

The Feminine Dimension in Islamic Esotericism

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Abstract

This article explores the aspects of Islamic spirituality and esotericism that contain a feminine dimension. Although it touches briefly on the controversial and complex status of women in the Muslim world, its primary aim is to draw attention to the inner or Sufic dimension of Islam, as opposed to the more patriarchal, conservative and legalist views on the position of women. The article examines pre-Islamic perspectives on the goddess and the feminine in Arabia, the Middle East and Iran before turning to the mysterious, interior domain of the feminine in her various guises as the preeminent heart of esoteric Islam.

Introduction

The feminine in Islam has often been neglected, owing in part to the Western focus on the juridical, socio-economic and political status of women in Islam today. Militant, fundamentalist and hyper-masculinized interpretations of Islam are contributing factors. Yet, it is worth noting that these factors represent a deterioration of what was once a fairly progressive attitude toward women. Not only did women play significant roles in Islam during and after the life of the Prophet, they were granted “women’s rights” in Arabia 1400 years before women in the West. Theosophist and women’s rights activist, Annie Besant underscored this fact in her book on *The Life and Teachings of Muhammad*, when, in 1930, she opined, “It is only in the last twenty years that Christian England has recognized the right of woman to property, while Islam has allowed this right from all times.”¹ A number of historians, Islamic scholars, and international affairs writers support these views, with one going so far as to describe the Prophet Muhammad as a feminist in his day, for establishing the Islamic law dictating women’s rights.²

These rights were based on an effort to address concerns about women, their relationship and

collaboration with men, and to emphasize their social function and spiritual significance. The majority of these concerns had their basis in Qur’anic doctrine, which held that Allāh created everything in the Universe in pairs.³ The pairs, including males and females, served complementary functions, which resulted in a division of social functions.⁴ But men and women were seen as having equal stature, especially with respect to their relationship to God. Islamic injunctions and prohibitions applied equally to members of both sexes. Men and women were expected to observe the religious standards relating to sound thinking, personal conduct, moral behavior and social affairs. The Qur’an advocated for women’s right to education, and one may note here that the oldest functioning, degree-awarding institution in the world is the University of al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco, founded by Fatima al-Fihri, daughter of a wealthy merchant, in 859—300 years before the University of Paris. Qur’anic verses also granted women the right of individual ownership and the unrestricted right of inheritance along with the right to accept or reject a marriage proposal as well as the right to divorce⁵—rights that were previously denied to many women in pre-Islamic Arabia.

It must, however, be pointed out that not every scholar agrees on the levels of oppression and abuse in the culturally diverse Arabian societies before the advent of Islam in 610 CE.⁶ Newer, more feminist views maintain that Islam presents a distorted narrative with respect

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to the barbaric behavior toward women that was said to be present in some pre-Islamic societies. Pre-Islamic, indigenous peoples in Arabia believed in a polytheistic, eclectic, but disorganized mix of gods, goddesses and tribal deities. Various customs and beliefs are likely to have led to women's empowerment and the assurance of freedoms in some tribal societies, while in others they were responsible for oppression and the appalling treatment of women and children.⁷ Some of these same scholars go on to point out that a number of Muhammad's pronouncements as well as passages in the Qur'an were and are responsible for demoting the social status of women,⁸ and that the shift from polytheism and goddess worship to a strict "monotheism may have occasioned a misogynist trend."⁹

It is not the author's intent to provide a definitive argument in support of one narrative or another, or to serve as an apologist for the lamentable status of women in Islamic societies. Valid arguments can be made to substantiate differing perspectives. Statements from Muhammad and passages in the Qur'an can be quite contradictory in encouraging equal rights and respect for women. That being said, it cannot be denied that in a number of pre-Islamic tribal systems, women, children and the underprivileged were deprived of basic human rights, and that the introduction of Islam in Arabia brought about a number of positive changes within some societies where Islam allowed for a transition from tribal affiliations to more comprehensive and consistent moral and religious virtues and principles.¹⁰ Pre-Islamic practices that degraded and oppressed women were not only condemned, Islam actively sought to restore women's dignity and humanity and raise them to a more equitable status.¹¹

To be sure, some Islamic societies have failed miserably to live up to these guidelines. Yet, contrary to popular beliefs and stereotypes, the feminine always has played and continues to play an essential, life-giving role in esoteric Islam, a role whose existence is largely hidden from view. What this role is and the many-faceted shapes that it takes, especially in Su-

fism, the esoteric dimension of the faith, is the focus of this article.

Pre-Islamic Foundations

Al-Lāt and Allāh

In the centuries before the emergence of Islam, the nomadic peoples living in Arabia practiced a complex mix of indigenous polytheistic beliefs that differed from region to region. Their gods and goddesses were tribal deities, venerated ancestors, spirits or djinn, sacred places and anthropomorphic representations of natural phenomena and the powers of nature.¹² The pan-Arabian Goddess *al-Lāt* (also spelled *Alla*, *Allatu*, *Alilat*, and *Allāt*,) was the chief goddess worshipped extensively in "Nabatean Petra in the North to the Kingdoms of Arabia Felix in the South, including the Biblical Sheba; as far east as Iran and Palmyra"¹³ as well as in Mecca or Makkah.^{14, 15}

According to Laurence Galian, aka Abdullah Muzaffer, who noted the intensive interaction between India and the ancient Arab world in his article on *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, Allāt or Alla are associated with *amba* and *akka* or "mother" in Sanskrit.¹⁶

Swami Sivananda (1887–1963), a Universalist Hindu spiritual teacher, along with a number of others, also maintained that Alla was a Sanskrit word for mother.¹⁷ Galian goes on to connect Alla with *Ila* (in his feminine form), with the consort of Shiva.¹⁸ Vedic mythology depicts Ila as an androgyne known for the ability to change sex. In masculine form Ila was known as *Sudyumna*, one of the kings of the *Suryavanash*—the Solar Dynasty. Ila, in the feminine form, is thought to be the progenitor of the *Chandervansh* or Lunar Dynasty of Indian kings.^{19, 20} Among the old Semitic peoples, as Anwar Hekmat points out in *Women and Koran*, *Il* or *El* was used in various combinations to "designate god or deities."²¹ We are reminded of the Hebrew *Elohim*, *Beth-El* (the house of God), *Emanu-el* and *Israel*, or the Babylonian *Ilu*; the Phoenician *Elos* (Kronos),²² the Aramaic *Alaha*, (sacred unity) the Arabic *ilāhah* (goddess) and Allāh from the contracted form *al-ilah*.

There are, however, different theories about the roles of al-Lāt and other deities, such as Allāh, in pre-Islamic Arabia. Al-Lāt was both the title and the name of multiple goddesses in pan-Arabia. But she was perhaps best known as a matriarchal deity who was also associated with the Moon. The ancient peoples were assuredly aware, on some level or another, that while the Sun was the giver of life to our entire planetary system, the Moon too was associated with life on our planet. This is especially the case, as Helena Blavatsky observed, with respect to the feminine physiological functions, i.e., beginning with the menstrual cycle, the quickening of the fetus, the period of viability and the period of maturation and emergence from the darkness of the womb into the light of existence.²³ Not surprisingly then, al-Lāt was the principal Mother goddess associated with the Moon and fertility. In addition, she was connected with Venus, the “Great Goddess,” the mother of *Hubal* (a Syrian Moon God), the goddess of the underworld, and the Crone goddess of Fate and Time. In certain periods and places the Great Goddess formed a feminine divine trinity consisting of *al-Lāt*, (Mother,) *al-Uzza* (Venus, the Evening Star) and *al-Manat*²⁴ (Fate or Destiny), which was analogous to the Greek lunar deity Kore/Demeter/Hecate.²⁵

Each aspect of the trinity corresponded to a phase of the moon. In the same way Al’Lat has three names known to the initiate: Q’re, the crescent moon or the maiden; Al’Uzza, literally “the strong one” who is the full moon and the mother aspect; then Al’Manat, the waning but wise goddess of fate, prophecy and divination.²⁶

Many of these pre-Islamic deities were worshiped in the form of a square stone, a slab of granite, or a meteorite that fell from the heavens or the stars. Galian remarks that “*Kabylia*, a North Algerian goddess who was turned to stone, was their first Great Mother, and that *Kubuha*, *Kuba*, *Kube* and *Cybele* were the names of other goddesses.”²⁷ He also points out that while “*Ka’ba* means cube, it is close in meaning to *ku’b*—a women’s breast.”²⁸

Before the advent of Islam some Arab tribes worshiped al’Lāt in the form of a white granite cube. In Makkah she was represented in the form of a black stone or cube (*Al-Hajaru al-Aswad*) or *Ka’bah*, where she became a separate deity and the unmatched “giver of life.” But many other gods and goddesses, such as the great Moon God Hubal, who was identified with an aspect of Allāh, as well as al-Uzza, al-Manat, Su’yar (an oracular god), Awf (the great bird god), Quzah (the weather god), and Shams (the sun god), were among the hundreds of deities revered at Makkah.

Allāh, another ancient deity, was the tribal god of Muhammad’s Qurayash clan. According to Najmah Sayuti, Allāh was the Supreme Deity even before the Prophet Muhammad’s mission.²⁹ Hekmat and others hold that he was regarded as being equal to the three goddesses mentioned above before he was generalized as the Supreme Being at the dawn of Islam.³⁰ Some scholars hypothesize that the *Ka’bah* in Makkah has always been dedicated to Allāh, the chief sustainer and creator of all the Arabia tribes,³¹ yet others point out that he seems to have little relevance to the paganism that was practiced there,³² in part, because he lived in the remote, uppermost heaven called *Aliyyin* or *Lahut* and was too great to be interested in human affairs. Hence, it’s thought that he delegated a measure of authority to the lesser gods and goddesses, who were tasked with carrying out various functions. In addition to invoking the lesser deities for succor and aid, the ancient peoples prayed to them to intercede before Allāh, the creator God, on their behalf.³³

The pre-Islamic Allāh has also been described by some sources as a Lunar Deity. This hypothesis is based, at least in part, on Robert Morey’s research on the similarities between pagan moon worship and Islam. Such claims are passionately disputed.³⁴ Nevertheless, many sources postulate that Allāh, the Arabic word for God, was used widely to refer to gods and goddesses in general, hence to the chief *Rabb* or high Lord and to the Lunar Deity. As such, in his role as the Moon God, Allāh was purportedly married to the Sun goddess and together they gave birth to the triple female

deities, al-Lāt, al-Uzza and al-Manat.³⁵ In this complex indigenous pantheon, al-Lāt was also associated with the “Goddess of the Sun,”³⁶ thereby making her the Moon God’s wife. This is why, in various times and places, al-Lāt seems to have been one of the daughters of Allāh, in others she was his spouse, while in others she was the principle deity or Goddess.

The Ka’bah

The Ka’bah or Kaaba (now Islam’s holiest shrine or “House of Allāh or God”), once contained as many as three hundred and sixty statues and paintings dedicated to various deities. A number of these corresponded to the stars, the sun, the moon and the planets, which the ancient Arabs believed were the controllers of their destinies. According to al-Shahrastani, a 12th century Persian historian and Islamic scholar, pilgrims would circulate around the Ka’bah seven times in veneration of the planetary motion of the seven heavenly bodies.³⁷ The Ka’bah also contained many fresco paintings, including those of Abraham and the Virgin Mary and Child. Most of the idols and frescos were removed when Muhammad reclaimed Makkah and the Ka’bah, but some, like the Virgin and her Child, were spared.³⁸

In his article on the divine feminine, Galian explains that:

Makkah was a holy site to the worshipers of *El’Ka’ba* (a goddess). Her worshipers knelt at her symbol, a black stone. This black stone was probably a meteorite... and was once known as the “Old Woman.” Popular tradition related how Abraham, when he founded the Ka’ba, bought the land from an old woman... She consented to sell it on the condition that her descendants should have the key of the place in their keeping. Today the stone is served by men called the *Beni Shaybah* (the Sons of the Old Woman).³⁹

One belief holds that the Ka’bah, purportedly built by Adam, was rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael, Abraham’s first son with Hagar, his wife’s Egyptian maid. Another tells of a visit to the goddess *El-Ka’ba*, this time by Abraham and his wife Sarah, who at age ninety-nine conceived Isaac, her first child, when she and Abraham had conjugal relations there. While

these are interesting stories handed down from the earliest days, many scholars refute these claims. Nonetheless, they speak of the importance of the Ka’bah, and the considerable role of the goddess.

The significance of the feminine can be seen in the structure of the Ka’bah itself with its sacred black stone—the Omphalos of the Goddess—one corner of which is marked by an aniconic yoni that was covered by a veil and dedicated to the goddess al-Lāt or the “Old Woman.” The sacred black stone enshrined in the Ka’bah is set within a silver mounting inside a recess that was once known as the “Haram Sanctuary” or “Temple of Women.” A number of sources maintain that the guardians of the temple and the holy high office were originally women before it was taken over by the male priests or the “Sons of the Old Woman.”⁴⁰ This niche or recess—called the *Mirhab*—is found in every mosque. According to the Qur’an it was in the contemplative solitude of the *Mirhab*, where Maryam or Mary took spiritual retreat, that the angel Gabriel visited her and told her that she was to give birth to Jesus (*Surya Maryam*, Chapter 19). The *Mirhab* is now used as prayer niche pointing to Makkah, but the very top of the niche is still regarded by Sufis as a symbol of the transcendent pudenda of the divine feminine and one of the esoteric secrets of woman.⁴¹

All of the gods, goddesses, idols and spirits at Makkah and the surrounding regions were uprooted when Muhammad unified Arabia in the belief of Allāh, the One God. The Goddess al-Lāt along with al-Uzza and al-Manat were ultimately demonized and linked to *Shaitan* (also *Iblis* or Satan),⁴² but the primacy of the divine feminine continues to exist, albeit in veiled or interiorized form.

Islamic Conceptions of Masculine and Feminine

From its initial inception Islam has always intended to function as a guiding light designed to bring one closer to the Divine through an active and total surrender to Allāh, the One and Only God. In order for such a surrender to take place, the Qur’an, Islam’s cen-

tral religious text, presents a system of metaphysics, cosmology, theology, and law, as well as a code of ethics that allows humanity to live in harmony with one another and all of God's creation. An essential aspect of the entire system necessarily involves the balance and integration of the masculine and feminine aspects into a unified whole. As such, gender relationships between the masculine and feminine aspects are intended to play a fundamental role in Islamic thought.

Qur'anic scripture sees men and women as having been created from a single soul and gives equal spiritual status to the masculine and the feminine archetypes, viewing them as fundamental attributes of the One, which are, like all pairs of opposites, complementary and interdependent. Although masculine and feminine are equals in Islam, they are not identical. As the Iranian Sufi philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-) explains in *The Male and Female in the Islamic Perspective*, the differences between them are not only biological and physical; they are also psychological and spiritual.⁴³ So rather than simply understanding gender as biological categories, inner Islam views the feminine and masculine as "attitudes of consciousness" and as "psycho-spiritual symbolic constructs," which are positive and active with respect to the masculine archetype, and passive and receptive with respect to the feminine archetype.⁴⁴ The differences between the two polarities, according to Nasr, "cannot be only biological and physical because in the traditional perspective the corporeal level of existence has its principle in the subtle state, the subtle in the spiritual and the spiritual in the Divine Being Itself."⁴⁵ He goes on to say that these differences even manifest as "principles within the Divine Nature which are the sources *in divinis* of the duality represented on the microcosmic level as male and female."⁴⁶

Worship of the Mother, the Goddess or the eternal feminine is one of the oldest, most pervasive and important forms of worship on earth. But over the past 2,000 years, the feminine has been cast into the shadows of a religious patriarchy that has done its best to obscure, repress and even malign the feminine spirit.

While polarization and duality exist on the level of the manifestation and have their basis in the nature of the Divine itself, Allāh "is one and not a pair." The idea of gender or duality is not applicable to that which is transcendent and has no physical form, for there is, according to the Qur'an, "none are alike unto Him."

(Verse 112:4) Although Islam is generally depicted as a patriarchal faith, Allāh is not ever portrayed as "Father." Such a conception is entirely inconsistent with Islamic theological doctrine for Islam decries any personification of God. The Qur'an does employ *lah* or Him and *huwa* or He in referring to Allāh, but the masculine

pronouns in Arabic do not necessarily apply to gender. This is in keeping with Islam's defining doctrine—*Tawhīd*—that unequivocally asserts the *Oneness of God*. Hence, all Muslims believe that God is a Divine Unity who is beyond all duality, and "whose multiplicities," as Nasr explains, "are merely a veil."⁴⁷

Allāh, therefore, is neither male nor female. But as M. Ali Lakhani explains in *The Universal Dimensions of Islam*, all the Divine's attributes (*sifat*), which are expressed in the Ninety Nine Names of God, "can be understood as limitless archetypal aggregations of existential realities derived from the Divine Essence."⁴⁸ These attributes or archetypes are complementary and have both a feminine and/or masculine character; as such, they are empirical theophanies or ways of knowing the Divine.

The names of Majesty (*jalāl*) represent the masculine archetypes, while those of Beauty (*jamāl*) symbolize the feminine archetypes. Not only are the Divine's attributes portrayed in terms of masculine and feminine, the universe as an aggregate is often described in male/female terms. Suchiko Murata (1943-), a professor of religion and Asian studies explains: "Heaven is up, dominant, controlling,

and masculine. Earth is down, subservient, accepting, and feminine.”⁴⁹ However, Sufi writings also depict the universe

as a series of contrasting pairs arranged in a hierarchy from God down to the world. In these depictions, the higher and controlling attribute is pictured as masculine, and the lower and receptive attribute is pictured as feminine. But, the gender of a thing is not fixed, because it changes depending on whether we view it as receptive to the higher or active toward the lower (e.g., heaven is feminine in relation to God, but masculine in relation to earth).⁵⁰

The polarities of gender relationships in Islam can also be related to the Taoist concepts of yin and yang, as Murata so competently shows in her masterwork, *The Tao of Islam*.⁵¹ For example, from the perspective of speculative theology and Islamic law, Allāh is viewed as yang—majestic, rigorous and severe. Sufism, on the other hand tends to perceive Allāh as yin, since he created the universe out of his mercy and love,⁵² as Murata maintains. This latter idea is bolstered by the very first line of the Qur’an, which reads: *Bismillaah ar-Rahman ar-Raheem* (I begin in the name of Allah, the most compassionate and merciful), and again in the Hadith or saying of the Prophet: “God’s mercy precedes his wrath,” which appears to give the feminine attributes priority over the Divine’s masculine qualities.

Another important feature of Sufism or inner Islam are the concepts of *zahir* and *batin*. *Zahir*, the active, masculine dimension applies primarily to the outer, evident form and letter of Islamic law, while *batin*, the feminine aspect, refers to the intrinsic and spiritual dimensions of reality, as well as to the *haqiqa*, the reality hidden behind outer appearances and forms. In order for a person to realize Tahwid or the oneness of Being, these two dimensions must be integrated so that a person becomes whole or “holy” and can live, according to Nasr, not on the perimeter or rim, but in the Center where the One resides.⁵³ Such a transformation, which must take place within each individual regardless of gender, is not possible without the integration and balancing of the

masculine and feminine, with the feminine serving as the necessary balancing factor.⁵⁴

For these reasons, and the many others, which will be explored here, the feminine is seen as the essential spiritual element in the esoteric dimensions of Islam.

The Feminine, A Metaphysical Interiority

For Sufis, surrender to God in his jalāl aspects of power, severity, authority, activity, majesty, etc., involves a receptive attitude to the masculine aspect of God. The concepts of acceptance, surrender and receptivity have a deeply feminine character. In Arabic, the very name “Islam” means surrender. The idea of surrender in Islam involves the active masculine struggle against the lower self as well as a consciously and freely chosen submission to God’s Will as means to complete peace, knowledge of God and unity with the Divine. To be a Muslim means that one agrees to surrender to God above all other things. Yet, the feminine concept of receptivity and surrender does not imply indolence or lassitude; on the contrary it involves an active and deep contemplative attitude in the effort to know and become one with Allāh, which is why Ibn al-‘Arabī (1165–1240), believed that women alone were both active and receptive. Surrender is undertaken for the sake of transformation; as a result, it is also seen as a creative act. Hence, surrender is not thought of as weak or passive, rather it is an alignment of the personal will with the divine Will and a “relationship of receptivity to the luminous impact of spirit,”⁵⁵ underpinned by the expression of the soul’s intense ardor or love toward the Supreme Soul or (*Mahabba*) Beloved.

In *Pathways to Inner Islam*, Patrick Laude, professor of religious studies at Georgetown University in Qatar, explains that the masculine aspect in Islam corresponds to the outer dimensions of life, most especially to the formal crystallization of the faith as it relates to *Sharī-ah* or religious law, which originates with men.⁵⁶ But woman or the feminine is viewed from another vantage point, which places her:

... in a pre-eminent position, with a privilege of extraordinary proximity to the divine mystery. This privilege is enunciated in the Qur'an, when woman is envisaged as a keeper of the mystery—*hafiz li-ghayb bi mā hafiza Allāh*.⁵⁷

The notion of woman or the feminine as a “keeper of mystery” (symbolized by the veil) can be looked at from multiple perspectives; for example, Laude reminds the reader that: “there is an understanding that passes understanding.”⁵⁸ This quote refers to the intuition and to the sapiential nature of the heart (*qalb*), but also to an inner orientation toward life, and to what Laude describes as “a communion with the essence of being.”⁵⁹ As “keeper of the mystery” the feminine element also creates the secure receptacle, or as Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee portrays it, “the inner space for relationship”⁶⁰ with the Presence.

For a number of Sufis the interiority of the feminine is also the all-important spiritual support and the means by which communion becomes possible. This is due to the feminine capacity for dynamic love and relationship to creation, to intuitive wisdom and to beauty, which mirrors the divine, and likewise its role as the transpersonal element or Soul, which is both the Universal Soul and the mystical soul seeking union with the Beloved.

Huda Lufti, in an article on the feminine in *Muhyī al Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Mystical Philosophy*, explains that for Ibn ‘Arabī, “Love is a circular movement toward completion.”⁶¹ The “movement of Love brought forth the Inward aspect of the Absolute: through the descending movement of Love, the Inward becomes the Outward, the One becomes the Many.”⁶² It is the “ascending feminine movement of Love,” according to Ibn ‘Arabī, “that retraces the steps of the initial descending movement.”⁶³ Hence, as *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (the *Greatest Master*) maintains, the very first phase in the journey back to completion, is inwardness, or the feminine interiority and alchemical elixir of love,⁶⁴ which reveals, among other things, God’s unconditional Mercy and Compassion, and the perception of divine Beauty along with the

recognition that these are manifest in all of creation.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s fervent appreciation of the feminine⁶⁵ in its spiritual aspect is evident throughout his work and can be seen in other notable passages where he maintains that to know woman is to know oneself: “He who knoweth his [her] self, knoweth the Lord.”⁶⁶

In his *Fusus al-Hikam* (“Bezels of Wisdom” also known as the “Wisdom of the Prophets”), Ibn ‘Arabī goes so far as to claim that:

The contemplation of Allah in woman is the highest form of contemplation possible: As the Divine Reality is inaccessible in respect of the Essence, and there is contemplation only in a substance, the contemplation of God in women is the most intense and the most perfect; and the union which is the most intense (in the sensible order, which serves as support for this contemplation) is the conjugal act.⁶⁷

He maintained further that in woman or the feminine one is able to see the perfect reflection of his or her own spiritual truth, since truth is a blend of both male and female qualities. Taking up this idea, Edip Harabi, the mid 19th century Turkish Sufi, wrote the following in his poem *Man’s World*: “Whosoever calls women inferior cannot reach the Truth.”⁶⁸

Ibn ‘Arabī, whose work extended beyond traditional Sufi boundaries on gender, also viewed the feminine as a *Qutb*, a cosmic pole, pivot or axial figure that symbolizes Divine Knowledge and authority.

The word “women” very well represents the various aspects and nature of the cosmic pole, suggesting as it does multiplicity, nature, form, body, receptivity, fecundity, becoming, beauty, fascination. In short, the feminine symbolizes, microcosmically and therefore in a very succinct way, the very principle of the projected and multifaceted mirror of the cosmic image that reflects to the divine Subject the panoramic beauty of His Own infinite possibility to become, which is nothing other than His own essential Self...⁶⁹

Another Sufi metaphysician and author, Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), also known as Īsā Nūr al-Dīn, wrote that the feminine

surpasses the formal, the finite, the outward; it is synonymous with indetermination, illimitation, mystery, and thus evokes the “Spirit which giveth life” in relation to the “letter which killeth.” That is to say that femininity in the superior sense comprises a liquefying, interiorizing, liberating power: it liberates from sterile hardness, from the dispersing outwardness of limiting and compressing forms.⁷⁰

Schuon goes on to link the feminine with inner-oriented attitude, and the gift of intuition—which he and the other Sufis believed was superior in women—with *Haqiqah*, (truth, or esoteric knowledge), as one of the reasons to justify the elevation of the feminine element.⁷¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, Rumi, Henry Corbin (1933–1978), the Sufi philosopher, theologian and Iranologist, Schuon and others, all identify the feminine as the archetype of Divine Truth and as the all-important inner support and means by which the Sufi can be initiated, via the feminine’s many “interiorizing potencies and liberating graces,”⁷² into the mysteries of Allāh or the One.

The Characteristics and Various Manifestations of the Feminine

The Feminine Names of Allāh

Arabic is a rich and complex gendered language in which there are a considerable variety of possible gender systems. Because the general rules do not always apply, gender assignment is replete with a number of exceptions. Nevertheless, Ibn ‘Arabī and other Sufis believe that the gendered character of the Arabic language implies an ontological aspect, in which the feminine is predominant in the process of creation.

As noted previously, the Ninety Nine Names of Allāh (*Asma ul Husna*), found in the Qur’an and the Hadith⁷³ describe the attributes (*sifat*) of God. These names, which have no independent existence of their own, are seen as

including both the masculine and feminine characteristics of Allāh’s divine essence. The attributes, while mutually existing, can, as we have said, be categorized into the *jalāl* (masculine) and *jamāl* (feminine) names. The first can be said to characterize Allāh’s “God-ness;” the second, Allāh’s “nurturing” Lordship.

Allāh, the One God, indivisible and without a second, is described as both Absolute and Infinite. While many Muslims accept that Allāh has a masculine polarity when viewed in terms of the “Absolute,” the “Infinite” aspect of His nature is often assigned a feminine character and can be likened to the *Mahashakti* of the Absolute due to its unlimited possibilities or potentiality, its mercy and its ability to draw us inward.⁷⁴ As explained earlier, according to the principal teachings of Islam, God’s preeminent attributes are Mercy (*Ar-Rahmān*) and Compassion (*Ar-Rahīm*), to which all the other attributes, such as severity, vigor and wrath, are subservient. *Rahmān* is generally viewed as masculine and *Rahīm* as feminine, however, the root of both words is the Arabic *rahm* or *rahma*, meaning womb. It is the qualities of mercy, generosity, forgiveness, compassion and love, say Qur’anic teachings, which guide human destiny and support its very existence.⁷⁵

Penkalai Katalikkiren, in her article *Islam and the Divine Feminine*, examines two key names in addition to the aforementioned *ar-Rahmān* (Endless or Merciful Love), which speak to the feminine dimension in Islam. The first is *al-Hakīm*—the source of all wisdom. This name corresponds to the personification of wisdom as woman, as in the divine Sophia.⁷⁶ In the Sufi tradition *al-Hakīm* can be interpreted to mean healing wisdom as well as receptivity to the light. With respect to the former, one might say that wisdom is healing because wise and loving action ultimately creates harmony and balance. *Al-Hakīm*, the wise, is one who derives knowledge from Allāh and understands the true nature of things. Hence, this name represents light or the discerning wisdom of the real, and healing wisdom based on the secrets of the Divine Heart and Mind.

The other name, *al-Dhāt* also *al-Dhaat*—meaning Divine Essence is fundamentally be-

yond gender. But because dhāt is classified as grammatically feminine it is sometimes described as more properly feminine than masculine. Najm al-Din Kurba, a 13th century influential Persian Sufi described dhāt as “the Mother of the Divine Attributes.” Ibn‘Arabī not only points to al-Dhāt as the feminine source behind the process of creation; the feminine is also the form in which the essence can be best recognized. These were, for him, among the many reasons why the feminine dimensions predominate. Consequently, as Katalikkiren suggests, al-Dhāt can be seen as the Sublime name for the veiled, inward and profoundly mysterious source or essence behind all manifestation.

Other names, which are thought to embody such feminine qualities as receptivity, empathy, healing, forgiveness, tenderness, reconciliation, nurturing, etc., include: *al-Muhyi* (the creator of Life), *al-Muqit* (the nourisher or source of sustenance), *al-Aliyy* (the exalted or transcendent), *al-Latif* (the subtle mystery of love) and *al-Nur* (light). We can also include *al-Jamil* (divine Beauty), *As-Sabr* (patience), *Wudud* (loving), *Halim* (gentle), *Wahhab* (bestower), and even *al-Khaliq* (the creator in its metacosmic aspect), as well as many others.

Based on Qur’anic teachings Sufism encourages contemplation and reflection upon these names as an aid to understanding and integrating the masculine and feminine qualities. As one contemporary Sufi explains, by balancing the many manifestations and dimensions of the masculine and feminine, one can be led along the path of unity and “taste the truth of *Tawheed*.”⁷⁷

Woman as Creator

Among the attributes discussed thus far those of Mercy (*Ar-Rahmān*) and Compassion (*Ar-Rahmān*) are the primary attributes of the Divine; for it is through divine Mercy and the “breath of the Compassionate,” which the Qur’an says encompasses all things, that the entire world is made manifest. The Divine Names, Ar-Rahmān and Ar-Rahmīn, are the maternal nourishers and protectors of existence. Creation and “God the Creator,” has been assigned a “feminine face”—the face of

the Mother, by some Sufis. Although all Muslims and Sufis believe that the Creator can be described as having feminine and masculine attributes, some Sufis, such as Ibn‘Arabī, point out that all the Arabic terms concerning origin, source of being and creation are feminine.⁷⁸ And this is why he actually refers to Allāh as She or *Hiya*, keeping in mind the Divine Essence or al-Dhat as the source of creation.

He goes on to say that “the Supreme Reality is indivisible, so who says He says She.”⁷⁹ In focusing on the feminine Ibn ‘Arabī stresses its receptivity, “her acted-upon-ness,” (there is nothing in existence that is not acted upon), and the feminine “as the place of seeding, and bringing into being creation and manifestation.”⁸⁰

In *Roots of the Human Condition*, Schuon likens the Absolute to the Universal Mother, the Supreme Productive energy, the irradiation of sanctity and the power of union personified as the divine feminine.⁸¹ Ibn‘Arabī, who had so much to say about the feminine aspect in his writings,⁸² described “Universal nature as the feminine or maternal side of the creative act” and as the “merciful breathing-out of God”—or the *Nafa ar-rahman*.⁸³

Mevlana Jualuddin Rumi (1207–1273) shares many of these same ideas; in *The Bedouin and His Wife*, he writes that: “Woman is a Ray of God’s Light; she is not just your earthly beloved. She is the Creator [*Khaliq*, one of Allāh’s sacred names] —not the created”⁸⁴ Calling attention to Rumi’s views on the feminine as evidenced in the character of the tropes and images through which he portrayed the sacred, and to the many women in Rumi’s circle, Fatemeh Keshavarz, professor of Persian and comparative literature in St. Louis says: “He chose womanhood, the ability to nurture, and the privilege of childbearing as metaphors for the sacred in order to underscore the vital, personal and evolving nature of the sacred.”⁸⁵

Another Islamic scholar, Jameelah X. Medina, in her research on the word “womb” in the Qur’an and in the *ahadith* or prophetic sayings, also notes that the two key attributes describing Allāh (Rahmān and Rahmīn), are derived from the RHM, rahm or rahma, meaning

womb or wom(b)an. She goes on to suggest that since creation is brought into being through a godly womb, this would make “Allāh the great Mother of all Creation.”⁸⁶ Medina refers to the Qur’anic verse (4:1), where Allāh says that all human beings were created from a single substance, but opines that Adam might not have been the first human being, as many Muslims believe, but rather the first of what was to be mankind. She concludes that unless Adam had a womb, Eve should be viewed as the first human.⁸⁷

The above comments from Medina and others are not as surprising as they may seem. Qur’anic narratives with regard to the creation are open to interpretation. Newer feminist exegeses of Sufism and Islam, from scholars such as Medina and Professor Riffat Hassan, give focus to the passages wherein it is said that men and women are created from the *nafs*, the original single soul. Sadiyya Shaikh, another scholar writing on Ibn ‘Arabī’s narratives regarding gender and sexuality, describes the *nafs* as “a dynamic entity” determined by one’s spiritual state.⁸⁸ Thus the *nafs* represent a range of states from the lower to the higher. The word “*nafs*” is grammatically feminine, while that of “*mate*,” or *zawji*, mentioned in the Qur’an in conjunction with Adam, is masculine.⁸⁹ Hassan also notes that the Qur’anic creation story does not depict Adam as the first man nor as a male. The word “Adam” is a collective noun describing human beings that is only used in reference to one or more humans who have become self-conscious, independent human beings.⁹⁰ Eve or Bibi *Hawwa* (meaning source of life or Mother of Creation) is mentioned in the hadith literature, but not in the Qur’an. Adam’s *mate* or *zawji*, is never presented as a woman nor is she seen as being secondary or inferior.

Although a majority of Muslims accept that Adam was the first man and had primacy over women, this idea is thought to have been influenced by biblical accounts of creation. The Qur’an, as Hassan so forcefully states,

even-handedly uses both feminine and masculine terms and imagery to describe the creation of humanity from a single

source. That Allah’s original creation was undifferentiated humanity, and neither man nor woman (who appeared simultaneously at a subsequent time), is implicit in a number of Qur’anic passages.⁹¹

In making the feminine an ontological degree or cosmic principle in relation to God, one that impregnates, permeates and nourishes all things, a number of ancient and modern Sufi philosophers believe the feminine shares with maleness in the act of creation.

Following in the footsteps of such luminaries as Ibn ‘Arabī, Schuon and Rumi, there is a viable basis for substituting “She” for “He” in what is perhaps one of the *Qur’an’s* most significant surahs—the one declaring God’s Tawhīd or Oneness:

... She is Allah. She is One, She is Eternal. She begets not nor is She begotten. And there is none equal unto Her. (Surah Ikhlas: 112)

The Feminine Soul

Sufism conceives of the Soul as feminine, in part, because it is grammatically feminine, but also because it veils the archetypal idea or primordial spark within. The word *nafs* (also *an-nafs*) is used to describe aspects of the psyche that make up a human being. Thus *nafs* (singular in Arabic), is One, or the whole of the individual self represented as a continuum from the lowest aspect of the personality to the highest Soul. Although the Soul is essentially free of matter, it has a connection to its actions and functions.⁹² Because of this the *nafs* can represent the little self and the secular or “Mistress World” which distracts the seeker from spiritual striving.⁹³ However, the *nafs* also serves as a vehicle by which one is able to register the influence of spirit. In its higher aspect “the *Nafs* acts as the mirror of the invisible worlds,”⁹⁴ and the all-important “locus of transformation.”

From this we can see that the concept of the feminine exists at a hierarchy of levels, signifying either the animal soul, the self or ego, the human soul, the spiritual soul or heart (*qalb*), the secret soul and the divine soul or “soul of the Soul.”⁹⁵ But, from the highest to

the lowest, the nafs extends from the original soul, or Universal Soul (*An-Nafs al-kulliyah*), which was impregnated with divine intelligence and from which the first pair and all other souls originated, to the animal soul or *An-Nafs al-ammārah*, and to the vegetable and mineral souls. Each aspect of the soul has its own dynamics which can be characterized at the lowest human level of development by selfishness, ambition, ignorance, impulsivity, etc., and at its highest human level of perfection, that of *An-Nafs al-sāfiyyah*, by beauty, freedom, certitude and the joy of union with the divine.

At each stage the soul reflects the feminine qualities of longing until the path of longing is gradually transformed from the self and the “Mistress World,” to the longing or Love for the Beloved, which is found within the innermost chamber of the heart. On the individual level, the heart is the abode of the Soul and the Soul is “the mystical companion in each person who is seeking the Beloved.”⁹⁶

In the Iranian spiritual world, which has its roots in Mazdean and Zoroastrian angelology, the *fravashi*, soul or guiding spirit, who reminds one of his or her purpose in life and prompts one to live in a way so that the soul progresses toward the divine, is perceived by Corbin in *Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis* as

an Angel, a mediating being whose appearance on the horizon of the soul unveils the self to the self. This angel whose nature is identified as symbolically feminine, is the inner face, the esoteric dimension of the self or the soul in heaven (on its own plane), that invokes the other half of oneself.⁹⁷

These comments seem to suggest an equivalency between the *fravashi* and the Solar Angel or the Agnishvatta of the Theosophical tradition. We may also note that the Deva Evolution, to which the Solar Angels belong, has a feminine polarity relative to humanity.

Corbin’s *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* also refers to the Mother Angel of the Earth, or the World Soul as

the Soul of creation and the Soul of each creature, that is, the constitutive part of the human being that appears essentially to the imaginative consciousness in the form of a feminine being, Anima. She is the eternally feminine in man, and that is why she is the archetype of the heavenly Earth.⁹⁸

Vaughan-Lee, the Sufi teacher and lineage successor in the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufi Order, has written at length about the importance of the return of the Feminine and the World Soul. For him, “the World Soul is not just a psychological or philosophical concept. It is a living spiritual substance within us and around us.”⁹⁹ The World Soul represents the receptive dimensions of the spiritual world with the capacity “to liberate creation from its imprisonment and awaken life to meaning.”¹⁰⁰

From these comments we can see that Sufism places an emphasis on the various states and expressions of the feminine soul, from the Microcosmic to the Macrocosmic level. Both the nafs and the World Soul or *Anima Mundi* are seen as manifestations and integral parts of the one Universal Soul or *Anima Universi*. Together these expressions serve mediating functions between spirit and matter, God and man, man and the cosmos, and, as such, their aim is to help the Sufi live inwardly, from the center or throne of the divine within, in order to gain knowledge of Allāh’s Absolute Oneness.

The Divine Sophia or Wisdom

The divine feminine in the Sufic tradition, is frequently understood as an expression of Sophia or wisdom. The Iranian scholar and polymath, Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, (973–1050), remarked that Sufis originally worshiped Sophia, the Goddess of Wisdom. Many Sufis assign a meaning to the word “Sufi” based on its phonetic resemblances to Sophia; but as the French metaphysician René Guénon (1886–1951), also known as “Shaykh” Abd al-Wāḥid Yaḥyá indicates, the strongest argument comes from the fact that the word Sufi has the exact numerical value as *al-Hikmatu’l-ilahiya* or Divine Wisdom. He adds that the one who possesses wisdom, which can only be known through God, is a true Sufi.¹⁰¹

Not only is wisdom often symbolized as feminine, “the aim of the spiritual quest is personified as a woman.”¹⁰² She is the one who alchemically transforms the “moon of our mind,” with its reflected light, “into the sun of understanding.”¹⁰³ Her function is to serve as a source of empowerment, of creative Self-awareness, inspiration and spiritual enlightenment. Of special importance is Sophia’s role as the reconciling and mediating principle between spirit and matter, humanity and the divine.

In addition to wisdom and intuition, the Sophianic feminine, according to Ibn ‘Arabī reveals “the secret of the compassionate God.”¹⁰⁴ He also viewed women as “teachers of wisdom.” Indeed, several women, such as Yasmina Umm al Fuqarā, Nizam Ain al-Shams, and Fatima of Cordova, played important roles in his spiritual development and rebirth. Yasmina was a feminine adept known for her intuition, and superior spiritual gifts. The Lady Nizam, who represented an archetypal image of the Sophia, helped him to free himself from doubt and ratiocentric belief systems by illuminating the ways of love and the subtleties of the spiritual path.¹⁰⁵ Fatima, a gnostic from Seville, also served as Ibn ‘Arabī’s guiding shaykha and divine mother. From her he learned the value of surrender to feminine leadership and an understanding of the science of letters¹⁰⁶ and saints. These women, and women in general, were viewed as having a unique aptitude for inner knowledge and as being endowed with the capacity for a direct understanding of God.

Another woman revered for her wisdom and spiritual authority was Umm ‘Alī Fātima of Nisapur. She was the teacher of a number of notable Sufis who were celebrated for their wisdom, such as the Iranian, Bāyazīd al-Bistāmī (804 – 874), King of the Gnostics and

the pioneer of the notion of *fana* (annihilation of the self). Al-Bistāmī held that she was the “one true woman who preceded him in the attainment of all spiritual stations.”¹⁰⁷

Other women, such as Maryam, the mother of *Isa* or Jesus, along with Fatimah al-Zahra bint Muhammad, the Prophet’s daughter, both of whom will be discussed in greater detail below, are directly identified with Sophia and wisdom, since respectively, they give birth to the “Word” and the “knowledge of God.” Therefore, the divine feminine embodies wisdom or knowledge and the means to attain it.

Renaud Fabbri, in extrapolating on the thoughts of Frithjof Schuon, maintains that “a holy man is not always a sage but his wisdom necessarily originates in Her domain.”¹⁰⁸

For Vaughan-Lee, the feminine is the matrix of creation and her wisdom originates from life itself.¹⁰⁹ Feminine wisdom is related to receptivity and the ability to hold a sacred space, either during pregnancy, in the heart, or within the soul where the sanctity of longing and receptivity creates an opening for the divine to be born.¹¹⁰ The heart or *qalb* is a primary focus in Sufism where it is seen as instrument of supra-rational intuition and a means to the mystical union. The eye of the heart, says Vaughan-Lee, sees behind the veil of appearances. It is the treasury where God’s mystery is stored; hence it is the feminine qualities contained within the spiritual heart, such as inwardness, beauty, love, sympathy, self-sacrifice that lead to true knowledge or intuition.

Beauty

In Islam, especially in the pre-modern intellectual and literary traditions, beauty played (and continues to play, albeit to a lesser degree), a pivotal role in the universe and in life.¹¹¹ In-

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spired by faith, and the effort to live a life that both investigates and reveals the feminine jamāl attributes of Allāh, Muslim poets, musicians, calligraphers, litterateurs and philosophers sought to create and express beauty in some form or another.¹¹² The Sufic traditions place a special emphasis on the expression of beauty in metaphysics, cosmology, psychology and ethics.¹¹³ For example, different groups might focus on “cosmogony and cosmology (the role of beauty in the origination and structure of the universe)” or “on psychology (the effect of beauty on the human soul)” as Kazuyo Murata, in *Beauty and Sufism*, explains. Other Sufis such as Raghīb al-Isfahani, an eleventh century Iranian scholar, classified beauty into three different categories: 1) rational beauty or beauty favored by the mind, 2) sensual beauty or beauty rooted in lust and desire, 3) sensible beauty or the beauty of appearances. Therefore, what Islam understood was that while beauty needs to be valued and defended, outer beauty was a double-edged sword that was fleeting and could distract and lead the seeker astray.

However, in its highest aspect, “true beauty” belongs to Allāh, the perfect Being, and all that is good. Beauty is also inseparable from Absolute Truth. Hence, the idea of beauty is connected to “knowledge” of the Divine, and when carried in the heart, can be expressed in all that is good, beautiful and true. Beauty is creative since it both elevates and inspires. Nasr describes beauty as “the radiation of the Face of the Beloved¹¹⁴ thereby linking Beauty with Love. Love and beauty are inextricably connected, for beauty has attractive and magnetic qualities that can draw forth the soul’s love and facilitate a relationship with the thing that is loved.

For Sufis in particular, beauty is thought to mirror the divine nature. All the beauty and splendor in creation is a reflection of Allāh’s ultimate beauty. Hence, the story of beauty, as Murata states: “is the story of the unfolding of the divine beauty through two mirrors, the universe (macrocosm) and the human being (microcosm).”¹¹⁵ Indeed the Qur’an assigns beauty to Allāh or God, to Muhammad, his prophet, to

humankind (especially women) and the entirety of creation.¹¹⁶

Sufis have always maintained that beauty in the human creature is the reflection of the divine nature. Feminine beauty¹¹⁷ is a supreme archetype, a representative or a visible symbol of the face of God. For this reason the love of a woman and feminine beauty, when mystically sublimated and directed in contemplation toward the Creator, could lead to union with the Divine. These ideas are epitomized for example, in the works of Ibn ‘Arabi, who explained that women and the feminine are the “most perfect locus of manifestation of God’s beauty on earth,”¹¹⁸ and in the poetry of Rumi, “whose religion of love,” according to Corbin, “fed on the theophanic feeling of sensuous beauty.”¹¹⁹ The Sufi saint and scholar Ruzbihan Balqi (1128–1209), who wrote at length about beauty, equated the love of feminine beauty with mystical experience, while Schuon called it the “Epiphanic Mirror” and “splendor of Truth.”¹²⁰

The notion of feminine beauty as a symbol of the Divine can also be seen in various Arab stories, most notably in the well-known story of Layla and Majnun, where the unrequited love of a beautiful woman is transformed into a symbol of Love for Allāh. In this story Majnun symbolizes the human spirit longing for the Beloved in the guise of Layla. As such, this story reminds us that the relationship between the lover and the Beloved is mediated by the feminine quality of beauty.

Spiritual Mothers as an Expression of the Esoteric Feminine

The feminine, in the Sufic tradition, is perceived as a means of Knowing God or Allāh, hence women are viewed as spiritual guides and recipients of revelation. In the Iranian Shi’ite and Ismaili’s tradition, for example, women have played an important role in the ranks of the spiritual elite alongside the Prophets and Imams. They are *hujjats* (indisputable proofs or demonstrations of wisdom and purity) who hold the rank of “Spiritual Mothers” or guides who help others to develop spirituality. Among these illustrious women are: Hazrat (an honorific title) Eve with Prophet Adam,

Hazrat Hagar with Prophet Abraham, Hazrat Zulaykhah with Prophet Joseph, Hazrat Maryam with Prophet Moses, Hazrat Maryam with Prophet Jesus, Hazrat Khadijah and Hazrat Fatimah-al Zahra with Prophet Muhammad, and numerous other women along with the Imams.¹²¹

Corbin, one of the twentieth century's most prominent thinkers and orientalist, depicts Eve's role as hujjat in relationship to Adam as "typifying the esoteric content of the *shari'ah*." In other words, she is one who understands the batin or esoteric significance contained within the symbols of Islamic canonical law. That is why, says Corbin, "Adam cannot fulfill the *shari'ah* in this cycle without her."¹²² Continuing, Corbin writes that the Supreme Maryam (*Maryam al-Kubra*), who is a representative of the heavenly Eve, is conceived as Isa's (Jesus) hujjat "because it was she who opened the doors of gnosis, which had been closed to Isa, by appealing to the master of the new *shari'ah*."¹²³

Among the list of spiritual mothers listed above two women are the most celebrated in all of Islam, and it is to these two spiritual exemplars that we now turn.

Mary or Maryam

One of these most revered women in the Islamic tradition, perhaps second only to the daughter of the prophet, is the Virgin Mary or *Maryam* the mother of Isa or Jesus, who, says the Turkish Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak, can effect a mystical virgin birth in the heart of those who venerate and meditate upon her virginity.¹²⁴ He points out that in the Islamic tradition, especially within the Sufic orders, "virginity is not primarily a biological condition, but a spiritual state. To be a virgin male or female, is to give oneself entirely to God... to the living Truth."¹²⁵

Hazrat Maryam is mentioned 34 times in 32 of the Qur'an verses. She is the only female referred to by name in the Qur'an and one of only eight people (prophets) who have an entire chapter or surah named after them. Maryam's name in Syriac signifies a blessing and is said to mean: "God exalts her." Of all wom-

en, she is the most blessed, uncorrupted and righteous. Maryam exemplifies purity and virtue and is the only woman who is protected from sin from the time of her birth.

Maryam gave birth to Isa (Jesus, also known as *kalam Allāh* or Word of God) who is also singled out as a prophet of singular import. The Lady Maryam was not only the "chosen woman" who was fit for the miracle of the immaculate conception, she is the one who was visited by angels and who turned away from the world to pray and meditate. As such, Maryam represents wisdom or the *sophia perennis* as well as the perfection of the Soul. Louis Massignon, the Catholic scholar of Islam, saw her as "the priestess of hospitality" because of her acceptance of the other within her self, not only in terms of being the archetypal mother, but especially as it relates to the inward acceptance of the soul. Along this same vein, another Sufi metaphysician, Schuon, founder of *Maryamiyyah Sufi Order*, conceived of Maryam as the one "who incarnates the sanctified soul and the creature in its primordial state."¹²⁶ She has, therefore, a shaktic or universal dimension; and as a terrestrial virgin, she is one who "transmits a message of humility, interiority, and resignation to God."¹²⁷

Fabbri, in discussing Schuon's thoughts on Maryam tell us that:

In Sufi terms, she perfectly realizes — holy poverty (*faqr*) as well as the primordial servitude (*ubudiyya*) of the creature in the face of God. On the operative plane, she is a model for those who remain in spiritual retreat (*khalwah*) and invoke the Divine Name to purify their heart. If Mary symbolizes on earth the faithful servant (*abd*) and the spiritual retreat, in Heaven she is exalted as the mother of the avatara and the — Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitab*). Schuon calls her, after the Iranian Sufi Ruzbihan Baqli, — the mother of all the prophets and the prophecy and the substance of the original sainthood and, along with a few Sufis and Islamic theologians, he attributes to her the status of a prophetess.¹²⁸

According to Schuon, Maryam was a *co-redemptrix* and the earthly mirror or reflection

of the Logos in its feminine aspect,¹²⁹ a title used by some Roman Catholics connoting the Mother of Salvation along with Jesus the Redeemer.

As noted earlier, the Shi'ite and Ismaili traditions view Maryam (*Maryam al-Kubra*) as the "Great Creator," the "One Great Pearl," *Al-Mohadatheh* (a female spoken to by Angels) and the "Celestial Light." In Ismaili metaphysics the Celestial Light refers to the Universal Soul—*Al-Nafs al-kull*,¹³⁰ terms that also refer to Fatimah al-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet.

Hujjats, like Maryam, have a responsibility for the spiritual training and instruction of future prophets and Imams, the manifestation of which is said to be necessary for the continued existence of the world.¹³¹

Fatimah al-Zahra bint Muhammad: The Daughter of Muhammad

For Muslims in general, especially in Shia Islam, there is a close connection between Maryam and Fatimah al-Zahra. Bahar Davary, in an article on *Mary in Islam*, observes that both Fatimah and Maryam are *al-Tahira* or pure ones, and both were holy women who gave birth to a pure and sinless male progeny.¹³² Mary gave birth to the Messiah, Isa; Fatimah gave birth to Muhammad's descendants (via the Imam Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib), and the Shi'ite lineage of Imams. Parallels between the two further depict each figure as a manifestation of the holy sufferer; for the sons of Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn, and Isa, the son of Maryam, suffered hardships, persecution and death at the hands of disbelievers.¹³³

In the Shi'ite faith, Fatimah holds the highest spiritual station among the hierarchy of devotional figures—being the only woman among the fourteen! Massignon indicates that she has become the archetypal "perfect woman" who has been virtually divinized by the Ismaili's, Nusayris, Druze and certain Shi'ite sects. Like Maryam, Fatima represents the universal virginal Substance in which "all faithful souls can participate."¹³⁴

Corbin follows Massignon, Schuon and others in assigning Fatimah the role of a creative and life-giving archetype.

Fatimah the Radiant appears as an archetype exemplified in numerous recurrences, which are carefully noted by the typology of Ismaili *ta'wil* [allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an.] Generally speaking, the feminine figures who exemplify this archetype are, like Fatimah herself above all, so many typifications of gnosis (*'ilm al-batin*, *'ilm al-haqiqah*), of the initiation into this gnosis, and of the Life which this gnosis breathes into the "dead," i.e., into those who are unknowing and unconscious. Thus, her esoteric rank is above all that of the *Hujjat*, the "Proof" or Witness of the Imam, indeed even a substitute for the Imam who, being in possession of the *ta'wil*, is the source of that Life which resurrects the dead.^{135,136}

Moreover, in Shia Islam, Fatimah is the axis of the Imamate; and among the Shi'ite it is believed that the future Imam Mahdi will come from among her descendants.¹³⁷ In certain traditions, she is believed to be the mother of all Shi'ite Imams responsible for transmitting the prophet's enlightenment and soul through her noble lineage.

She is also regarded as one of the foremost commentators on the Qur'an whose expertise of divine knowledge is on a par with the Imams or spiritual successors to the prophet.

Fatimah has been given a number of titles, each referring to one of the spiritual qualities that she is thought to embody. She is called Fatimah the Brightest Star and Fatima-Star of Venus. It is of interest to note here that the planet Venus, the light bearer to our earth, has immense significance in Islam and figures prominently in its system of metaphysics. Along with the Moon, Venus is the five-pointed star on the Islamic flag and at the top of every mosque. Among other examples are the *Fajr*, the pre-dawn prayer, which aligns with Venus' rising and the black stone or me-

teorite at the heart of the Saturnian Ka'ba, which John of Damascus believed came from Venus.

Among Fatimah's other names, are *Fatimah al-Zahra*, the Radiant or Luminous. This title refers to her as the "repository of the repository of the Light of the Imams, thereby implying her preeminence over the Imams."¹³⁸ John Andrew Marrow, in *Islamic Images and Ideas on Sacred Symbolism* describes Fatimah as "the vessel of light contained within the material world," or human body ... "the recipient of light and the guardian of revelation."¹³⁹

Another appellation is "mistress of all the women in the world," especially for those who seek to come to God or Allāh. Fatimah is a model for all women due to her purity, compassion, beauty, harmony and spiritual love. She is also linked with light of knowledge and wisdom; hence she serves as the image of the divine feminine in the hearts of women and men.

Mistress of the Resurrection

Islamic eschatology refers to a branch of theology pertaining to the end of the world, and the Day of Resurrection or the *Yawm al-Qiyamāh*. Islamic beliefs in the Resurrection are based on the *Sūrat al-Qiyamāh*, the seventy-fifth chapter in the Qur'an, and are fundamental to all Muslims. Such beliefs have a great deal in common with the eschatological beliefs in the other major faiths and have been dealt with in more detail elsewhere.¹⁴⁰

There are, however, some fascinating differences in certain minority sects regarding the Qiyamāh. Among them are the *Ghulat* (exaggerators) and "extremists," a term given to a group by outsiders, primarily because it is thought that they divinize various figures, such as Ali. The so-called Ghulat are concealed Shi'ites living in Iraq, Iran, Kurdistan and Azerbaijan.¹⁴¹ But the appellation that they give to themselves is *Ahl-i haq*, meaning Truth-Worshippers or People of the Truth. Within these minority groups, the Divine Feminine is held in high regard.

Dr. Matti Moosa, in his research on the Ghulat sects,¹⁴² informs us that among the beliefs held

by the Ahl-i-haq is one concerning four arch-angels brought into existence by the King of the World. In one version of the myth, one of the angels, the female *Hazrat Razbar* (also *Remzebar*) was of such Pure Substance that she provided the very stuff or substance of creation.¹⁴³ In addition to being directly associated with the Creator and the myth of creation (Razbar means "secret of creation"), she also plays a significant role in death. According to the Ghulat or Ahl-i-haq, an aspect of the Divine Feminine in the form of the mysterious Razbar, appears as the *Khatun-i Qiyamat* (Lady of Resurrection) who comes to aid all of humanity in the hereafter.¹⁴⁴ As Moosa points out, "she is not only an angel of mercy, but an intermediary between God and man, through her celebration of the "first communion" with God and the... angels,"¹⁴⁵ after the creation of the world.

In the more traditional Shi'ite sects the Divine Feminine takes the form of Fatima bint Muhammad, the prophet's daughter. Believers accept that Fatima will be manifest to every soul on the Last Day or Day of the Gathering. During this time Fatima is said to serve as an intercessor between human souls and Allāh. She also serves as something of a judge, because before proceeding to Paradise, she will look into every human heart and then take by the hand all those whose heart is filled with love. Certain Shi'ites and the Druze believe that Fatima will be the first person to enter *Jannah* or Paradise. Others believe that she (and Maryam), are the first "women" to enter heaven.

It is of interest to note here that exoterically the term Qiyamāh means "rising" of the dead, but as author and Ismaili scholar, Mumtaz Ali Tajddin maintains,

allegorically, it implies an idea denoting the rising to the next spiritual stage, and qiyamat-i qubra (great resurrection) means an attainment of the highest degree when a man becomes free from the ties of external laws... and transfigures into spiritual substance, which rejoins its divine sources.¹⁴⁶

In other words, from an esoteric or feminine (batin) perspective, the qiyāmāh can be seen

not only as a physical event, but rather, a spiritual or soul-related event that has its effects in the material world.¹⁴⁷ The feminine, as Sufism emphasizes, plays a significant role in the creation and salvation of the soul and the world. Just as the divine Feminine is there at the beginning of creation, so does she take part in its consummation and rebirth.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

Worship of the Mother, the Goddess or the eternal feminine is one of the oldest, most pervasive and important forms of worship on earth. But over the past 2,000 years, the feminine has been cast into the shadows by a religious patriarchy that has done its best to obscure, repress and even malign the feminine spirit. While virtually every religion still contains vestiges of feminine veneration—one may point to Sophia and Mariology, the Shekinah and the other feminine archetypes in the Kabbalah, the Dakinis and the female Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and the many feminine expressions of the divine in the Hindu tradition—yet, in the majority of these traditions, the feminine has been relegated to the sidelines in favor of a powerful masculine presence. Elsewhere the feminine lives a largely invisible existence.

Islam, like the major religions, contains a feminine component. The role of the feminine in Islam has been there from the beginning. Indeed, the feminine dimension has been explored and discussed at length and is given a preeminent position in the deeper spiritual economy of Islam. Various factors, such as male domination of the faith, and Western misconceptions and ignorance of Islam have obscured this fact. Due also to its metaphysical interiority or ontological inwardness, the mystery of the feminine dimension has been veiled and hidden from view.

While both the masculine and the feminine have their origin in Allāh and are called to participate in Allāh's nature, this article has given special emphasis to the feminine in an effort to show that in esoteric Islam or Sufism, with its more speculative and contemplative traditions, there is an "explicit preference for the feminine aspect of Allāh."¹⁴⁹ This preference had its

roots in the complex polytheism of pan-Arabia in which the worship of matriarchal deities was once prominent. But Sufis like the great Ibn 'Arabi, Rumi, al-Isfahani, Balqi and more modern Sufis like Corbin, Schuon and Murata, have done much to elevate and deepen conceptions of the sacred feminine in her role as initiator into the mysteries of God.

In the strict monotheism of Islam, God is shown to be "One without a second." Humanity, on the other hand, was created in pairs from a single substance. Male and female are counterparts that make up the original Self. From the Sufi perspective, the male or masculine element represents the outward aspects of the faith and existence in general. The feminine, on the other hand, symbolizes the subtle, inward dimension or the reality behind the world of appearances. As such, it is viewed as the necessary factor in integrating the two basic natures.

Although God or Allāh is an ineffable reality, the differentiated aspects of the Absolute, which are neither identical nor distinct from the essence, are also expressed in the Ninety-Nine Names of Allāh. These names were shown to express the fundamental polarity of male and female, outer and inner, majesty and beauty, strength and mercy. An examination of the feminine names revealed that such interiorizing attributes as receptivity, intuition, beauty, mercy, love and surrender, serve as a means of spiritual support for those who are seeking union with the Beloved.

In addition to an examination into the major qualities or characteristics of the feminine, this article discussed Sufi conceptions of the feminine soul, feminine creativity and wisdom. Various manifestations of the divine feminine in the guise of a spiritual mother, evident in such figures as Maryam or Mary and Fatimah al-Zahra, were explored. These are women who served as proofs of purity and wisdom. Not only are they viewed as spiritual exemplars; they also function as spiritual guides or teachers for the likes of Isa or Jesus, and Ali and the Shia Imams. Finally, the feminine in her role as the "Mistress of the Resurrection" was discussed and shown to be an angel of

mercy and an intermediary between humanity and God during the end times and “Day of Rising.” Thus, the divine feminine in the Sufic tradition is revealed as being integral to the achievement of wholeness and the realization of the Self within the Complete Self, which is the oneness of Tawhīd. She represents the interiorizing aspect of the Islamic faith, the spiritual support and mediating presence between spirit and matter.

¹ Annie Besant, *The Life and Teachings of Mohammed* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1932), 29.

² Lisa Beyer, “The Women of Islam,” *Time Magazine*, Sunday November 25, 2001.

³ *The Message of the Qur’an*, translated and explained by Muhammad Asad (Bristol, ENG: The Book Foundation, 2003), Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt, 51:49.

⁴ Gai Eaton, *Remembering God: Reflections on Islam* (Cambridge, ENG: The Islamic Texts Society, 2000), 92.

⁵ Muslim Student Association at the University of Southern California, www.uscmuslims.com/ (Last accessed February, 27, 2018).

⁶ See for example, “Women and the Advent of Islam,” by L. Ahmed in *Signs, Vol. 11, No. 4* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 665-691.

⁷ Anwar Hekmat, *Women and the Koran: The Status of Women in Islam* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997), 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Hekmat’s work is a reexamination of the Qur’an as a “dangerously patriarchal, anti-women text.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁰ See for example, *Women in Pre-Islamic Arabia*, published by the Muslim Women’s League, in 1995. Online at: <http://mwlusa.org/topics/history.htm> (Last accessed February 3, 2018).

¹¹ Mohammed Arkoun points out that when the Qur’an appeared in history, it was unable to modify views on kinship and control of sexuality, which were deeply entrenched into the centuries old societal system. For more information see: *Rethinking Islam* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 60-63.

¹² *Arabian Paganism*. <http://wathanism.blogspot.com/2011/11/deities-beings-and-figures-in-arabian.html>, (Last accessed February 27, 2018).

¹³ Thalia Took, *Arab Triple Goddesses*, <http://www.thaliatook.com/AMGG/arabtriple.php> (Last accessed February 27, 2018).

¹⁴ Amina Wadud, *The Qur’an and Women: Re-reading a sacred Text from a Women’s Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18.

¹⁵ The author will use the spelling “Makkah,” the proper spelling preferred by Muslims and the official spelling used in Saudi Arabia.

¹⁶ Laurence Galian, *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, The Islamic Research Foundation International Inc., 2009. http://www.irfi.org/articles3/articles_4801_4900/the%20centrality%20of%20the%20divine%20feminine%20in%20sufismhtml.htm (Last accessed March 8, 2018).

¹⁷ As quoted by Subhamoy Das, a Hindu researcher and author, who has written extensively on Hindu philosophy and Indology. We wish to note here that despite claims from Galian, Swami Sivananda and a number of others, Alla and Allāh do not appear in the Monier Williams Sanskrit English Dictionary. *Ibid.*

¹⁹ The *Chandervansh* were the warrior caste and one of the two great royal dynasties in India. See for example, *Origin of Pagan Idolatry Ascertained From Historical Testimony, Vol.1*, by George Stanley Faber. Published in 1816. Reprint available from Kessinger Publishing LLC, 2004, or *The Vishṇu Purāṇa: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*, Horace Hayman Wilson, ed. (reprint; London: Forgotten Books, 2015).

²⁰ From an esoteric perspective, Sudyumna represents the solar nadi or *pingala*, while Ila presents the lunar nadi or *ida*, the rational and intuitive, or positive and negative forces in the body.

²¹ Anwar Hekmat, *Women and the Koran*, 18.

²² Eusebius believed that Philo Byblos associated the Phoenician Elos with Kronos. For additional information see: Avner Falk, *A Psychoanalytic History of the Jews* (London: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1996), 66, or Dwayne A. Meisner, *Orphic Tradition and the Birth of the Gods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 29.

²³ Helena Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1 (reprint, 1978; New York: The Theosophical Publishing Co., 1888), 386.

²⁴ A few scholars maintain that the goddess al-Manat was older than al-Lāt. See Najam

- Sayuti, *The Concept of Allah as the Highest God In Pre-Islamic Arabia* (The Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University Montreal, 1999).
- ²⁵ Ibid., 55.
- ²⁶ Arab Religion before Islam, <http://sakina.wikidot.com/arabian-deities> (Last accessed June 1, 2018).
- ²⁷ Galian, *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, http://www.irfi.org/articles3/articles_4801_4900/the%20centrality%20of%20the%20divine%20feminine%20in%20sufismhtml.htm (Last accessed March 18, 2018).
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Najmah Sayuti, *The Concept of Allah as the Highest God In Pre-Islamic Arabia*, Master thesis for the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University Montreal, CA, 1999, 7.
- ³⁰ Anwar Hekmat, *Women and the Koran*, 18-19
- ³¹ Sayuti, *The Concept of Allah as the Highest God In Pre-Islamic Arabia*, 2.
- ³² “Pre-Islamic Arabia: The Nomadic Tribes,” *The Rise and Spread of Islam*, in “Boundless World History,” <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-worldhistory/chapter/pre-islamic-arabia/> (Last accessed June 3, 2018).
- ³³ Mayluna Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad: The Prophet* (reprint; 1993; Lahore: Ahmadiyya Ajnuman Isha, 1924), 10.
- ³⁴ Some sources dispute this claim saying that pre-Islamic Allāh was confused with Hubal, who represented an aspect of the High God. Others hold that this is a fringe theory arising in the 1990’s when evangelical Christians mistook the crescent moon on the Islamic flag and the tops of every mosque as a form of moon worship. But this theory too, has been refuted. What is certain is that the Islam is unassailably monotheistic. The *Qur’an* makes no mention of the Moon God other than to strictly forbid its worship. Passage 041.037 states: “Among His Signs are the Night and the Day, and the Sun and the Moon. Do not prostrate to the sun and the moon, but prostrate to Allāh, Who created them, if it is Him ye wish to serve.”
- ³⁵ Mayluna Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad: The Prophet*, 19.
- ³⁶ Sam Shamoun, *Revisiting the Identity of the pre-Islamic Allah at Mecca: Part 1*, https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/shamoun/preislamic_allah1.html (Last accessed February 22, 2018).
- ³⁷ Benjamin Walker, *Foundations of Islam: The Making of a World Faith* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 1998), 46,47.
- ³⁸ Josh Ellenbogen; Aaron Tugendhaft, *Idol Anxiety* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). 47.
- ³⁹ Galian, *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, http://www.irfi.org/articles3/articles_4801_4900/the%20centrality%20of%20the%20divine%20feminine%20in%20sufismhtml.htm (Last accessed April 12, 2018).
- ⁴⁰ See for example, Lennard James, *The Black Stone, at Kaaba*, 2009, <https://www.scribd.com>, or Bob Trubshaw, *The Black Stone - the Omphalos of the Goddess*, <http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/blstone.htm> (Last accessed February 28, 2018).
- ⁴¹ Galian, *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, http://www.irfi.org/articles3/articles_4801_4900/the%20centrality%20of%20the%20divine%20feminine%20in%20sufismhtml.htm (Last accessed March 18, 2018).
- ⁴² The goddesses’ identification with Satan is perhaps best known in the West with the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*. Rushdie’s book is titled after the group of Qur’anic verses that are interpreted as allowing intercessory prayers to be made to three Pagan goddesses, Allāt, al-Uzza and al-Manāt.
- ⁴³ Seeyed Hossein Nasr, “The Male and Female in the Islamic Perspective,” *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 14, No. 1 & 2, Winter-Spring (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, Inc., 1980), 2.
- ⁴⁴ See for example. Ahmed Duree’s “Gender and Islamic Spirituality” in *Islamic Masculinities* (London: Zed Books, 2006) or Sachiko Murata’s *The Tao of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).
- ⁴⁵ Nasr, *The Male and Female in the Islamic Perspective*, 3.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 1.
- ⁴⁸ M. Ali Lakhani, “Neither of the East nor of the West,” *The Universal Dimensions of Islam: Studies in Comparative Religion*, ed. Patrick Laude (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2011), 107.
- ⁴⁹ Sachiko Murata, *Women of Light in Sufism*, for the Muhyiddin Ibn al-‘Arabi Society,

http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/womenoflight.html (Last accessed March 20, 2018).
50 Ibid.
51 Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), or Ahmed Duree's "Gender and Islamic Spirituality" in *Islamic Masculinities* (London: Zed Books, 2006).
52 Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 77.
53 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications, 2001), 3.
54 Nasr, *The Male and Female in the Islamic Perspective*, 7.
55 Sadiyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabi, Gender and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill: NC, University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 39.
56 Patrick Laude, *Pathways to Inner Islam* (New York: SUNY, 2010), 105.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 111.
59 Ibid.
60 Llewellyn Vaughan Lee, "The Grace of the Guru: The Keeper of the Gates of Grace," *The Light of Consciousness Journal*, Fall 1998.
61 Huda Lufti, "The Feminine Element in Ibn 'Arabi's Mystical Philosophy," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 5 (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1985), 10.
62 Ibid., 13.
63 Ibid., 14.
64 Ibid.
65 Formative influences on Ibn 'Arabi philosophy were two female Sufi Saints: Fátima of Cordova and Yasmina of Meshana, and a Persian Sufi woman, Nizám who represented for Ibn 'Arabi, the embodiment of divine love and beauty. His teachings, while still considered to be controversial even today, have had significant impact on elevation of the women and the role of the feminine is Sufism and Islam.
66 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futúhât al-Makkiyyah* (or *The Openings in Makkah*) (translated by Eric Winkel; Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2016), 308:22. Author's brackets.
67 Ibn al-'Arabi, *al-Hikam* or *Bezzels of Wisdom* (Hyderabad, India: Taj Publishers, 1994),
68 Ahmed Edip Harabi, *Quarreling with God: Mystic Rebel Poems of the dervishes of Turkey*, translated by Jennifer Ferraro and Latif Bolat (Mersin, Turkey: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Kütüphaneler ve Yayımlar, 2009).
69 Ibn' al-'Arabi, *Fusūs al-Hikam*, 270.

70 Frithjof Schuon, *The Roots of the Human Condition* (Bloomington, IN: WorldWisdom Inc., 1991), 40-41.
71 Ibid. 41,
72 Laude, *Pathways to Inner Islam*, 123, 125.
73 The *Hadith* are the recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.
74 See for example, Frithjof Schuon, *Roots of the Human Condition*, 29-31.
75 Murata, *Women of Light in Sufism*, for the Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi Society, <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/womenoflight.html> (Last accessed March 20, 2018).
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79 Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi, as quoted from *The Pathways to Inner Islam*, by Patrick Laude (New York: SUNY, 2010), 120.
80 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Fusūs al-Hikam*, 507.
81 Schuon, *The Roots of the Human Condition*, 33.
82 Ibn 'Arabi writings are controversial, and his comments on women and the feminine can be contradictory. See for example: Sadiyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabi, Gender and Sexuality*.
83 As quoted in, *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos and Science of the Soul*, by Titus Burckhardt (Shaftsbury, VT: Element Books, 1986), 116.
84 Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Masnavi: Book I*, (trans.; Jawid Mojaddedi: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2437. Author's brackets.
85 Zahra Taheri, "Women in Rumi's Spiritual Circle," *La Trobe Journal* Vol. 91 (Victoria, AUS: State Library Victoria, 2013), 48.
86 Ar-Rahman, Ar-Rahim and Ar-Rahm <https://feminismandreligion.com/2013/12/22/ar-rahman-ar-rahim-and-ar-rahm-by-jameelah-x-medina/> (Last accessed July 25, 2018).
87 Ibid.
88 Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabi, Gender and Sexuality*, 37.
89 Riffat Hassan, *Dossier 5-6: Equal Before Allah? Woman-man equality in the Islamic tradi-*

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- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 Fethullah Gülen, "Nafs (The Soul)" *Key Concepts in Practice of Sufism* - 3, 2009).
- 93 Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1997), 20.
- 94 Nazeer Ahmed, "The Soul-Mirror of the Invisible Worlds," *The History of the Islam: Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*.
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- 96 Caitln Matthews, *Sophia the Goddess of Wisdom* (New York: Aquarian Press, 1992), 179.
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- 99 Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, *The Return of the Feminine and the World Soul* (Point Reyes: CA, The Golden Sufi Center, 2009), 108-109.
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- 110 Ibid., 51-52.
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- 112 Ibid., 4.
- 113 Ibid., 29.
- 114 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2002), 222-223.
- 115 Murata, *Beauty in Sufism*, 29.
- 116 Ibid., 31.
- 117 It goes without saying that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" and cannot be judged objectively.
- 118 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Fusūs al-Hikam*, 217.
- 119 Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone* trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 100-101.
- 120 Jean-Baptiste Aymard, Patrick Laude, *Frithjof Schuon: The Life and Teachings* (Albany: SUNY, 2008), 74.
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- 122 Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 183.
- 123 Ibid.
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- 125 Ibid., iii.
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