jerrahi order and their differences in practice and ideology.[18] Meanwhile, Schönbeck's presents ways in which the diverse manifestation of Sufi ideology in the United States has been categorized by scholars and

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[15] Celia Genn, "The Development of a Modern Western Sufism," *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam*, ed. Martin Van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 257-278.

[16] Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler, and Gritt Klinkhammer, Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality (New York: Routledge, 2009), 45.

[17] Robert Rozehnal. "Sufism Today: Heritage and Tradition in the Global Community" Edited by Catharina Raudvere and Leif Stenberg." Journal of Islamic Studies 21, no. 2 (2009): 277-80. Accessed January 2019. doi:10.1093/jis/etq010.

[18] Margaret J. Rausch. "Women Mosque Preachers and Spiritual Guides: Publicizing and Negotiating Women's Religious Authority in Morocco." Women, Leadership, and Mosques: 59-83. doi:10.1163/9789004209367_005.

discusses the greater impact of academic discourses on the approaches by academics and upon the Sufi movements themselves.[19]

Scholars in universities have limitedly researched Sufi orders. Marcia Hermansen, professor of Theology at Loyola University in Maryland, is renowned as a leading scholar of Sufism in America. Among her remarkable contributions to the field, she proposes a "garden" typology for classifying the Sufi movements in America,[20] summarizes Sufi movements by their tariqa affiliations,[21] and deciphers common literary themes in contemporary Western Sufi literature.[22] She also attempts to distinguish between Sufism in America and Europe in her article "What's American about American Sufi Movements."[23] Scholars who hold membership in Sufi movements have added significantly to the literature. For example, Frances Trix,[24] an associate professor of Linguistics and Anthropology at Indiana University and member of the Albanian Bektashi Tariqa in Detroit, Michigan, has contributed to the research about the order to which she belongs and her Albanian shaykh Baba Rexheb. Another example is Gisela

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[19] Oluf Shonnbeck, Sufism Today: Heritage and Tradition in the Global Community, ed. Catharina Raudvere and Leif Stenberg (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 285.

[20] Marcia Hermansen, "The Garden of American Sufi Movements: Hybrids and Perennials," in *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*, ed. Peter B. Clark (London: Luzac Orietnal, 1998), 155-178.

[21] Hermansen, Marcia. "Hybrid Identity Formations in Muslim America: The Case of American Sufi Movements." The Muslim World 90, no. 1-2 (2000): 159.

[22] Marcia Hermanson, "Literary Productions of Western Sufi Movements," *Sufism in the West*, ed. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells (London: Routledge, 2006), 28-48.

[23] Marcia Hermansen, "What's American about American Sufi Movements," *Sufism in Europe and North America*, ed. David Westerlund (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 36-63.

[24] Frances Trix, *Spiritual Discourse: Learning with an Islamic Master*, Conduct and Communication Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

Webb,[25] an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Seton Hill University and member of the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She has written several articles and chapters on her Sufi order and also a history of Sufism in America. Other insider scholars include Daniel Atesh Sonneborn,[26] who explores the distinctive musical elements of Sufism in America through a Chishti-based Sufi center in California, and Elliott Bazzano,[27] who researched spiritual healing and the Shadhili tariqa, which is led by a Palestinian sheikh in America, for his Ph.D. dissertation through the University of California. Additionally, Dr. Lynn Wilcox, a scholar from the Oveyssi order and Professor Emeritus from the University of California Davis, has produced books on Sufism and psychology, poetry, and women and the Holy Quran.[28]

Sufi Masters in various orders have also produced literature. It is common for these writings to be broadly on Sufism or their theoretical explanations of specific Sufi practices. For instance, Shaykh Hakam Moinuddin Chishti, uses his publications to discuss physical and spiritual healing from the Sufi perspective. On the other hand, Shaykh Hisham, the son-in-law and current leader of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Order, provides abbreviated versions of studies that have been conducted on the order as well as

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[25] Gisela Webb, "Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary American Spirituality: The Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship," in *Muslim Communities in North America*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994): 75-108.

[26] Daniel Atesh Sonneborn, "Music and Meaning in American Sufism: The Ritual of Dhikr at Sami Mahal, a Chistiyya-derived Sufi Center" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1995).

[27] Elliott Bazzano, "The Shadhiliyya Sufi Order in America: Liminality, Innovation, and Tradition," Conference Paper (2008).

[28] Lynn Wilcox, *Sufism and Psychology* (Abjad Book Designers & Builders, 1995).

discussions of the order's core principles. Additionally, many Sufi seekers have written and published their personal journeys such as, Muhyiddin Shakoor where he details his learning experiences as a murid in his book, *The Writings on the Water*.[29] Furthermore, many Sufi orders in the United States have published websites that highlight their order's history, beliefs, practices, events, and recommended readings.

The Research Context

Methodology

My research of the Maktab Tarighat Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi was conducted during a month-long trip to the local Dallas khaneghah center. For my research, I used an ethnographic approach with participant observation. Although I have been a lifelong student of this school of Sufism, I attempted to view the teachings, practices, and discussions as an objective viewer. At first, I thought that it may be difficult to view something that I have experienced countless times for over two decades as 'new' and 'fresh.' However, upon starting my research journey, I realized how much of my attendance and practices had been based upon habit and how little I had viewed these practices with significant detail.

Initially I wanted to hand out surveys to the students of the school in order to gauge their understanding and attitude towards the order, Islam, and their reasons for

[29] Muhyiddin Shakoor, *The Writing on the Water: Chronicles of a Seeker on the Islamic Path* (Shaftesbury Dorset: Element, 1988).

pursuing this specific spiritual path. Through conversation, I had learned that many of the students were believers and practitioners of other Abrahamic faiths and had never formally converted to Islam. Although I understood why the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order did not require formal conversion, a matter in which I will discuss in the chapters below, I was intrigued by the fact that many of these practitioners attended their belief's services and still attended the khaneghah sessions. Although I had prepared the necessary surveys and interview questions, I felt uncomfortable pursuing this path. On the one hand, it felt as though I would be invading the privacy of the students. On the other hand, I did not want the students to engage in participant bias. Often in the realm of religion, it is difficult for individuals to engage in self-reflection and to answer questions truthfully and honestly. Therefore, I relied on the content and structure of the weekly sessions, my personal meditative practices, and group dhikr practices. I found these to be an appealing alternative because they illustrate present values and serve as evidence for longstanding attitudes.

Research Methods

Ethnographic fieldwork provided the empirical basis of this study drawing upon empathy as understood in the phenomenological approach to the study of religion.[30] This methodology involves the "study of people in naturally occurring settings…by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to

[30] Ninian Smart, "Within and Without Religion," The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge: Some Methodological Questions, 1973.

collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally."[31] Ethnographies are regarded as highly valuable methods of research and often used in the social sciences due to their "interpretivist" approach, which allows the researcher to enhance his or her capacity for cultural understanding of social and personal meanings through both participation and observation. A scholar at the forefront of this concept, Bronnislaw Malinowski, who wrote *Argonauts of the Western Pacific,*[32] used this method as well as other social scientists, such as Crapazano (1973)[33], Geertz (1986)[34], and Levi-Strauss (1992).[35] American anthropology also embraced this methodology, which later became associated with the emic, as opposed to the etic or outsider approach.[36]

Between November 2019 and December 2019, I participated in the weekly activities of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order in Dallas. The participant observation provided data on practices and community events and details of experiences. The research was also supplemented by data from outside the community. This included published and unpublished documents on the religious history of this specific order. The

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[31] John D Brewer, *Ethnography* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2000), 6.

[32] Bronislaw Malinowski, Argonauts of the Western Pacific (London: Routledge, 2002).

[33] Vincent Crapanzano, The Hamadsha (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

[34] Clifford Geertz, Islam Observed, Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986)

[35] Claude Levi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques (Penguin Group, 1992).

[36] Kenneth L. Pike, Marvin Harris, and Thomas N. Headland. *Emics and Etics: The Insider/outsider Debate* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990).

limited documentation of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order by outside sources confirmed that this study would help fill a void in the literature.

Participant Observation

Given that I was unable to involve the participation of other students, I decided to take a participant observation, which was my primary research method. Since myriad levels of participation exist, a researcher must adapt these based on his or her relationship or agreement with the community being studied. Due to my involvement as a student in the Oveyssi order, my research required me to detach myself and participate in a manner that allowed me to experience it anew. Therefore, my level of participation altered from "pure participation" to "active participation" on Dewalt and Dewalt's scale.[37] It involved combining the typically opposite roles of detached observation and involved participation.

My participation observation was limited in three scopes: (1) listening to the weekly sessions; (2) conducting meditative practices for 30 days; and (3) practicing dhikr during the weekly sessions for 30 days. I limited my research to 30 days due to my inability to take leave from school for a longer period of time. I was unable to continue my research in a khaneghah closer to my school as the only Northeast khaneghahs are located in New Jersey and Washington D.C., both hours from my secondary residence. I knew that if I wanted to see the effects of meditation, or Tamarkoz®, and dhikr, that I had to at least give myself four weeks of continuous practice. However, this short amount

[37] Kathleen M. Dewalt and Billie R. Dewalt, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 18.

of time also stands as a limitation for there is no clear indication or set timeframe of when these practices will suddenly illuminate for the practitioner. An individual can practice these methods for years and not reach a substantial conclusion and another can practice it for a week and be able to understand at least a part of the experience. However, I was determined that I would not limit myself with my desires within these thirty-days. I would simply practice without attaching any expectations to them.

I collected data through observation at the Dallas khaneghah during the weekly sessions. Different khaneghahs throughout the world host their sessions on different days. The Dallas khaneghah hosts its sessions every Sunday afternoon. I noted attendance levels at weekly activities and took notes of the composition of membership with regard to gender and age. With regard to the content of the sessions, I would try to decipher the foundations of the teachings and its accessibility to interested students. During the more spiritual and subjective practices that I participated in, such as meditation (*Tamarkoz ®*) and remembrance (dhikr), I free-wrote my thoughts and experiences afterwards. My intention was to write notes in "thick description," thereby not limiting myself to recording the visible world but also explaining it using intelligent guesswork to determine the purpose of actions and events.[38]

I had established a meditative schedule for myself so that I would begin my practice every night at 11:00 pm for thirty-days. Initially, I wanted to give myself a certain minimum time-limit for how long I should sit and then decided that restricting myself in this manner completely acts in opposition to the practice of Sufism. Therefore,

[38] Clifford Geertz, "Thick description: Towards an interpretive theory of culture." In Clifford Geertz (Ed.), *The interpretation of cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 32.

I would sit down at my set time and record the "end" of my practice to whenever I would become too tired to continue or lose my concentration. In the Oveyssi order, it has been my understanding that the meditative practices that must be performed during the week help perfect one's dhikr practice during the weekly sessions. It is otherwise not suggested or recommended to perform dhikr individually. Therefore, I was able to perform dhikr during the weekly sessions for only 4 times during my thirty-day research period. In order to test whether my meditative practices helped me during the dhikr, I measured the following items: (1) ability to concentrate on the words, melody, and rhythm of the dhikr; (2) abnormal sensations and feelings.

Insider Status

It is important to consider the relationship between the researcher and subject because this impacts the research. The teachings of Islamic Sufism and Hazrat Nader Angha are freely accessible to all interested parties. One's practice and progress is not dependent upon the amount of exposure to the teachings nor is it dependent upon ones role within the khaneghah or types of service (*khidmat)*. However, it is important to note that there is a difference between an individual who studies a religion from an academic perspective and one who participates in a religion. Occasionally, these roles can merge when a researcher studies his or her own community, like my present study.[39] For instance, Lila Abu-Lughod, a Palestinian-American professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies at Columbia University, studies issues of women's rights and Middle

[39] Due to my membership in the Oveyssi tariqa, my research is a form of autoethnography. An autoethnography may refer to conducting an ethnography of one's own group or writing an autobiography while conducting an ethnography.

Eastern women's sources of power. Although Lughod shares a common gender, ethnic, and religious identity with the women she studies, she diverges from them by her role as a researcher.[40]

In 1967, Kenneth Pike noted two tactics in research by devising the terms "emic" and "etic" based on the words phonemic and phonetic in linguistics. The emic approach describes those who study behavior "as from inside the system."[41] Customarily, ethnographic fieldwork and insight from insiders allow the researcher to move from an etic viewpoint of theories and outside observation toward an emic viewpoint, which recognizes the intricacies of the cultural-specific situation. Conversely, an insider researcher coming from the emic position should manage personal and group beliefs and practices with outsider understandings. As a result, Geertz proposes that the researcher exists on a scale of degrees between "experience-near" (having insider familiarity) and "experience-distant" (having outsider familiarity) and that in order to advance the study of human behavior and beliefs, the objective should be to take the insider knowledge, eradicate it from immediate limitations, and employ it to the abstract academic theories.[42]

In the present study, I am considered an insider because of my involvement with the Oveyssi order since birth. In my role as a researcher, however, I felt somewhat like an

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[40] Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

[41] Kenneth Pike, "Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behavior." Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), 37.

[42] Clifford Geertz, 'From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and sciences* (1974), 28.

outsider because I had to incorporate a different perspective when attending the sessions and taking part in the practices.

Chapter Overviews

In chapter one I will provide a background on the religion of Islam, its roots in the Abrahamic faith, and its beliefs. I will also provide historical information on Sufism and its origins. I explain the difficulty of describing Sufism and the importance of theory and experiences in order to understand its actual meaning.

In chapter two, I introduce the typical structure of Islamic Sufi orders with respect to their instructor and students. Then I explain the significance of a Sufi master and the purpose of tariqas and gathering centers, such as khaneghahs. Afterwards, I introduce the most well-known Sufi orders in the West such as the Naqshbandi-Haqqani order and the Inayati order. I provide background on their order's history, beliefs, practices, and current

In chapter three, I introduce the Oveyssi order and explain its background and establishment in the United States. I provide background on the current and previous Sufi masters of the Order as well as their publications. Then, I introduce the khaneghah, its meaning, and purpose.

In chapter four, I introduce the practices taught in the Oveyssi order such as prayer, Tamarkoz ®, dhikr, Sufi psychology, and the eight principles. In regard to the prayer, I delve deep into the Oveyssi order's teachings on inward and outward prayer, as well as the process of ablution. I also touch upon research that has been conducted on Tamarkoz ® practices and explain the general methodology of the dhikr.

In chapter five, I describe the results of my research. I divided my research by the weekly sessions, my meditative practices, and the group dhikr practices. I also explain the implementation of Islamic Sufism by the Oveyssi order and the greater significance of this research.

Chapter I: Understanding Islam and Sufism

Islam

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, national and international media has been overwhelmed with images and news of violence conducted in the name of Islam. Of all the non-Western religions, Islam stands closest to the West—closest geographically and also closest ideologically, for religiously it stands in the Abrahamic family of religions, while philosophically it builds upon the Greeks.[43] Yet, despite this mental and spatial proximity, Islam is the most difficult religion for the West to understand. No part of the world is more hopelessly and systemically and stubbornly understood by us than that complex of religion, culture, and geography known as Islam.

Islam is derived from the word *aslama*, and the roots s-l-m, primarily meaning "peace," and secondarily meaning "surrender or submit." Its full connotation is, "the peace that comes when one's life is surrendered to God." This makes Islam—together with Buddhism, one of the two religions that are named after the attribute it seeks to

[43] Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco,1991), p.221.

cultivate. In Islam's case, life's total surrender to God. Those who adhere to Islam are known as Muslims.

Islam begins not with the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) but with God. The book of Genesis tells us that, "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth…," and the Quran, the holy book of Islam, agrees. It only differs in using the word Allah. Allah is formed by joining the definite article al (meaning "the"), with ilah (meaning God). So literally, Allah means "the God," not 'a god,' for there is only one. It is my understanding that when the masculine plural ending is dropped from the Hebrew word for God, Elohim, the two words sound much alike. God created the world and humans after it. The name of the first man was Adam. The descendants of Adam led to Noah, who had a son named Shem. The descendants of Shem led to Abraham. Abraham married Sarah who could not have a child thus motivating Abraham to continue his lineage through a second wife, Hagar. Hagar bore a son named Ishmael, whereupon Sarah also conceived and likewise had a son, named Isaac. For Christians and Jews, the direct lineage to Abraham is through Isaac. However, for Muslims, the direct lineage to Abraham is through Ishmael. Following Ishmael's line in Arabia, the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) is reached in the latter half of the sixth century A.D. There had been authentic prophets of God before him but, he was their culmination. Hence, He is called, "The Seal of the Prophets." No valid prophets will follow him.

In Islam, there is the acceptance and reverence of all Prophets and their teachings. The foundation of all religions is the same principle, which is unity. The prophets came with the good news that there is a God and each individual could know Him. They all guided souls to the cognition of God and to the ultimate level of divine unity. One of the

fundamental principles of Sufism is that whatever exists is the manifestation of the one absolute knowledge that pervades everything and is not limited to time or place. Therefore, the closest place to gain access to this knowledge is within one's own self. Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) gave directives as to how one can cognize one's true self. To attain this state, one must submit to God. It is through submission that one's actions will be founded upon knowledge and wisdom, and not on ignorance, superstition, or blind faith. Unfortunately, some believe that to submit means one is subservient to someone. This is false as that would be the definition of blind faith. Over 1400 years ago, the Prophet of Islam declared, "Whoever cognizes the true Self has cognized God." The true self is equated with the Divine. This is the true human dignity granted to humans- that there is no separation between him and God. Being a Muslim is neither determined by where one is born nor where one lives. One is not a Muslim simply because one is born into what societies label a Muslim country or family, any more than one is Christian because of being born into a Christian country or family. Following rituals also does not make one a Muslim. For instance, many consider themselves Muslims because they repeat a set of formalized movements and recitations of prayer five times a day. However, a repetition of movement and recitation of prayer without total concentration, focus, and realization of each movement is insufficient.

The Oveyssi order's teachings state that in essence, the discipline of Sufism has existed since the beginning of human history, for in every time and place, God has sent

His prophets to lead mankind to the knowledge of Him and that Sufism is the way of the prophets.[44]

Elusiveness of Sufism

It is difficult to encapsulate a discussion on Sufism because it is not a discipline that can be easily understood unless one has experienced it. Scholars typically describe Sufism as the "mystical dimension of Islam," while those not in academia describe it as the "universal spirit of mysticism."[45] Words fall short when used to describe the essence of Sufism because its reality is infinite and boundless while our understanding is limited. It is human tendency to label or limit understanding of a subject by polluting an idea with one's thoughts and analyzations rather than taking the topic as is. Annemarie Schimmel notes that mysticism comes from the Greek *myein*, "to close the eyes." She states that "only the wisdom of the heart, *gnosis*, may give insight into some of its aspect."[46] To definitively understand Sufism, it must be understood from the heart where the presence of God is apparent and not elsewhere.

The depth of understanding Sufism can be related to the parable of Mowlana Jalaledin Rumi in his Mathnawi of an elephant being kept in a dark building for an exhibition. In the story, lines of people went inside the dark building to see the animal and since it was dark, they used their hands to stroke it to try to understand what the

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[44] Nader Angha, *Sufism* (Riverside CA) M.T.O. Publications, 2011), 35.

[45] Card W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997) xvii.

[46] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 4.

animal is. As the individuals touched different parts of the elephant, each would claim that the whole of the being is comprised of the part in which they were touching, i.e. the trunk being a 'drain pipe' or the ear seeming like a 'fan.'[47] Human beings' understanding of Sufism when limited by theoretical knowledge is similar.

The term Sufism stands as a misnomer in the sense that words ending with "-ism" typically indicate philosophies and social constructs or movements that have distinct beliefs and qualities. The word 'Sufism' appears for the first time in a European language in the book of Friedrich August Gottreu Tholuck entitled, *Sufismus, sive theosphia Persarum pnatheistica*, which was published in 1921.[48] It was the translation of the Arabic word, *tasawwuf*. For the purposes of this paper and for the streamlining of research that has been gathered, I will use the term "Sufism" instead of 'tasawwuf.' Further, I use the word "Sufi" to denote anyone who believes it is possible to directly experience God and is prepared to put themselves in a state to do so.

Origin of Sufism

Sufism embraces the tendencies in Islam which aim at direct communion between God and man. It is a sphere of spiritual experience which runs parallel to the main stream of Islamic consciousness deriving from prophetic revelation and comprehended within

[47] Jalalu'ddin Rumi, The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi. Ed. and Trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Cambridge: Biddles, Ltd), 1259-1268.

[48] Friedrich August Gottreu Tholuck, *Sufismus, sive theosphia Persarum pnatheistica* (Berolini, 1821).

the Shari'a and theology.[49] Perhaps, it is due to this contrast that legalists have enmity towards Sufism, for it means that the mystics are claiming knowledge of a Real (*al-Haqq*, a term for God) that cannot be gained through revealed religion which in Islam became codified religion.[50] Generally, the method of approach to attaining Reality (*Haqiqa*) includes the use of intuitive and emotional spiritual faculties, which are dormant and latent, and involve training under guidance. This training, which is often termed *salek at-tariq*, or travelling the Path, aims at removing the veils that hide the self from the Real and thereby become transformed or absorbed into Unity.[51] This process is not entirely a theoretical or intellectual process however. Throughout time, mystics have concluded the formulation of various types of mystical philosophy which bypasses systemic theology and promotes an individual's spiritual freedom where intrinsic spiritual senses can be allowed to bloom in full scope. The various Ways (*turuq*, sing. *tariqa*) are concerned with this process, and each has its own historical development, practical organization, and modes of worship that allow seekers to find their Reality. Sufism incorporates the spirit of Quranic piety in the mode of expression as through the practice of remembrance (*dhikr, zekr, zikr)* and prayer (*salat*). Sufism was a natural development out of these tendencies that manifested in early Islam, and it continues to stress them as an essential aspect of the Way.[52] Thus, it became a natural development within Islam and allowed

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[49] J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.

[50] *Ibid*.

[51] Ibid, 3.

[52] Ibid.

seekers to direct experience communion with God while asserting that Islam was not confined within a legalistic directive.

Other sources relate Sufism's origins as having been influenced by the Hindu Fakirs, relating the ascetic practices of the Fakirs to that of the Sufis[53]. While others regard it as an outgrowth of Buddhism due to the similarities between the two, especially the extensive use of vision.[54] Additionally, some view the similarities of the lives of the Buddha and Ibrahim Adham, a renowned Sufi Master, as further evidence of their connection. Both of these individuals were born as princes and left all worldly materials behind in pursuit of Reality. On the other hand, some trace the roots of Sufism to Christianity, finding similarities between the austerity of the Syrian monks and that of the Sufis. Though both Christian monks and Sufis seek to distance themselves from superficial and materialistic attractions in the world, there are importance differences of attitude between the two groups.[55] Christian monks withdraw themselves into monasteries and remain in that environment in order to avoid temptation. Meanwhile, Sufis do not abandon the world or practice asceticism. Sufis believe that it is critical practice to overcome temptation and worldly desires so that no physical environment can have any degree of effect on them. Lastly, others argue that Islam began in an area where both ancient Oriental and Christian influences were great, thereby influencing Islam from its onset.

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[53] Ibid, 5.

[54] Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Arkana, 1989), 38.

[55] Nader Angha, *Sufism Lecture Series* (California: MTO Publications, 2011), 10.

In the 11th century, a scholar named Hujwiri presented several views of the origin of the word "Sufi." According to Hujwiri, some scholars believe that "Sufi" is derived from the term, "ahl-suffia" (the people of the Bench), which refers to the platform on which the Holy Prophet and the Companions sat on while worshipping God[56]. Another theory is that individuals were named Sufis due to their tradition of wearing wool, or suf. Lastly, others contribute the term Sufi to Sufis because of the *safa*, or purity, in their hearts and the cleanliness of their actions.[57] Hazrat Nader Angha, the current Sufi Master of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi tariqa, states that these hypotheses are not incorrect but are incomplete because they only present the outer form of Sufism and not its inner meaning. He states:

> If we look closely at the last three hypotheses we will note that to be called a Sufi had certain requirements. To be a companion of the Prophet surely requires a different mode of action and behavior. It also requires purity of heart, spiritual awareness, and sacredness of goal. In essence, the People of the Bench, or the companions of the Holy Prophet, must have been aware of the significance of the teachings of the Holy Prophet, and must have been intent on being trained by him, because the wanted to know God. This, if wearing wool was one of the conditions, they did so.[58]

Early Sufism asserted an individuals' right to pursue a life of contemplation, seeking contact with the source of being and reality, over institutionalized religion based

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[56] 'Ali b. 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al*-Mahjub (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014), 302.

[57] Nader Angha, *Sufism Lecture Series*, 23.

[58] Nader Angha, *Sufism and Islam* (California: MTO Publications, 2011), 22.

on authority, a one-way Master-slave relationship, with its emphasis upon ritual observance and legalistic morality.[59]

Chapter II: The Sufi Orders

The Structure of Orders

The structure of the Sufi orders is based on a system and relationship of a Master and disciple. Based on the eminent language of the order, the Master may be called *pir, shaykh, or murshed*, and the disciple or aspirant, *murid, salek, seeker, or student*. The basis of this system is that the Master, one who has traversed the stages (*maqamat)* of the Sufi Path and has obtained Reality can guide others who also seek to attain it. Masters of the Way believe that every man has inherent within him the possibility for release from self and union with God, however this ability is latent and dormant and cannot be released, except with illuminates gifted by God, without the guidance of a teacher.[60] The underlying theory is that man has placed himself in state of limitations and attachments, through the experiences within society, and thus developed veils that prevent him from seeing his Reality. As Jean-Louis Michon states, “the true master is one who has himself already traversed the path, who knows its route, its pitfalls, and its dangers, so that he can guide others.”[61]

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[59] J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 10.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Michon Jean-Louis, "The Spiritual Practices of Sufism," ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Theology and Practice for the Modern World*, 1987, doi:10.5040/9781474297820.0008.

The role of a Sufi Master in a seeker's journey can be experienced through the epic allegory of the Sufi Persian Poet Attar of Nishapur entitled "Conference of the Birds." The poem begins with all of the birds of the world gathering together to seek a king. The wisest of them all, the hoopoe bird, suggests they undertake a journey to the court of the great Simourgh, equivalent to the Phoenix, where they can achieve enlightenment.[62] The group of birds that had gathered represent individual human souls, the hoopoe represents a spiritual Master, and the legendary Simourgh represents God. The birds elect the wise hoopoe as their leader for the quest. Each bird has a specific fault, the sort of shortcomings and attachments that generally prevent humans from attaining enlightenment. One by one, some of the birds begin to drop out of their journey, each offering an excuse for why they cannot continue. Eventually only thirty birds remain. The birds must confront their individual limitations and fears while journeying through seven valleys, before they ultimately find the Simourgh and complete their mission. In the end and to their amazement all of the thirty birds find a lake and see their own reflection in the water. In Farsi, there is a play on the word 'Simourgh.' A Simourgh is a bird but "Si" means thirty and "morgh" translates to 'bird.' Therefore, only at the end of the quest and while staring at their reflection, the birds realize that the great Simourgh that they had been seeking all along was themselves. It's a Sufi doctrine that God is not external or separate from the universe; rather it is the totality of Existence.

[62] Farid al-Diin Attar, *Muslim Saints and Mystics* (Boston: Routledge, 1976).

Hazrat Shahmaghsoud, the 42nd Master of the Oveyssi order, extends upon these seven valleys what were travelled in the story of the Simourgh in a poem that he wrote:

In the Kingdom of heart, seven stages there are:
That the seeker of Truth must go through them all.
The first stage is to seek and Yearn,
With hardship and pain, he may earn.
Faith is the heart's second stage,
Its essence is eternal knowledge.
The third stage is that of love,
Mirror aglow with the light of Love.
One with existence the seeker becomes,
In this stage, a witness of Truth he becomes.
The fifth stage is that of Unity,
Brilliant as the sun the particle will be.
The sixth stage is that of Ecstacy,
Full of wonder the seeker will be.
The seventh stage is Annihilation and poverty,
God will manifest in all to you.
In eternal peace they heart shall live,
When the seventh stage, thy home, is reached.[63]

The early Sufi Masters were concerned with experiencing rather than theosophical theorizing and sought to guide rather than to teach. Sufism consists of feeling and

[63] Hazrat Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha, *Al-Rasael* (University Press of America: Lanham, MD, 1986), 106-110.

unveiling, since gnosis (*ma'rifa)* can only be reached through ecstatic states. A theorist of ethical mysticism, writes of his own realization that denotes Sufis cannot be theoretically taught but must attain knowledge through direct experience and inward transformation.[64] Al-Ghazali, creates a parallel by stating that a drunken man knows nothing about the definition, causes, and conditions of drunkenness, yet he is drunk, whilst the sober man acquainted with the theory is not drunk.[65] Seemingly, al-Ghazali spoke from a personal perspective as his own inability to submit himself unconditionally to guidance imposed a barrier for him to attain direct Sufi experience.

A *tariqa* (also known as, *madhhab, ri'aya, suluk)* was a practical method to guide a seeker by tracing a way of thought, feeling, and action, leading through a succession of 'stages' (*maqamat*) to experience divine Reality. Each Sufi order has a place of gathering where its students unite for sessions, prayer, dhikr, or other activities. The name of this place differs amongst the Orders but common terms used will be "maktab," "center," and "khaneghah."

Traversing the Sufi path involved undergoing a process of inner transformation. The ultimate goal of a seeker or student is to self-annihilate and "dying" to the self (*fana*) and unifying with God (*wahdat al-wujud*).[66] The unveiling experience has inspired seemingly blasphemous statements and writings from students. For example, Mansur al-Hallaj famously declared, "Ana' al-Haqq" (I am the Truth). Though this utterance gave him the title of "martyr of mystical love" by other Sufis, those who were more orthodox

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[64] Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad Al- Ḡhazālı̄, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* (Allen & Unwin, 1953), 124-125.

[65] ibid

[66] William Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 16.

Muslim considered his utterance heretical and among one of the many factors that led to his execution in 913 CE.[67]

In order to understand the concept of Sufi orders in the United States, I will provide a brief background on prominent orders in America before presenting my research and focus on the Oveyssi order. For the purposes of my paper, I will refer to the *tariqa* as orders, disciples as *seekers*, and Sufi Masters by the term each order uses specifically for their teacher.

Naqshbandi-Haqqani Order

History

The Naqshbandi-Haqqani order in the United States is led by Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, the deputy and son-in-law of Shaykh Nazim. However, there are two living Sufi Shaykhs of the organization with the other being Hajjah Naziha Adil, the daughter of Shaykh Nazim. Given this privilege however, women are only allowed to participate in the gender segregated rituals but are not accorded formal leadership roles and female members of the leaders' families are viewed as role models for women disciples.[68] Shaykh Hisham Kabbani bases his order on the teachings of the 40th imam of the Naqshbandi Golden Chain, Shaykh Nazim Adil al-Haqqani.[69] In an effort to escape the civil war in

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[67] Michael A. Sells, *Ealry Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'ran, Miraj, Poetic and Theological Writings*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 22-23.

[68] "Sufi Orders and Movements: Indonesia." *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*. doi:10.1163/1872-5309_ewic_ewiccom_0712.

[69] "About the Most Distinguished Naqshbandi Sufi Way." The Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order of America: Sufism and Spirituality. Accessed February 13, 2019. http://naqshbandi.org/the-tariqa/about/.

Lebanon, Shaykh Kabbani moved to the United States in 1991 and established the first Naqshbandiyya-Nazimiyya Sufi Order of America. During my research, I was unable to obtain more information regarding the decision and reason as to why the 'Haqqani' portion of the tariqa's name was removed upon establishment in the United States. Since 1991, Shaykh Kabbani has opened 23 Sufi centers in Canada and the United States. In his outreach mission to transmit the message of love, peace, and acceptance that comprises, in His words, the "Traditional Islam," Shaykh Kabbani has met with politicians, heads-of-state, diplomats, and common folk around the world. It is also claimed that he successfully established programs to counter radicalism and promote tolerance and has obtained hundreds of thousands of students in the process.[70] It has been noted that in 1998, in an effort to have a voice among Muslim leaders, Shaykh Kabbani established an organization in Washington named, Islamic Supreme Council of America.

Teachings and Centers

The official Naqshbandi website states that the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi tariqa is strictly based on the Shari'ah, the Holy Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, and the teachings of the noble teachers of the Naqshbandi *silsilah*. On Hisham Kabbani's personal website, viewers can find information on his background, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi centers around the world, contact someone for prayer requests (presumably the Shaykh), and donate to the organization. According to the website, Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani graduated from the American University of Beirut where he obtained a degree in Chemistry. Afterwards, he studied in Belgium and Damascus

[70] "Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani," The Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order of America: Sufism and Spirituality, accessed September 14, 2018, http://naqshbandi.org/living-masters/shaykh-muhammad-hisham-kabbani/.

where he received degrees in medicine and Islamic Law, respectively. The website denotes the lineage of the Shaykh by stating that from childhood, Shaykh Kabbani accompanies Grand-shaykh ‘Abdullah ad-Daghestani and Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil, two Sufi Masters of the Naqshbandi Order and received training for 40 years under their guidance.

The centers that are listed on Shaykh Kabbani and official Naqshbandi websites are categorized by different color pins: orange, turquoise, light green, light blue, purple, brown, dark purple, red-purple, yellow, and tan. Unfortunately, the website does not provide a map key to explain the significance of each color marker. However, there is no official Sufi center for this order. Rather, he has homes in Michigan and California and claims about 8,000 regular contributors and participants, 60,000 students, and 13 Islamic centers that offer space to hold either Friday juma prayers or zikr sessions.[71] During my research, I was unable to find information such as the specific juma prayer and dhikr practices, movements, and recitations or who specifically leads these sessions. Furthermore, viewers can find that some cities will have as many as five different locations for sessions, all within short distance of one another. However, it is not clear as to why there is a separation. Furthermore, on the Naqshbandi website, viewers can find written “suhbats” of previous Shaykhs of the order that are written in a format similar to hadiths. Interestingly, this tariqa has also allowed six members of the order to participate in events promoting the teachings of Tasawwuf to Americans.[72] Publications by students

[71] Laurie Goodstein, "A Nation Challenged: The Cleric; Muslim Leader Who Was Once Labeled an Alarmist Is Suddenly a Sage." The New York Times. October 28, 2001. Accessed April 3, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/28/us/nation-challenged-cleric-muslim-leader-who-was-once-labeled-alarmist-suddenly.html.

[72] "Speakers." The Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order of America: Sufism and Spirituality. Accessed November 13, 2018. http://naqshbandi.org/in-america/speakers/.

or the Shaykh of the order can be found on the Naqshbandi website as downloadable files.

Inayati Order

History

The Inayati Order, formerly known as the Sufi Order International, is an international organization dedicated to spreading the Sufi message of Hazrat Inayat Khan, who according to their website, first introduced Sufism to the Western world in 1910, specifically France. Hazrat Inayat Khan was an Indian Chishti teacher whose teachings evolved into a universalist interpretation of the unity behind all Prophetic revelations inspired by the same spirit of Guidance.[73] After the death of Hazrat Inayat Khan in 1926, the order was revived by his son, Pir Vilayat Khan, in the 1970s and temporarily joined by disciples of an American Sufi, Murshid Samuel Lewis (1971).[74] Soon after their merge, Lewis's disciples left to form their own movement, the Sufi Islamia Ruhaniat Society. Today his grandson, Zia Inayat Khan, directs the movement in the United States.

The Inayati Order's website claims that the chain of transmission of the tariqa unites the teachings and lineages of four orders –the Chishti, Suhrawardy, Qadiri, and Naqshbandi. According to the silsila provided by the Inayati website, Hazrat Inayat Khan became the successor of the four respective orders. However, it does not explain how or

[73] "Sufi Orders and Movements: United States." Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures. Accessed February 5, 2019. doi:10.1163/1872-5309_ewic_ewiccom_0149e.

[74] ibid

why this event occurred nor does it provide evidence from a third-party source to confirm that this is an accurate portrayal of their lineage.

Teachings and Centers

Similar to other Sufi orders, the Inayati order has centers throughout the world. Specially, there are 73 centers in North America that offer weekly or monthly sessions. Each center's manager is listed on the website as well as their personal email addresses for interested participants. Unlike other Sufi tariqas, however, initiates of the Inayati Order are encouraged to find a guide within the Order to work with them as they explore the Sufi path. According to the website, a guide is a person with deeper experience and grounding in the Universalist Sufism taught by Hazrat Inayat Khan. However, there is no clear distinction as to the qualifications and requirements of an individual to become a guide for others. The website claims that a guide in the Order is not conceived of as an enlightened or perfected being but as someone more experienced and a spiritual friend on the path, who can provide inspiration and guidance. The guide does not provide directives or attempt to substitute their own will and conscience for those of the seeker but helps the seeker gain confidence and develop their own will and conscience.[75] Although it is stated that the Inayati Order teachers are bound by clear ethical standards and guidelines, there is no mention of how they are overseen. Additionally, since Sufism embarks a subjective and personal journey, there is no metric by which to measure whether the guides have correctly understood and live a lifestyle according to the order's Sufi teachings. However, it does not explain how an individual can help another gain

[75] "Home." Inayati Order. Accessed March 07, 2019. https://inayatiorder.org/.

confidence and develop their own will and conscious if the guides themselves lack these capabilities since there are no given metrics.

Chapter III: The Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi Order

History and Establishment

The Maktab Tarighat Oveyssi (MTO) Shahmaghsoudi, School of Islamic Sufism, was established in Sufi Abad, Iran. MTO Shahmaghsoudi is one of the Uwaysi Sufi orders and belongs to the Shi'i branch of the Kubrawiyya Sufi order, or tariqa.[76] Presently, this school stands as the largest Iranian Sufi order operating outside of Iran. The terms "tariqa" and "Uwaysi" are often rendered "tarighat" and "Oveyssi" respectively due to their Farsi intonation and has three diverse interpretations: (1) one who follows an order of Uways al-Qarani, who was given the Prophet Mohammad's cloak, a sign of esoteric transmission; (2) Oveyssi transmission refers to a Sufi who has received Sufi knowledge from a deceased master in the Oveyssi method- 'alam al-arqah- without meeting him physically, just as Oveys al-Qarani did not physically meet the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) but was a recipient of his *nass* (esoteric knowledge). This facet of Sufism is deeply important, connecting the believer with a past *murshed* via read or sung poetry, or other texts, and legitimizing the mystical process of inspiration beyond the living master;

[76] Moha Ennaji, *New Horizons of Muslim Diaspora in Europe and North America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillion, 2016), 89.

or (3) it means those descended from Uways al-Qarni, for example, those living in Hyderabad, India.[77]

In the lineage of Sufism, Maktab Tarighat Oveyssi, is named after Oveys Gharani, the son of Amer Moradi from Gharan, Yemen. Oveys was born in Najd, Saudi Arabia and died in the company of Hazrat Amir-al-Mo'meneen during the war of Saffein. Although Oveys was living during the time of the Prophet of Islam, he did not have the honor of personally meeting him. He inwardly recognized the unity of God, the Prophetic Mission of the Prophet of Islam, and the Spiritual Guardianship of Hazrat Amir-al-The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said to the Companions: "There is a man at Qaran, called Uways, who at the Resurrection will intercede for a multitude of my people, as many as the sheep of Rabi'a and Mudar[78]." Then turning to 'Umar and 'Ali, he said, "You will see him. He is a lowly man of middle height, and hairy; on his left side, there is a white spot, as large as a dirham, which is not from leprosy, and he has a similar spot on the palm of his hand. When you see him, give him my greeting, and bid him pray for my people."[79] Upon the death of the Prophet, 'Umar visited Mecca and cried out during a sermon, "O men of Najd, are there any natives of Qaran amongst you?" A few responded by stating that Uways is a madman who dwells in solitude and does not associate with anyone. The people of the town claimed that Uways, "does not eat what men eat, and feels no joy or sorrow…when others smile he weeps, and when others weep he smiles." Upon receiving

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[77] Ibid.

[78] 'Ali b. 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al*-Mahjub (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014), 84.

[79] Ibid, 85.

directions, ‘Umar and ‘Ali set out in quest of him. Uways al-Qaran saluted them and showed them the marks on his side and the palm of his hand. They asked his blessing, gave him the Prophet’s greeting, and enjoined him to pray for the Muslim people. After they remained with him for a while, he said: “you have taken trouble to see me; now return, for the Resurrection is near, when we shall see each other without having to say farewell…at present I am engaged in preparing for the Resurrection.”[80] It is noted that Uways left his native home and that nobody saw him until the period of the civil war when he fought for ‘Ali, and fell a martyr at the battle of Saffein.

Another profound leader of the Maktab Tarighat Oveyssi School of Islamic Sufism was Salman Farsi, also known as Salman the Persian or Iranian. Salman Farsi’s given name was Behbood, the son of Badakhshan. He was born into a Zoroastrian family and was raised in the village of Jay, a province of Fars in Iran. In his quest to seek God, he spent a number myriad years in servitude to different priests until his path crossed with a Christian priest who told him about the Prophet of Islam living in Medina. Upon hearing this, Behbood left for Medina and eventually was able to meet the Prophet. Afterwards, he converted to Islam and was named Salman Farsi. The Prophet of Islam further honored him by stating, “Salman is my Ommat.”[81]

Oveys Gharani and Salman Farsi had one similar trait: they both inwardly cognized God, the Prophet, and the Imam of their time. As such, the ‘Oveyssi’ school’s underlying teaching is that anyone in any location can cognize God. Throughout the last

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[80] Ali b. ‘Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al*-Mahjub (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014), 84.

[81] Seyed Modjtaba Akhavi, *Cognizing the* Self, (Riverside: MTO Publications, 2004), 253.

fourteen centuries, seekers in the path of enlightenment have been placed under the instructional guidance of a Pir. The Pir, like a gardener tending to its plants, gradually guides the student through various phases of personal and spiritual growth and development. Once the student has successfully attained enlightenment and achieves the rank of Master, the student will receive the cloak of guidance from his Pir, and devotes his life to teaching and guiding interested devotees. The method of the passing of the cloak represents two significant elements in the teachings of the Holy Prophet, which compose the method of instruction in the Oveyssi tariqa: 1) cognition must take place inwardly and 2) cognition must be confirmed. Wearing the wool cloak was a reminder not to surrender to earthly absorptions. As the Holy Prophet had declared, La Illaha Ila Allah, meaning that reaching this state means that no other but God is in one's heart. The complete lineage of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order is recorded in a number of different references, including a chart produced by Tehran University. Since the chart cannot be shrunk to fit within the margins of these pages, I have included multiple close-ups of the whole chart.[82]

In the twentieth century, a unique event occurred. Hazrat Mola Jalaleddin Ali Mir Abolfazl Angha, the first of the Angha Pir's, received permission to teach from the Oveyssi school's Pir of the time, Agha Abdol-Ghader Jahromi. In light of this new succession, four other Sufi pir's at different orders recognized Hazrat Mola Jalaleddin Mir Abolfazl Angha as the teacher of the time and delivered their individual cloaks of

[82] Appendix I, 87.

guidance to him. As a result, all four orders, which had at one point in history diverged, united once again under the Oveyssi order and under the scholarship of Hazrat Angha. These lineages include:

- Agha Mohammad Jasebi, the caliph and successor of Haj Mojammad Jafar Kabootar-Ahangi, in the Maktab Ma'roufi lineage,[83]
- Zahir-al-Islam Mir Ayneddin Hossein Dezfouli in the Ne'matollahi lineage as well as the Nourbakshi lineage,[84]
- And Agha Seyed Hossein Ghorayshi in the Zahabi lineage.[85]

The complete silsila of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order can be viewed in twelve volume hardback book written by Dr. Mohammad Mohebbi, entitled, Aghtab-e Oveyssi: The Chronology of the Oveyssi Masters.86 which covers the biography of the Oveyssi masters from the time of Hazrat Imam Ali to His Holiness Hazrat Salaheddin Ali Nader Angha. The first eleven of the twelve volumes have been published thus far. Dr. Mohebbi conducted extensive research and presents documentary evidence and original references to the materials, pictures, people, and places references in these volumes. Additionally, the works and publications of all the Sufi masters of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order are also included after their biographies. [87]

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[83] Tehran University, *Islamic Sufism Genealogy* (Tehran University Publications, 1998).

[84] Ibid

[85] Ibid.

[86] Mohammad Mohebbi, *Aghtab-e Oveyssi: The Chronology of the Oveyssi Masters* (Riverside: MTO Publications, 1998-2012).

[87] Ibid.

Current and Previous MTO Sufi Masters

Hazrat Salaheddin Ali Nader Shah Angha

The present Pir of the MTO School of Islamic Sufism is Molana Hazrat Salaheddin Ali Nader Shah Angha, known to his students simply as Hazrat Pir. Hazrat Pir was born on September 30 in Iran. Growing up he did not limit himself to esoteric disciplines and sacred sciences (i.e., the science of letters and numbers, alchemy), but he expanded his knowledge to other disciplines such as physics, mathematics, astronomy, astrophysics, quantum mechanics, biophysics, philosophy, poetry, and architecture.[88] After decades of constant studying under his father, the 41st Sufi Master of the school, Hazrat Pir's was formally confirmed and announced as the successor. On September 5, 1979, and at the young age of twenty-five, Hazrat Pir was presented with the Cloak of Guidance. Although some may find it odd that four generations of Sufi masters have come from within the Angha family, Hazrat Pir was always given the same treatment as the other students.[89] It is noted that they all received the same education and teachings,

[88] "Appointment." MTO Shahmaghsoudi ®. Accessed August 5, 2019. http://mtoshahmaghsoudi.com/sufi-master/appointment/.

[89] Mohammad Mohebbi, *Aghtab-e Oveyssi: The Chronology of Oveyssi Masters*, 10

though the results of the teachings differed based on each individual's love, devotion, truthfulness, and obedience to the Sufi path.[90]From the date of his appointment, Hazrat Pir carried his duties, which included the construction of the first official Sufi center in the city of Karaj, twenty kilometers North of Tehran. Before the establishment of this physical center, the Pir's instructions were only available to a handful of students and the sessions were held in a private residence.[91] Upon the change in regimes in Iran, Hazrat Pir immigrated to the United States and expanded the sacred teachings to a wider audience. As a result of his deep commitment to spread the message, MTO has developed into an international non-profit organization with over 40 centers worldwide and 500,000 students.[92]

Hazrat Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha

Hazrat Shahmaghsoud Sadegh Angha, the forty-first Master of the Oveyssi school, was born on February 4, 1916 in Tehran, Iran. From birth, Professor Angha, as he was titled, was surrounded by the greatest minds in Sufism, for both his father and grandfather were also Sufi Masters of the school. He was trained in various disciplines such as: philosophy, theology, poetry, mathematics, physics, astronomy, and alchemy. After decades of rigorous training and commitment to Sufism, Professor Angha achieved

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[90] ibid, 15.

[91] Nader Angha, *Theory "I": The Inner Dimension of Leadership* (Riverside, CA: MTO Publications, 2006), 92.

[92] Kate Darby Rauch, "New Home for a Sufi Meditation, Cultural Center in South Berkeley," Berkeleyside, March 03, 2019, accessed April 3, 2019, https://www.berkeleyside.com/2018/06/04/new-home-for-a-sufi-meditation-cultural-center-in-south-berkeley.

enlightenment and was consequently designated as the succeeding Sufi Master in 1962. The teachings of Professor Angha created a new chapter in Sufism and this discipline was now accessible to seekers around the world. It was his wish for his son, the current Pir of the school, to expand the tariqa and teach individuals throughout the world about this beautiful and poetic discipline. Thus, due to Professor Angha's grand contributions, the school is known as Maktab Tarighat Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi, School of Islamic Sufism.

Dr. I. Shata, a Professor of Literature at Cairo University in Egypt, dedicated research to the Oveyssi School of Sufism. Dr. Shata spoke with Professor Angha and stated that during the sessions, each meeting was protracted hours and hours, yet he never fatigued because Professor Angha's extraordinary spiritual awareness and boundless knowledge distinguished him clearly. Further, Dr. Shata noted that Professor Angha's book, *Psalm of the Gods*, is a "loud cry to invite all beings to free themselves from the mundane attachment which are the heavy burdens of sins on their shoulders."[93]

In 1974, Hazrat Shahmaghsoud Sadegh Angha was made a member of the International Multidisciplinary Research Association (IMRA), who had submitted a series of questions regarding sophisticated biological scientific issues to Professor Angha.[94] The answers that were provided to the association are gathered and published in a book entitled, *The Hidden Angles of Life*. Dr. Grisell, the General Secretary to the I.M.R.A at the time, relayed: "Hazrat Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha's vast knowledge

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[93] Molana Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha, *Dawn* (Riverside: MTO Publications, 2000), 43.

[94] Molana Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha, Hidden Angles of Life (Riverside: MTO Publications, 1975), 4.

and extensive experience in mathematics, physics; particularly relativity theory, astrophysics, quantum physics; physical chemistry, biochemistry, alchemy, philosophy, literature, and other sciences reflect his infinite and comprehensive knowledge and wisdom."[95] Like his father and grandfather before him had done, Professor Angha formally designated his son, Hazrat Pir Molana Salaheddin Ali Nader Angha, to be the forty-second Sufi Master and his successor.

The Khaneghah

The Khaneghah literally translates to "House of Present Time." Similar to traditional education, where a student attends school to receive lessons from a teacher, students of Sufism attend a khaneghah. Historically, when an individual desired to seek self-cognition but was unable to attain it independently, he or she would turn to the khaneghah for spiritual guidance. Within a khaneghah, an individual is expected to set aside social ranks and acquired knowledge and turn with humility to the khaneghah to discover the inherent knowledge, which is boundless and limitless, through the presence of the pir and the practice of dhikr. The "*-gah"* is the moment in which the individual is completely presented and focused in his or her heart. It is this moment of presence and ultimate connectedness that is required to further one's journey of self-Truth.

The Dallas khaneghah is situated in the suburb of Frisco, TX, roughly 20-miles North of Dallas. The khaneghah is adorned with high gates and a guard house, built after the increase of vandalism to the building in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Upon entry

[95] Molana Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha, *Dawn*, 40.

into the expansive property, the flowers and trees that have been planted around the building and in the gardens quickly give off a light fragrance.

Upon arrival at the khaneghah, one takes off his or her shoes and leaves them outside. This represents the leaving behind of all worldly belongings and attachments. While in khaneghah, the individual attends to his or her spiritual self with complete concentration and presence. Discipline and order are the basis of a seeker's, journey. This is why one manifests order in all aspects of everyday life, including outer appearances. The seeker wears a simple white outfit with no pattern in khaneghah, because one has left the transient patterns behind to discover a deeper level of one's being. One is not just reflecting the predominant trends of society. The outfit is white and the goal is to be pure. As such, one's outward and inward calmness saves oneself from distractions and leads the seeker to tranquility and peace within.

With total presence, the seeker focuses on his journey. Khaneghah provides him with a suitable environment for practicing the principles that will enable him to free himself from his instabilities and desires. The true personality of the seeker is gradually developed in khaneghah, so he can maintain and expand his state of balance, peace, and tranquility into all aspects of his everyday life. In other words, he experiences the true meaning of being present. That is how he truly becomes the "child of his time," and discovers the true meaning of Khaneghah as being the "House of Present Time."

Inside the khaneghah, there is an amphitheater-like seating for the students. The students are divided by gender, with the males sitting on one side and the females on the other.

Chapter IV. Oveyssi Order Beliefs and Practices

Prayer

Etymologically, in Islamic Sufism, prayer or al-salat, means remembrance of God and submissiveness, *dhikr u inqiyyad*. However, the correct usage of the term applies to the five prayers which God has ordered to be performed at five different times, and which involve certain preliminary conditions: (1) the purification outwardly from filth and inwardly from lust; (2) that one's outward garment should be clean and one's inner garment undefiled by anything unlawful; (3) that he place where on purifies one's self should be outwardly free from contamination and inwardly free from corruptness and sin; (4) turning towards the qibla, the outward qibla being the Ka'ba and the inward qibla being the Throne of God, by which is meant the mystery of Divine contemplation; (5) standing outwardly in the state of power (*qudrat*) and inwardly in the garden of proximity to God (*qurbat*); (6) sincere intention to approach unto God; (7) saying "Allah akbar" in the station of awe and annihilation, and standing in the abode of union, reciting the Quran distinctly and reverently, and bowing the head with humility[96]. One must prostrate oneself with abasement and make the profession of faith with concentration. It is the salute of annihilation of one's attributes.[97]

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[96] Sadegh Angha, *Al-Salat: The Reality of Prayer in Islam* (Riverside: MTO Publications, 1998), 20.

[97] 'Ali b. 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al*-Mahjub, 301.

The Outward Prayer

While the formal ritual of prayer, or *salat*, is based on the Sunnah (tradition), the obligation for any Muslim over seven years is derived from the Holy Quran, which mentions the word 67 times, and considers it one of the basic characteristics of religious behavior in general.[98] In a Sufi context, the *salat* creates the presence of God that enables the worshiper to speak to Him directly. This is analogous to the Holy Prophet's *mi'raj*, the worshiper transcends the ephemeral world during *salat*.

Salat can be performed individually or in communion with others. Among the communal prayers are the Friday prayer, and the prayer of the festivals of Id al-Adhha and Id al-Fitr. Salat has to be said in Arabic and has to be performed in a state of ritual purity (ghusl)[99]. The worshiper must turn in the direction of Mecca (*qiblah*), and formulate the intention (*niyyah*) of performing the prayer he wants to perform by naming it. Salat must be performed five times a day at fixed intervals. The number of rakats that one should pray differs amongst schools of Sufism and Islam. The Oveyssi tariqa follows the following pattern:

1. The Morning Prayer consisting of two raka'at, and takes palce at dawn and extends until the sun approaches
2. The Noon Prayer consists of four raka'at, and is performed when the sun has reached its zenith
3. The Late Afternoon Prayer consists of four raka'at, and is performed when the shadow of objects equals their height.

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[98] Sadegh Angha, *Al-Salat: The Reality of Prayer in Islam*, 37.

[99] Sadegh Angha, *Al-Salat: The Reality of Prayer in Islam*, 36.

4. The Sunset Prayer consists of three raka'at, and begins after the sun has disappeared beneath the horizon.
5. The Night Prayer consists of four raka'at, begins after the beginning of night, and preferably is ended before midnight.

The Inward Prayer

In Islamic Sufism, a practitioner must pray with presence of heart. Presence of heart means presence in the heart with all inner powers and all mental and spiritual faculties so that in seeking God, one is steadfast and no thoughts, good or bad, can interfere, and one is fully committed to the intent of seeking God[100].

Ablution

Ablutions, washing before prayer, is necessary. The outer meaning is the cleansing of the body from dirt and contamination; the inner reality is the cleansing of the self from impurities, from mistakes, sins, self-importance and worldly desires. Physical cleanliness shows "…respect toward God and inner purification is for achieving closeness to God because God looks at the believer's heart."[101] Professor Angha states that washing the hands signifies washing ourselves of all that is prohibited, and denunciating worldly attachments and desires[102]. Washing the head signifies washing away all unlawful,

[100] Sadegh Angha, *Al-Salat: The Reality of Prayer in Islam* (Riverside: MTO Publications, 1998), 26.

[101] Ibid, 28.

[102] Ibid.

forbidden, doubtful thoughts and concentrating the mind on union with God and affirmation of His Oneness. The washing of the feet signifies purification from past wrongs and firmness of step on the journey to God. The order and motion of the ablutions align the body's electromagnetic field.[103]

The outward meaning of purification in prayer is the cleansing of the body and clothing from contamination; its inner reality is the purification of the self from misdeeds, sins, and faults of character, and the purification of the heart from the love of the world and all other than God.[104]

Hazrat Mawlā al-Muwahhidīn Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī (peace be upon him) while beginning his ablutions would say: "In the name of God and by God, O my God, accept my repentance and accept me among the pious," for repentance is the return with absolute purity from all worldly involvements.[105] When washing his face, he would say: "O God, shine Thy light upon my face when faces are in darkness, and do not take Thy light away from my face when faces are lit by it."[106] This indicates purify of intention and the truth of devotion." While washing the right hand he would say: "God, give me my book in my right hand and the eternity of paradise in my left hand, and have mercy in judging me."[107] While washing his left hand he would say: "God do not give me my book

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[103] Molana Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha, *Al-Rasael* (University Press of America: Lanham, MD, 1986), 23.

[104] Ibid, 24.

[105] Ibid, 29-30.

[106] Molana Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha, *Al-Rasael,* 30.

[107] Ibid, 31.

in my left hand, nor from the back of my head, and do not make it a chain around my neck; I seek refuge in Thee from the flames of fire."[108] While washing the head he would say: "God, cloak me in Thy grace and make Thy abundance, forgiveness, and eternity my clothing and my shield."[109] While washing the feet he would say: "God make my steps firm on the way to Thee when steps falter, and turn my efforts in the direction that pleases Thee." When his ablutions were over, he would say: "God I beseech Thee for the completeness of ablution, of prayer, of contentment and of forgiveness."[110]

Therefore, the intent of ablution is to be purified completely from all wrongs. This means washing the hands of all that is prohibited; and absolute awareness with all of your being to God; and renunciation of all worldly attachments and desires of the self; and turning to God in sincerity.

Tamarkoz®

Tamarkoz® is a practice that unites the body and mind with the spirit that was developed thirty years ago by Hazrat Nader Angha.[111] It is the only system which encompasses the following components: physical flexibility, posture exercise, correct breathing, mental focus, concentration of forces, relaxation, meditation in the heart,

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid, 34.

[110] Ibid.

[111] "Sufism: The Way of Love," Conference on Medicine and Religion, accessed March 16, 2019, http://www.medicineandreligion.com/sufism-the-way-of-love.html.

healthy diet, positive thinking, and serenity.[112] This specific mode of meditation was registered with the U.S. Patent Office in 2009. The process of Tamarkoz® creates a sensation of happiness and enhances awareness of the body and emotional state, aspects that is commonly overlooked in daily life. The basis of Tamarkoz works by utilizing the human body's electromagnetic system. The electromagnetic energy centers are activated, enabling their fields to become balanced and unified.[113] This specific practice utilizes the physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects of an individual. In some forms, it includes Movazaneh® a movement balancing practice developed by Professor Nader Angha. Movazeneh® movements direct concentration of the mind to a state of collectiveness and activates electromagnetic centers in the body, which are said to develop spirituality in an individual.[114]

According to the teachings of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order, there are several important energy centers in the human body. It is through the practices of Tamarkoz, prayer, and dhikr that a practitioner harmonizes these centers. The main center resides in the heart and is called the Source of Life.[115] There are an additional twelve magnetic sources which are: the Solar plexus, the three nodes of the heart, thymus, throat center, the third ventricle in the brain, third eye, the gray layer of the brain, the anterior fontanel

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[112] "How Does Tamarkoz® Work?" Tamarkoz, accessed August 25, 2018, http://tamarkoz.org/tamarkoz/how-does-tamarkoz-work/.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Habib Larijani, *Movazeneh: the Art of Sufi Balance and Harmony: the Forgotten Horizon* (Riverside: MTO Publications, 2005), 100.

[115] Ibid.

of the brain, brain stem, and coccyx.[116] The emphasized center and the topic of most publication is the Source of Life, which is in the heart.

Although the health benefits of some forms of meditation are well-established in scientific research, little has been published on Tamarkoz®. One preliminary study indicated that it reduced stress in heart patients. Another larger study performed on students at the University of California, Berkeley proved that Tamarkoz® reduced perceived stress, decreased heart rate, increased positive emotions (i.e. love, compassion, awe, etc.), and increased spirituality in its participants. Students from the University of California, Berkeley were recruited by researcher Dr. Nasim Bahadorani for an 18-week quasi-experimental study with pretest-posttest and follow-up in three groups. Assessments were conducted with blood pressure, heart rate, the 10-item perceived stress scale, the 38-item dispositional positive emotions scale, and the 16-item daily spiritual experiences scale in a Tamarkoz ® group, a wait-list control, and a third group utilizing the campus health centers stress management resources. [117] Additionally, the researcher required all participants to providing saliva samples to determine changes in salivary immunoglobulin A and salivary cortisol. The results showed a significant increase in positive emotions and daily spiritual experiences, and reduction in perceived stress and heart rate in the experimental group compared to the two control groups.[118] Though half of the participants in the Tamarkoz® group were atheists and agnostics, they experienced

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[116] Ibid, 50.

[117] Nasim Bahadorani, "Implications of Tamarkoz® on Stress, Emotion, Spirituality and Heart Rate - Full Text View," U.S. National Library of Medicine, accessed September 18, 2018, https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT03489148.

[118] Ibid.

increases in daily spiritual experience. [119]Thus, this study concluded that this technique is not limited to those who self-designate as religious or who declare a religious affiliation. Further, the results demonstrate that the practice and techniques are not bound by limits of gender, religion, race, or social status.

Dhikr

Dhikr is a standard practice in Islamic Sufi orders and specifically in the Oveyssi order. Dhikr is that by which a person seeks closeness to God. Hazrat Imam Jafar Sadegh, the sixth Shiite Imam, once said: "Pure is he who has deemed the heart of the 'Airf (gnostic) to be the vessel of dhikr, the heart of the pious the vessel of reliance, the heart of the believer the vessel of satisfaction, the heart of the meek the vessel of contentment, and the heart of the worldly the vessel of greed."[120]

The dhikr in the Oveyssi order is performed in a group setting, usually in the beginning and conclusion of the weekly session. The dhikr leader can be male or female and often more than one dhikr is practiced.

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[119] "Returning the Soul to Psychology, an Islamic Sufi Perspective," Conference on Medicine and Religion, accessed March 4, 2019, http://www.medicineandreligion.com/returning-the-soul-to-psychology-an-islamic-sufi-perspective.html.

[120] Molana Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha, *Al-Salat: The Reality of Prayer in Islam*, 10.

Eight Principles of Sufism

In the book, Wealth of Cognition (*kanzol-soluk)*, Hazrat Nader Angha presents the eight principles of Sufism as follows:[121]

1. *Dhikr*: to remember –remembering God at all times
2. *Fikr*: to think, meditate –being in the state of awareness and wondering
3. *Sahar*: to awaken –awakening of soul and body
4. *Jui'*: to hunger – having exterior hunger (mind) and interior hunger (heart) to obtain the truth and to persist in the search
5. *Somt*: to observe silence –ceasing to think and talk about worthless things
6. *Soam*: to fast –fasting of body from food, mind from attachments, and soul from desires
7. *Khlavat*: to observe solitude – praying in solitude, externally and internally
8. *Khidmat*: to serve –dissolving in the Truth of the master and dissolving in the Truth of existence, God.

The purpose of these principles is to help facilitate the student's journey of self-cognition, by first promoting awareness, and then control of the physical, mental, and emotional desires, appetites, attachments and dependencies. With the integration of these principles in daily life, the student will gradually feel a greater sense of inner and outer balance, as he is no longer controlled by the external and natural tendencies.[122]

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[121] Molana Salaheddin Ali Nader Angha, *Kanzol-Solouk (Wealth of Cognition),* (Tehran, Iran: MTO Publications, 1986), 33-34.

[122] Ibid.

Sufi Psychology

The Sufi Psychology of M.T.O Shahmaghsoudi is commonly regarded as the science of the Soul. It is a way of expanding the current limitations of psychology to encompass the entirety of the human being.[123]Though the principles of Sufism each individual can come to know his or her innermost self, the self which is much more than simply thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Sufi Psychology is a method to reacquaint each individual with their true identity, the "I", which is the source of strength, resiliency, joy, and peace. In doing so, one moves past the habitual patterns of behavior, repetitive thought processes, and emotional reactivity to discover harmony, balance, and joy from within. As a result, outward relationships with family, friends, and community are expected to also improve. Although there now is more research being conducted on Sufi Psychology by other institutions, the Oveyssi order was a pioneer in this field. In fact, a student of the order, Dr. Lynn Wilcox, established the Sufi Psychology Association ® where the two fields of psychology and Sufism are taught through conferences, seminars, and symposia hosted throughout the year.[124]

Gender and Hijab

Female involvement in Sufi orders is not unique to the West, however their levels of participation and leadership opportunities differ amongst the orders. Annemarie Schimmel dedicates a chapter in her book, *My Soul is a Woman,* to highlight notable Sufi

[123] Sufi Psychology Association - Information, accessed January 6, 2019, https://www.sufipsychology.info/information.

[124] ibid

women throughout history. She notes, "in the early years women were not only female disciples of great Sufi masters, but they also participated in community gatherings devoted to recitations from the Quran and to dhikr."[125] The Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi stands as one of the few Islamic Sufi orders in the West that not only includes the participation of women but also promotes their leadership. Many of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi khaneghahs throughout the world have enlisted women as the center managers.

With regard to religious dress for women, the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order does not require mandatory covering, or *hijab,* in either the weekly sessions or in daily life. The teachings highlight three definitions of a hijab: (1) a veil of ignorance; (2) spiritual cover; (3) as woman's clothing. This order teaches that a hijab that is prevalent in Islam actually infers a veil of ignorance, that separates a seeker from attaining submission and union with God. The veil of ignorance includes attributes such as materialism, egoism, envy, and desires that block the light from shining in the heart of seekers. Furthermore, it is the belief that limited perceptions create veils. Limited perceptions involve committing acts, such as prayer, without understanding the reality of the words. With respect to hijab's definition as a spiritual or inner cover, the order teaches that all seekers must present a shield, or *hijab*, as they begin their journey to cognition. This metaphorical hijab should act as a shield that protects the seeker from surrounding chaos and from one's own negative qualities.[126]

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[125] Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2003), 42.

[126] Molana Salaheddin Ali Nader Angha, *Theory "I",* (Riverside: M.T.O. Publications, 2002), 87.

A final definition of a hijab is attributed to the veil worn by women. Along with scripture-based arguments, some scholars believe that a head covering should not be compulsory in Islam since it predates the revelation of the Holy Quran. For instance, Leila Ahmed in her book, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, states that the veil was heavily used in the Christian Middle East and Mediterranean regions at the time of the rise of Islam.[127] She further notes that the hijab existed in Arabia prior the Prophet's time and was connected with social status, as it was commonly used among Greeks, Jews, and Assyrians. Another scholar, John Esposito, professor of Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, illustrates that veiling and the seclusion of women in early Islam were adopted from Persian and Byzantine societies and were later viewed as expressions of Qur'anic norms and values.[128] Additionally, he claims that the Quran does not instruct seclusion of women and actually emphasizes the participation and religious responsibility of both men and women. Additionally, al-Ghazali declares in his book *Sunna Between Fiqh and Hadith,* that all traditions that function to prevent women from functioning in public are the remnants of jahiliyya and oppose the spirit of Islam.[129] He further states that women were equals at home, in the mosque, and on the battlefield at the time of the Holy Prophet of Islam.

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[127] Leyla Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 5.

[128] John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path,* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 98.

[129] Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Sunna Between Fiqh and Hadith* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1989).

Chapter V: Results

Weekly Sessions

Students in high school or university are required to attend their class, listen to lectures given by a professor, one who is an expert in a given field, and are assigned assignments to harden their understanding of the subject matter. Similar to this, students at the Oveyssi order are encouraged to attend weekly lecture sessions at their local khaneghah. Although there is no attendance sheet by which students could be questioned on their attendance levels, the Sufi pir has made it clear that missing more than a few sessions will cause one to delineate from their path and prohibit progress.

The sessions at the Dallas khaneghah are conducted on Sunday afternoons. Students are encouraged to be seated thirty-minutes prior to the start of the session. On November 11, 2018, my first day entering through the gates of the khaneghah as an observer rather than a practitioner, I noticed the serene tranquility and absolute silence that surrounded the building. This was something that I had never paid much attention to. I had seen the plants, trees, and fragrant flowers planted throughout the property yet I had never truly seen them. I neglected to notice their colors or how they sway with the wind. Upon opening the intricately crafted wooden khaneghah doors, I was met with smiling faces. As I took off my shoes, greeters in the front of the building warmly smiled and welcomed me and all students who were entering, whether or not we were new or returning students. After I was warmly greeted, another individual in the shoe room took my shoes and placed them on the shelves. Afterwards, I made my way through a large hallway and into the main sitting area. As I was walking, I noticed that although many

individuals were working around the Khaneghah and performing certain acts of service, *khidmat*, such as sorting the shoe room, preparing the kitchen, or seating individuals, there was essentially zero noise amongst the people. Everyone was focusing on themselves and trying to not make sounds so as to distract others from their concentration.

The sitting area resembles an amphitheater, with rows of open seating divided into two halves. The men are seated on one side and the women on the other, all dressed in white clothing that covers their arms and legs. All of the students are also required to wear white socks as well. I was unable to find primary sources to explain the reasoning behind the requirement of socks. As stated previously, unlike most other Islamic Sufi centers, the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order does not require women to wear headscarves, though a modest dress code is implied. Upon sitting down in the lecture area, I was either met with the beautiful, melodic tunes of a Sufi dhikr or absolute silence. If I arrived an hour before the sessions began then I would be sitting in silence, attempting to meditate and prepare myself for the session. However, if I arrived thirty-minutes prior then the lecture hall would be filled with the sounds of dhikr. The composition of the congregation was a mixed crowed. The first few rows consisted of younger students. The congregation included people of color, Iranians, Iranian-Americans, Americans, and Europeans.

The sessions would begin with the recitation of the "Fatiha va Niyaz," the surah al-Fatiha from the Holy Quran, with an additional series of recitation specific to the school and in the Farsi language. Afterwards, the Quran would be recited in Arabic, Farsi, German, French, and English allowing all participants to understand its message.

At this point, Hazrat Pir would begin the lecture. It should be noted that given the numerous centers around the world, the Oveyssi order's website implements a webcast that broadcasts Hazrat Pir's weekly lectures for all interested students. The webcasts are of no cost to the viewer. When Hazrat Pir is unable to physically attend a given center, the webcast from the week are broadcasted for those gathering in the khaneghah. The goal upon doing so is to ensure that all students around the world, whether or not they have access to a khaneghah, are given the same lessons and have access to the same teachings. There is no other goal or incentive but to guide others to attain self-knowledge.

Hazrat Pir conducts his lectures based on the Socratic method, often by posing a question and asking a student to elaborate on his or her answer. Every week the lecture starts in different ways. Some weeks, Hazrat Pir may base his lectures on heavily scientific findings while other times he may lecture at a rudimentary level, allowing the students to attempt to understand the material as simply as possible. No matter the method that is used to convey the teachings, the underlying theme of the lectures remains the same: the importance of knowledge of the Truth and how to do attain it. The methods always remain the same. I find it remarkable that Hazrat Pir has lectured at least 150 times a year for the last forty years, each time presenting a new way to illustrate the method of self-cognition. It seems these different presentations are given with the hope that one of them will strike a light within a student's heart and that he or she will begin their journey.

After Hazrat Pir finishes the lecture, he instructs for the beginning of dhikr. On average, three dhikrs are conducted and the content of each differs from another. The students will often practice dhikr for 40 minutes before ending the session with another

recitation of the "Fatiha va Niyaz." The dhikr is led by either a male or female, beginning with a slow melody and slowly progressing to a faster rhythm. The Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order's method of dhikr consists of sitting with one's legs crossed. The spine is instructed to be straight and both hands are placed on the top of one's knees. When the dhikr begins, the students simultaneously move from the left to the right, from the heart center to the right. As they move, their head also rotates in an "infinity" motion. When I was able to sit in the back rows, I noticed that most of the students were unable to move in the "infinity" motion and would simply move from the "left" to the "right" in a linear motion.

The Underlying Theme of the Lectures

The core of Hazrat Pir's teachings and publications revolve around his intention to express the essence of self-cognition and scientific explorations using the simplest explanations.[130] Sufism reveals itself through time in each era in its own unique way and is neither confined by words nor restrained by social customs. According to the teachings, the great mystical traditions, faiths, and religions share the same basic truths of wisdom, peace, love, unity and self-discovery. Although the messengers of these religions may have been different people at different time, the source of this knowledge is "One" and they seek to experience it.

The fundamental theme in the teachings is self-knowledge, unity and oneness, and perfection and harmony. Sufism is primarily based on the goal of self-knowledge, which

[130] Moha Ennaji, *New Horizons of Muslim Diaspora in Europe and North America,* 93.

is believed to be synonymous with knowledge of the Absolute, the Divine, the Universe, Existence, Enlightenment or God. This true identity, which the Sufis actively seek, existed before the body or personality came into existence. Consequently, aspects of the human being, such as gender, race, ethnicity, religious background, and geographical location are superficial differences that tend to distract, divide, and consume society. These matters are irrelevant in search of Truth because they are variables that always change. According to Hazrat Pir, Truth is that which is constant and unchangeable. Therefore, it is only by knowing yourself that one will be freed from limitations and false boundaries that one has created between oneself, others, and Existence. It is easy to use the word "enlightenment" without truly understanding what it means. I would like to explain my understanding of this word. However, I would like to note that whatever I have learned, or think that I have learned, is attributed to my perceptions of the lessons that I have received from Hazrat Pir by attending the khaneghah over the course of my life.

I have come to understand that enlightenment is the successful return to oneself. It is the act of removing all attachments and philosophies to return to a state of calm. For example, from the moment that I was born, I was given an identity that included a name, a race, a gender, and a religion. However, those were identities and labels given to me by others. As a newborn, I did not comprehend the meaning of these words or that they are even words. As I grew older, these identities molded and suddenly a plethora of more labels became attached to me: student, athlete, daughter, cousin, etc. However, none of these labels described me. Rather, they were descriptions of an outer "me," the "me" that people see or assume. Therefore, it is my objective as a student in this path to rid myself

of all of the unnecessary "veils" or "labels" that I have created for myself. It is not an easy task or one that can be accomplished within a day or two. Often times, it seems impossible to let go of these attachments that have become embedded in me. Some of the attributes that act as veils include: the ego, self-centeredness, ignorance, arrogance, etc.

Meditation

Throughout the weekly sessions conducted in the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order, one teaching consistently occurred: the theoretical and experiential must combine in order to produce Knowledge. In the case of Sufism, the experiential can be found through meditation and dhikr. Since my research was not one based in the sciences, I used the only other metric of measure that was at my disposal: myself.

As previously discussed, the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order's method of mediation is Tamarkoz®. Although there are various methods incorporated, the easiest and most basic is to sit cross-legged on the floor, or with a support of a pillow, and clear the mind of all thoughts. I have notated my experiences with my meditation below:

Days 1-3

- The first day of my meditative practice started on Sunday, November 11, 2018.
- For the first few days, I determined a set time that I would sit down to start my meditation. I wanted to meditate at the same time each night in order to gauge how disciplined I can be.

- At times, I found it difficult to sit down for meditation, especially if I was in the middle of studying, watching television, or speaking with family or a friend. However, I managed to put aside my activities and make myself sit down.
- In the beginning, I found it exceptionally difficult to stop my mind from wandering. The moment I sat down, I was bombarded with thoughts about the past and the future.
- Additionally, I felt immediate grogginess when I began my practice. This was an odd sensation because I would be energetic before preparing for my practice but then suddenly feel like I needed to sleep. I was unsure if this was a side-effect of laziness or if my body had become conditioned to associate my sitting down with the calm of meditation.
- Days prior to the start of my practice, it was difficult for me to fall asleep. However, from the first night, though I felt that I was unable to concentrate or clear my thoughts, I fell asleep almost immediately upon entering my bed.

Days 4-6

- In order to keep my meditative practice at the same time, I created an alarm on my phone. Although the alarm was helpful in reminding me of my practice, I still managed to sit a few minutes late during this specific time period.
- My mind was still flooded with thoughts, though they were easier to handle and set aside. I noticed that certain images kept reoccurring. It was an odd experience since many of these images were not witnessed prior to my practice and were “screenshots” of the past.
- I felt agitated. My feet began to sting and tingle, my knees were aching, and my back suddenly hurt. It was hard for me to remain seated and often had to take quick breaks

to lie down on my back. I attempted meditating while laying down but found it even more difficult to concentrate. I also feared falling asleep.

- Sometimes when my back ache was too severe and a floor cushion was to no avail, I would conduct my practice by resting on a wall. I noticed that this method actually distracted me more, so I only used it once.

Days 7-14:

- I was unable to sit down for meditation at exactly 11:00 pm each night. Some nights I would be away from home or otherwise unable to sit down for meditation. In the event that I missed my designated time, I would still meditate later that night.
- The body aches were easier to manage. I tried to reposition my feet so to prevent them from tingling or stinging, though it did not make much difference.
- On day 13, I missed my meditation time completely.
- On day 14, I tried to restart my meditation schedule but noticed how much of a difference one missed session makes in one's practice. Unlike the previous night's where it had become increasingly easier to push aside my thoughts and concentrate at least for a few seconds, day 14 felt like a reverse to the beginning.

Days 15-30:

- As my practice continued, I felt a sense of calm and emotional healing. I would wake up in the mornings with more energy, even if I had only slept for a couple of hours the night before.

- I felt more connected to my body and as though my views on myself and the world had changed.
- Instead of moving at a quick pace and trying to get tasks accomplished quickly, I found myself taking my time and wanting to perform my tasks with complete thought rather than quick action.
- Although it had become more routine to sit down at my designated time by this point in my practice, it was still something that I had to mentally prepare myself for.

Dhikr

In order to test whether my meditative practices helped me during the dhikr, I measured the following items: (1) ability to concentrate on the words, melody, and rhythm of the dhikr; (2) abnormal sensations and feelings.

Session 1

My first session of dhikr for this research was on November 11, 2018. Although I committed the acts that are required for the dhikr (moving from left to right, tapping the knees), I was unable to hold my concentration. I reminded myself to focus on my breathing and to clear my mind of all thoughts. However, it became increasingly difficult to do so. The sounds of others became distracting for me. Some individuals would be singing too loudly, while others would tap their knees too hard. These distractions prohibited me from remaining clear of thoughts.

Session 2

During the second session of dhikr, I had gathered seven days' worth of meditative practices. I noticed that it had become easier to tune out all other distractions. The sounds of the students singing louder than usual or tapping harder than required no longer prevented me from my practice. When the distractions became too loud, I quickly had to remind myself to concentrate on my own practice. I did not feel any unusual sensations.

Session 3

During the third session of dhikr, I sensed that it was becoming easier to follow the melody and beat. I felt free from all thoughts and bodily pains. It was no longer difficult to sit cross-legged for an extended period of time, probably due to my meditative practices. The dhikr session seemed to go by quickly even though three dhikrs were performed. I did not feel any unusual sensations. However, after the practice, I felt a sense of peace and happiness.

Session 4

During the fourth and final session of dhikr, I felt completely immersed in the melody and rhythm. It was easier to concentrate on the words and to follow the rhythm led by the dhikr leader. Additionally, there was a feeling of serenity and happiness that I had never felt before and I felt saddened that this would be my final dhikr session.

Concluding Thoughts on Meditation and Dhikr

As I started this journey, I did not know what to expect. The biggest challenge in my practice was putting aside any and all expectations. However, this was harder to do than imagined. I felt myself becoming frustrated when I was unable to sit in silence or concentrate without diverting my attention to a noise in the room or the tingling of my feet. I had to constantly remind myself that there were no expectations. It was interesting to see what I had imagined in my mind as a result of my practice and how much this illusion affected my practice. Then it made me consider every other aspect in my life where my illusions have clouded the reality. I noticed that during this given time period, I began to appreciate silence and yearned for a moment to go outside and walk in nature. I felt calmer and at peace in these moments than ever before. Previously, I would relax by watching a movie or by browsing the internet. Yet after starting my practice, I noticed that I was more interested in writing as a method of relaxation.

Conclusion

The Sufis bridge the divide between the societal development of religions and self-journey towards the cognition of God by implementing and teaching Islamic concepts such as prayer. The increase of membership into Eastern religions and individualist spiritualties has enabled those who are dissatisfied with current religious institutions to become exposed to alternative methods of worship. Amongst these alternatives is Islamic Sufism, which has recently expanded throughout the U.S. and offers considerable internal diversity based on differing interpretations of Islam and cultural traditions. These Islamic Sufi orders differ from one another in their lineages, teachings, practices, organizational structures, and leadership. However, these differences

allow interested students to find an order that resonates with them and more importantly, a teacher who they can lean on for spiritual support as they embark on the perilous flight to self-cognition.

This study highlights the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order, an Islamic Sufi order that is not widely discussed or mentioned in academic literature, and its approach to implementing Islamic Sufism in the United States. Although this order's lineage can be traced to the time of the Holy Prophet of Islam however, its exposure to the West occurred in 1980 when the first khaneghah was established in Los Angeles, CA by the current Sufi Master, Hazrat Salaheddin Ali Nader Shah Angha. Since then, the order has expanded to include more than 35 centers worldwide. The composition of its congregation consists of Iranians, first and second generation, as well as Americans and Europeans.

The success of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi's order can be primarily attributed to the Sufi Master's ability to portray Islamic Sufism in a unique manner. Hazrat Pir's style of instruction highlights the unrestricted essence of the reality of religion by teaching that Reality is attained through knowledge of the self and not through codified religion. One example of this unique instruction is the Sufi Master's openness to other Abrahamic religions. Although this order is termed as the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi School of Islamic Sufism, its membership includes individuals from varying religious backgrounds, such as Christianity and Judaism. This reason is attributed to the essence of Sufism according to the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order, which is the fluidity of Reality. From the weekly sessions, I have gathered that this order views all the Abrahamic prophets as teachers of their time. Each prophet was sent forth to teach the community a set of instructions from

God. These teachings build upon each other and concludes with the Prophet of Islam. In order for an individual to cognize Reality, it is required of one to engage in prayer and other Islamic practices. However, formal conversion involves the recitation of the Shahada, "la illaha ila Alla wa Muhammad rasoul Allah" (I bear witness that there is no god but God and Mohammad is His messenger). the order believes that a simple recitation of this phrase does not equate true understanding of its meaning. One must internally cognize the truth of this statement. However, the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi teaching is that the Shahada is not simply an affirmation of God's existence but the internal cognition that God is the only true reality. It is act of witnessing that there is a unity in God in the depth of one's heart. Additionally, Hazrat Pir's method of instruction is by incorporation of the Socratic method, encouraging students to actively participate in discussion during the lectures in order to solidify their understanding of the teachings.

A second enduring facet of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order is its inclusion of women, which is rare in an Islamic Sufi setting. Although Western cultural norm highlights women actively participating in public events, most Islamic based orders or sects limit the participation of women or physically separate them. However, in the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order, men and women are considered unconditional equals. Although the seating arrangement in the khaneghahs have men and women seated in separately, they are sitting opposing each other. This same composition is witnessed during group prayer. In other Islamic Sufi centers, or Islamic centers generally, men and seated in front of women or in different rooms. Additionally, leadership positions such as center managers, dhikr leaders, Quran *ghavvals*, and all other services, *khidmats*, are held by both men and women. These positions do not involve a hierarchy, as each person does

the task that they are assigned. Furthermore, women in the Oveyssi order are not required to cover themselves with a hijab. According to the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi teachings, there are three different meanings of a hijab: (1) hijab as a veil of ignorance that covers the truth; (2) hijab as a spiritual shield or cover; (3) hijab as women's clothing.

By participating in the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi's activities and practices, the students are pursuing a spiritual transformation towards self-annihilation and the attainment of Truth. Their approach does not involve ascetic exercises. In fact, it is encouraged that students live in society but do not take part or adopt the behaviors of society. Unlike other Islamic Sufi orders that may encourage living with minimal needs, this order considers it an important aspect of learning to not be attached to material needs but to live the best standard of life. Furthermore, the aspect of participation in social and community is considered to be integral. This is demonstrated by the order's dedication to local programs, such as interfaith discussions and community outreach.

Through partaking in societal activities, the students in the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order are surrounded by potential distractions and material gains. Many of these distractions are hidden and it is only the student who must be aware of their thoughts and actions so that they may not be driven into an erroneous path. To make spiritual practice, students are encouraged to recognize and internalize the fact that the material world is temporary and that the only lasting satisfaction is contained in achieving Knowledge or cognition. The teachings of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi further state that a student cannot solely rely on the theoretical components within the teachings. Although it is encouraged to understand the fundamentals of religion and to constantly research and read about topics that exist within this vast field, a student must also

incorporate an experiential learning process to truly understand the essence of Sufism. Experiential activities are used to reduce one's attachment to the material concerns and to solidify the student's understanding of the theoretical components. For instance, a student in a student in a classroom may learn about the composition of water, study the structure of its molecules, and read about its importance in the human body and environment. However, the student would be unable to truly understand its concept without drinking or touching it. Similarly, experiential learning is required in order to accurately understand Islamic Sufism. Otherwise, Islamic Sufism would simply be an academic discourse and would lack the subjectivity and delicacy required to understand it. These experiential practices, some of which were discussed in this study, include: remembrance (dhikr), prayer, fasting, meditation (Tamarkoz®), and self-examination.

The Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order has developed new methods of meditation such as Tamarkoz® and Movazeneh® and provides workshops led by professionals trained by Hazrat Pir to instruct interested participants throughout the world. Additionally, this order is a pioneer in the field of Sufi Psychology and established the Sufi Psychology Association®, where numerous conferences are conducted by students of the order who are experts in the field of psychology. The goal of this organization is to link the two fields of psychology and Sufism together and provide new methods of therapy.

Due to my inability to procure access to study the students at the Dallas khaneghah, I altered my research to an ethnography with participant observation. Although I had been a lifelong member of the Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order, this research allowed me to see this school of Islamic Sufism in a new light. I was encouraged

to break the limits and boundaries that I had established for myself and to pay attention to details that I had previously missed. It made me wonder whether my inability to see the weekly sessions, Tamarkoz ®, and dhikr practices in this new light was due to my laziness or ignorance. Regardless, this research has become a stepping stone for my personal journey and the results of my practices have encouraged me to attempt to remain disciplined so that I can experience the teachings that I have been listening to.

All in all, Sufism in the United States remains as an almost untapped opportunity for academic study and research. Future writings could highlight other Sufi orders and provide detailed analyses on their history, activities, practices, and beliefs. Comparative studies between these orders and could potentially facilitate an understanding of common themes that are important for Sufism today. Researchers who belong to specific orders may find this endeavor particularly useful due to their unique perspectives and access to information. It would also be of value to continue studying Sufi approaches to living in Western societies and if Sufi orders in the United States have contributed to the acculturation of Islam.

The Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi order provides a time-honored, spiritual path grounded in Islam, guidance from a highly trained, knowledgeable, and kind spiritual teacher, and self-transformative practices that allows students to remove one's veils of ignorance. It presents an alternative for individuals familiar with Abrahamic traditions who are dissatisfied with the codified religions and seek to establish unity with God. It offers a dynamic spiritual path which is individualistic and builds upon theoretical foundations and experiential learning in order to reach Knowledge.

Appendix I.

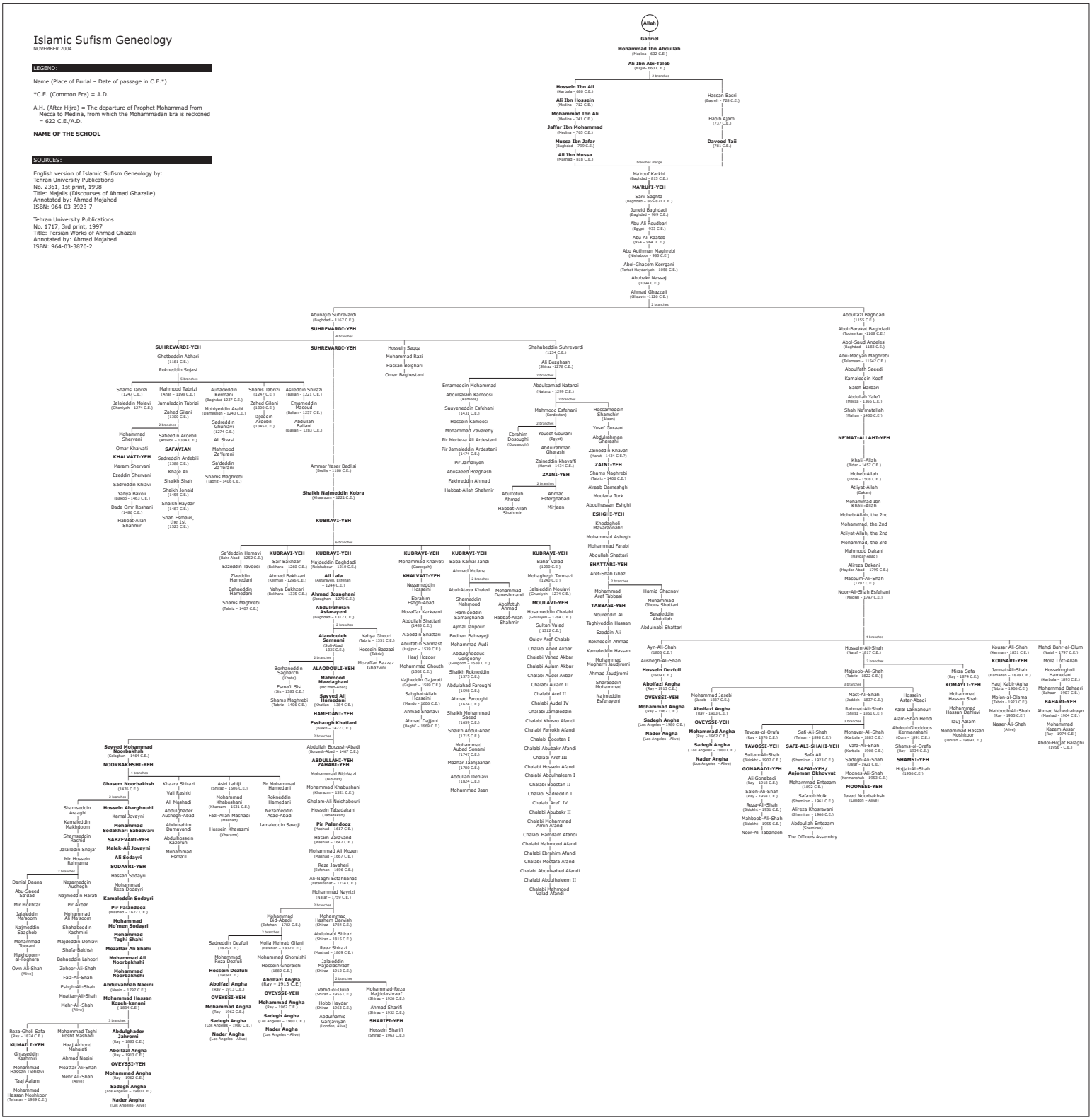


Figure 1 Islamic Sufism Genealogy as published by the University of Tehran

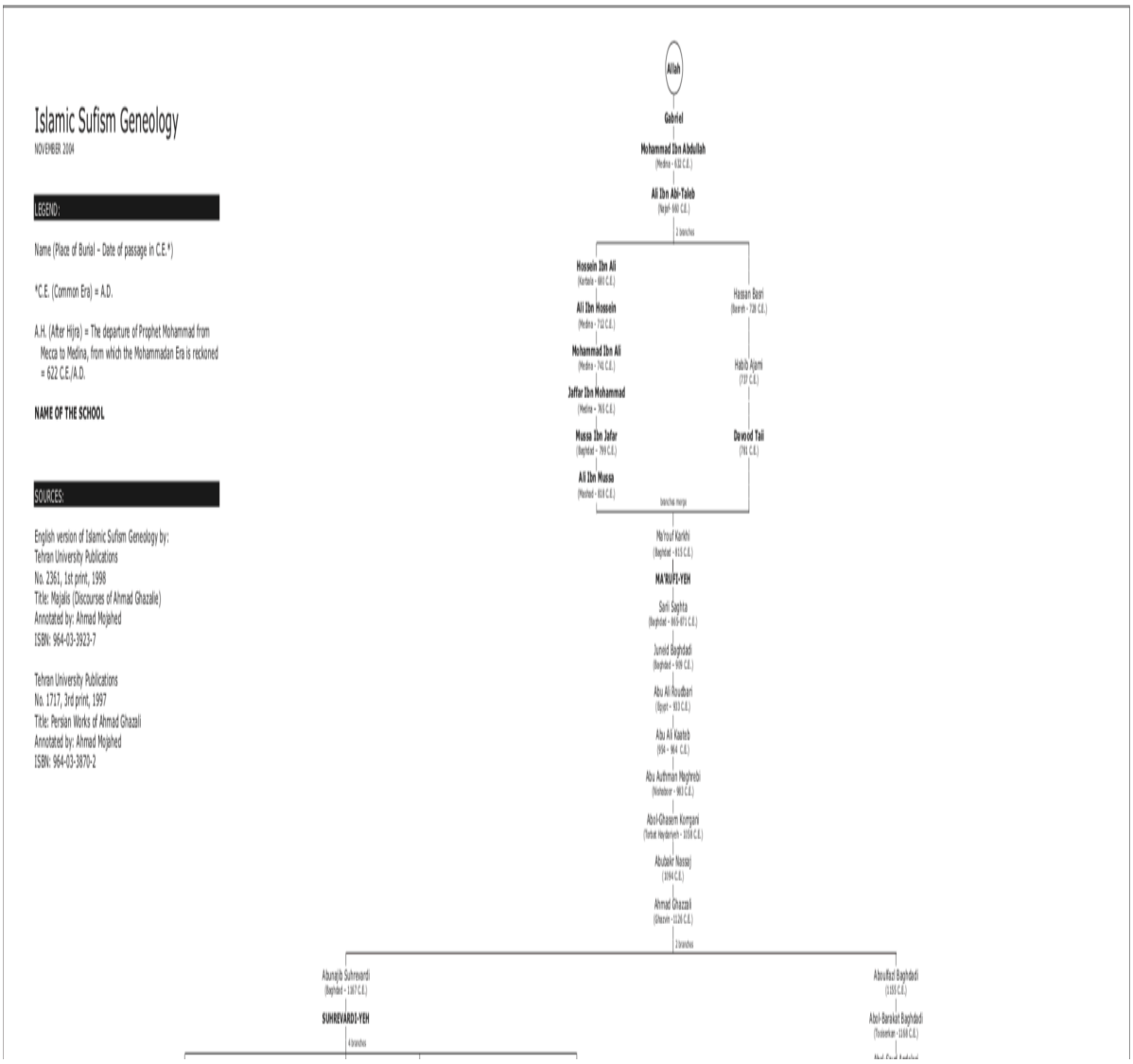


Figure 2. First Section

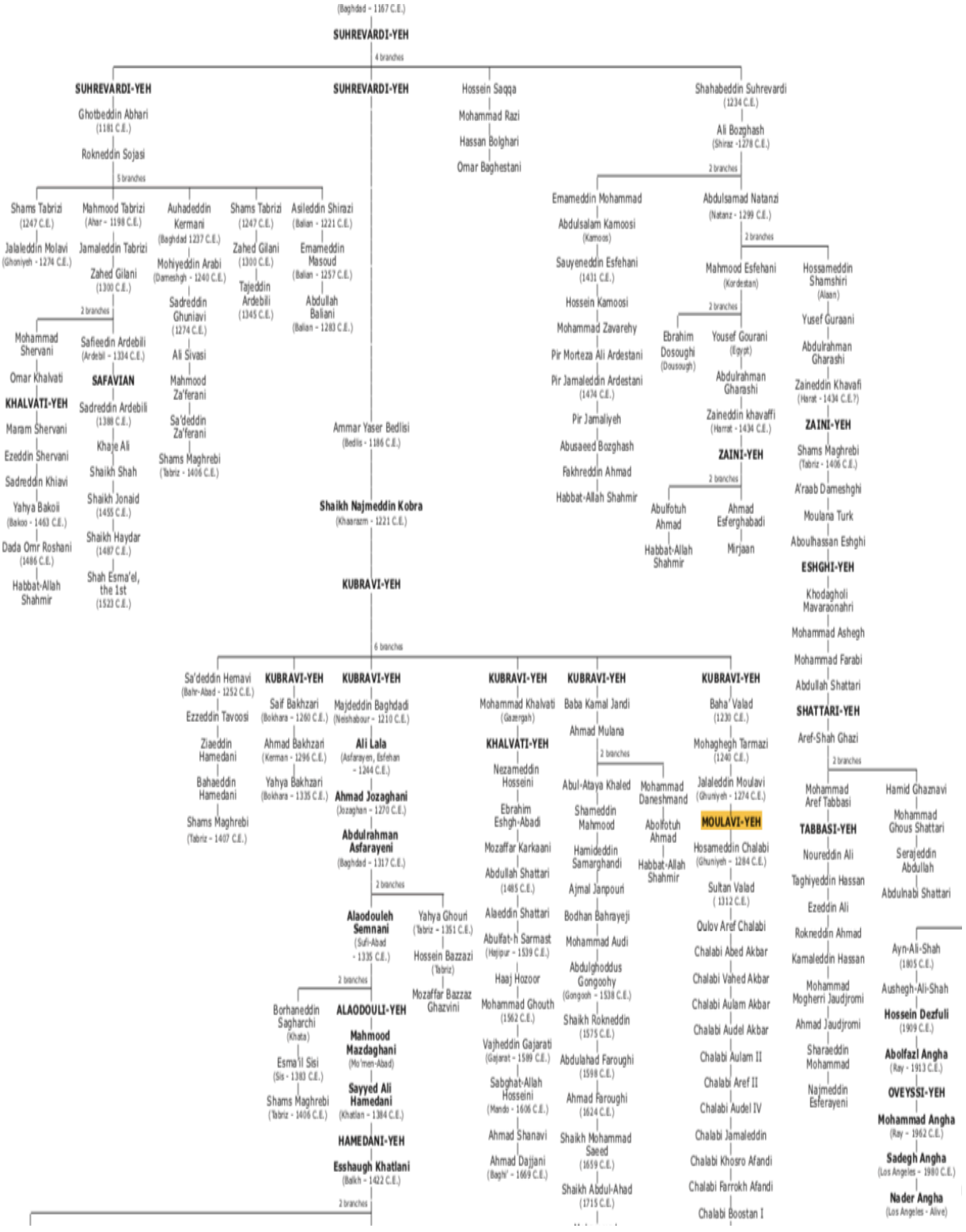


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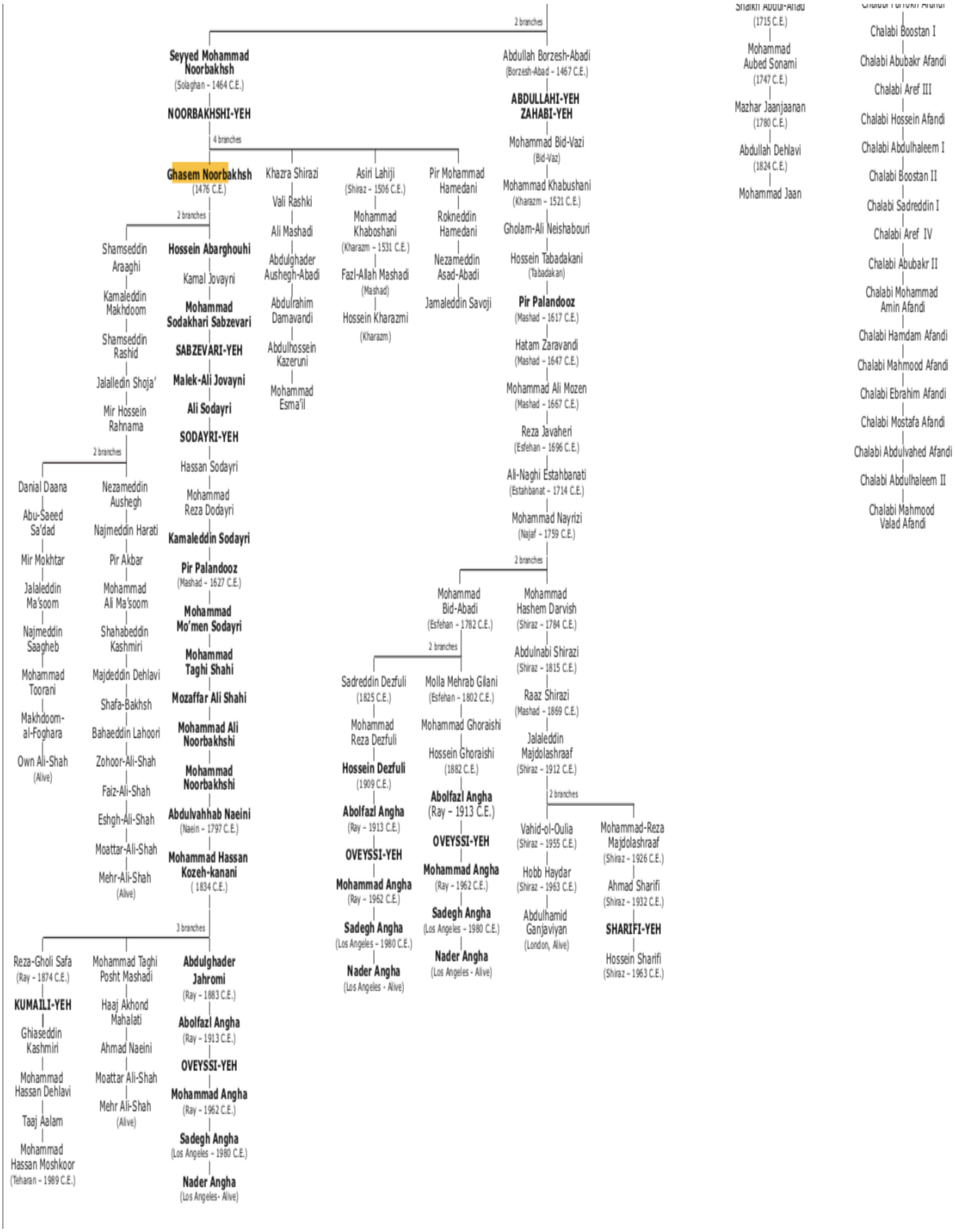


Figure 4 Third Section

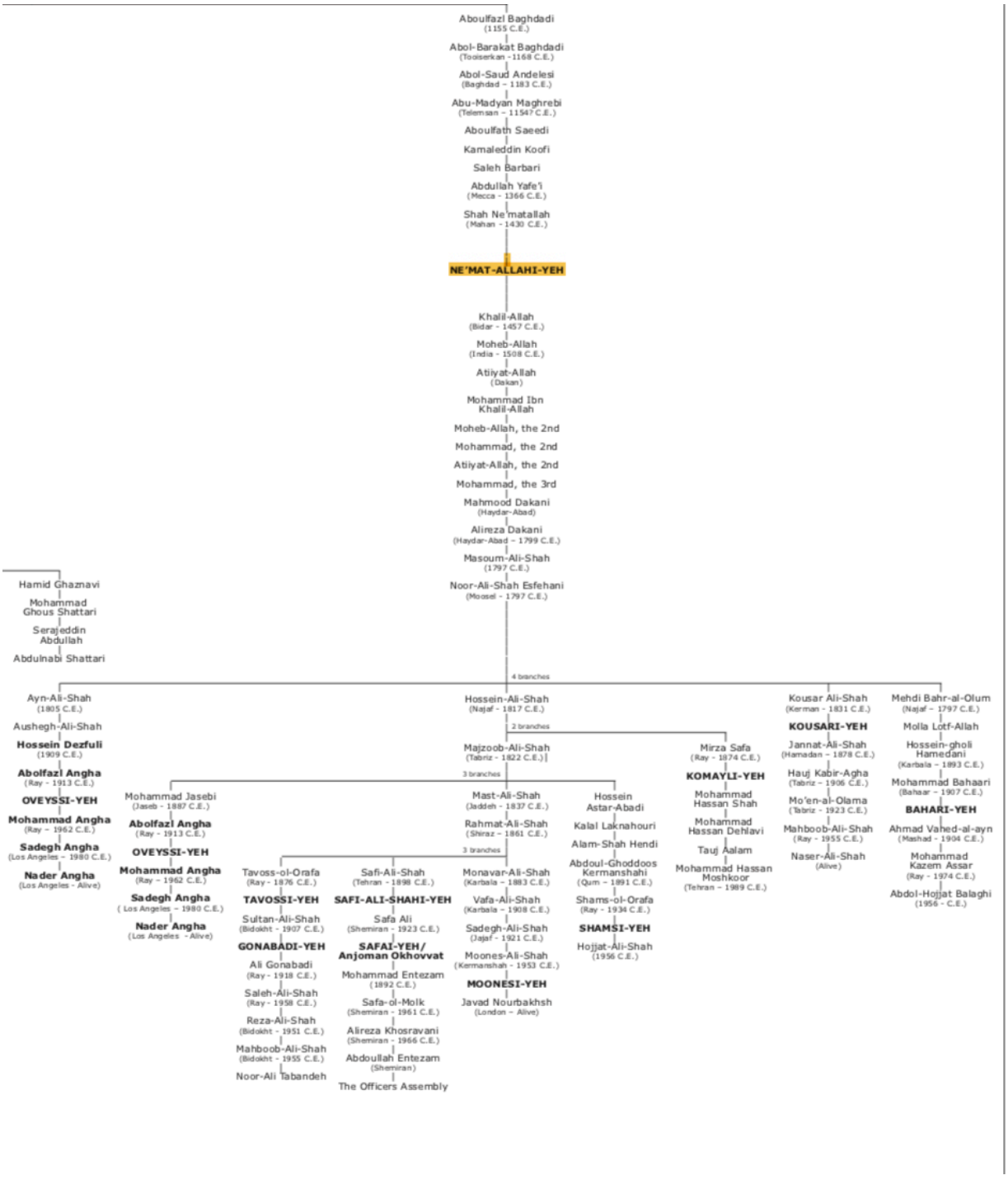


Figure 5 Fourth Section

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