

# Religion: sufism essay sample

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



The word Sufi is Arabic for wool which symbolizes purity in Islam. Sufism is an Islam's mystical tradition defined by scholars as a science that aims at making the heart focus on God only and thus cleansing oneself. It is practised by a Sufi. It is thought to have originated from the Islamic Prophet Mohammad who passed it on to Ali, his cousin or Abu Bakr, the father in-law. Though some modern proponents argue that this mystical tradition is universal, the mainstream Sufis believe that Sufism only exists in Islam. It involves rules that govern repentance of sin and observing good character. One must find a teacher so as to enter into this way of religion. It is thought to be a divine transmission of light to the student rather than the normal word of mouth communication to the ear. It cannot be learnt through books. In the early days, Sufism was thought to be internalized only in Islam and no other way. Others were of the perspective that through recitation and meditation of the Qua'ran, Muslims' Holy book, then Sufism proceeds. Some other scholars held the opinion that Sufism was strictly the imitation of Muhammad way of life that connects the heart to the divine intervention. Traditional theorists believed that the teachings in Sufism were passed on from Prophet Mohammad to those who could understand the teachings through the divine intervention of God. From these early teachers, the teachings have been passed down to students over centuries. Only a little portion of these teachings are found in books. Most of the teachings are only relayed through teachers to the identified students. In the early Middle Ages, Sufism was introduced into devotional orders. Over time, these devotional styles changed and new traditions developed depending on the way the masters understood the subtle knowledge, referred to as gnosis.

Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058 - 1111) was a Muslim psychologist, physician, jurist and theologian amongst many other responsibilities he held. He is still a popular scholar amongst the Muslims world over. Ghazali influenced the Europeans, Jews and the Christian scholars through his arguments (Horne 100). He is renowned for changing the perception of early philosophies in Islam from the Islamic metaphysics that was influenced by Hellenistic and ancient Greek philosophies. He focussed it on an Islamic philosophy that were determined by God or by the intermediate angels. He was highly respected for his Islamic discussions and debates. Ghazali significantly contributed towards a systematic view of Sufism and its acceptability in the mainstream Islam. According to Horne, Ghazali established the orthodox religion and insisted on genuine Sufism which he perceived as the only way of achieving the whole truth (100).

Thinkers like Al-Farabi could not evade criticisms from Ghazali. Al-Farabi referred to ancient Greeks like Aristotle to write his own works. Ghazali was of negative opinion on this since it would undermine the truth, which Muslims held to the utmost because the ancient Greeks were not believers. He argued out that these works of pagans would mislead the believers in case they were included in the works of the Muslim writers. Ghazali's ideas were later affirmed by other Western writers such as David Hume who clearly suggested that such pagan theories should be outrightly rejected and the truth be sought (Rhemana). Al-Ghazali thought of the terms knowledge and science as equals. He talked of two kinds of knowledge that have to be known at the beginning of reasoning (intermediate) and the other after it has

been given some thought (theoretical). Eternal knowledge according to this scholar belonged to Allah alone unlike the former two.

Al-Ghazali brought a change in the ancient Islam perception of teleology. The ancient Muslims thought of God as the sole material cause of this world. The Muslims believed in total teleology and believed that God knew everything even before he created the earth and there is nothing such as after or before creation. This drew a lot of controversy in the past. It was difficult to justify punishments for any wrong doing if God already knew about it. But after Al-Ghazali argued this theory out, many Shia's theologians abandoned it.

Ghazali described God as eternal and completely infinite with all the freedom. He distinguished this from nature which according to him is finite, temporary and with necessity. He argues out the fact that human was forced to make a choice. He therefore classifies human action as volitional, natural and free. From this argument, he came up with a theory he referred to as 'kesb' where he argues that any human has to pass through nine knowledge stages to get to the truth. the scholars understood this to mean that with God, everything becomes a necessity but they become freedom to human.

Sufism has stood the test of time and is still highly practised. It has seen a resurgence in the modern world with more and more people, not only the Muslims, embracing it. Al-Ghazali still remains popular in the Islam world with his teachings still being upheld.

#### WORKS CITED

<https://assignbuster.com/religion-sufism-essay-sample/>

Horne, Charles F. ed. The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East. Vol. VI, New York, Claud Field, 1917, pp. 99-133.

Rehman, Adeel M. Muslim Sufi Mystics. Stanza Ltd, December 27, 2007. (Retrieved September 18, 2008 from <http://www.relijournal.com/Islam/Muslim-Sufi-Mystics.69113>).