

ANIMISM IN THE CREED AND IN THE USE OF THE BOOK AND THE ROSARY

One has only to read popular expositions on the Koran texts that refer to angels, *jinn*, *iblis* (the devil) *kismet* (fate) or the many traditions regarding the creation of the soul and its transmigration, to realize that the world of Moslem thought and that of Animism are not distinct. Not only in popular Islam with its magic (high and low), its amulets, charms, talismans, magic squares, sacred trees, etc., but in the sacred literature of Islam we find pagan beliefs and practices perpetuated. The shortest of all monotheistic creeds, the Kalima, has itself become a species of magic and at least in three of the six articles of the expanded statement of orthodox belief, we find animistic teaching and interpretation: "I believe in Allah and His angels, and His books, and His prophets, and the Resurrection and the Predestination of good and evil." The doctrine of God includes the magical use of His names and attributes. The doctrine of angels includes not only demonology, but belief in *jinn*—fear and *jinn*-worship, as real as in Paganism. The belief in revelation had in popular Islam almost degenerated into bibliomancy and bibliolatry. Do the *fellahin* of Egypt not take their oath on *Al Bokhari*? The Apostles, especially Solomon and Mohammed, had intercourse with demons and *jinn*, according to the Koran and tradition. Man is created with a double-ego or two souls (The Qarina) ¹ just as in the pagan mythologies. The beliefs regarding the relation of the soul to the body after death, and the doctrine of metempsychosis resemble those of Animism. Their belief in how the spirit leaves the body; the benefit of speedy burial; the questioning by the two angels of the tomb; the visiting of the graves and the presentation of offerings of food and drink on the graves: all this is mixed up with pagan practices which find their parallel in Animism.

¹ See article on this subject "Moslem World" Vol. VI, No. 4.

We limit our discussion for the present to the use of the Koran, the Creed and the Rosary in ways that are condemned by the creed itself. "There is no God but Allah"—yet His book, His names, His very attributes are used as amulets against demon and jinn, or as fetish receive the worship due to Himself alone. Every missionary knows that the Koran, or even portions of it, has the power of a fetish in popular Islam. Not only is the book eternal in its origin and is therefore used for mystic purposes, but only those who are pure ritually may touch it. Certain chapters, words or letters (e. g. *alif, lam meen*) are of special value against evil spirits. It is related in Tradition that "Whosoever reads the 105th chapter and the 94th chapter of the Koran at morning prayers will never suffer pain in his teeth!" This is one reason why these two chapters, i. e. of the "Elephant" and one entitled "Have we not expanded?" are almost universally used for the early prayers. At funerals they always read the chapter "Y. S."; and then for fear of jinn and spirits, the chapter of the Jinn. One has only to read this last chapter with the commentaries on it to see how large a place this doctrine occupies in popular Islam. The cure for headache is said to be the 13th verse of the chapter called "Al-Ana' am" or the "Cattle," which reads: "His is whatsoever dwells in the night or in the day: He both hears and knows." Against robbers at night a verse of the chapter called "Repentance" is read, etc., etc.² No religion has ever made so much of its sacred book in a magic way as Islam. Not only do we find bibliolatry, i. e. the worship of the Book, but also bibliomancy, i. e. the use of the Koran for magical or superstitious purposes. Much of this is perhaps based on Judaism for we find that the Jews also used the Torah for purposes of protection and in magical way as do the Mohammedans.³

The Koran is not only the most excellent of all books, but the essential Words of God contained therein are eternal and uncreated. The Book was originally written

² Even Al Ghazzali is quoted as authority for this in the book entitled *Mujarabât* by Ahmed Dirbi. Cairo. p. 80.

³ See *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. Vol. 3. pp. 202-203.

by God Himself on the Preserved Tablet, then brought down in sheets *suhuf* to the lowest heaven on the night of Al Qadr where they were preserved in a place called the House of Majesty (Beit-ul-'Izza). From here they were brought to Mohammed as required by circumstances of revelation.

What Professor Hurgronje says of the Moslems of Sumatra is true of *all* the illiterate masses in Islam (i. e. ninety per cent) and of many of the so-called literates, even in Arabia and Egypt. "This book, once a world-reforming power, now serves but to be chanted by teachers and laymen according to definite rules. The rules are not difficult, but not a thought is even given to the meaning of the words; the Koran is chanted simply because its recital is believed to be a meritorious work. This disregard of the sense of the words rises to such a pitch that even pandits who have studied the commentaries—not to speak of laymen—fail to notice when the verses they recite condemn as sinful things which both they and the listeners do every day, nay, even during the very common ceremony itself. "The inspired code of the universal conquerors of thirteen centuries ago has grown to be no more than a mere text book of sacred music, in the practice of which a valuable portion of the youth of well-educated Moslems is wasted and which is recited on a number of ceremonial occasions in the life of every Mohammedan."⁴

In all Moslem lands and on occasions of birth, death and marriage, the Koran is commonly used as a charm. It is put near the head of the dying, or on the head of a new born infant, for good luck. It is the common belief in East Arabia that the Koran, if wrapped in a fresh sheep-skin, will withstand the hottest fire and never a page be singed or burned. During my early missionary days at Bahrein I was repeatedly challenged to this ordeal with the Gospel versus the Koran. That the sacred character is not limited to the meaning of the text, but extends to paper and ink, is also clear from the process of insulation practiced when taking oath! In India, a hog's bristle put on the ball of the thumb, which then rests on

⁴ *The Achehnese*, p. 343-4.

the Koran, allows the swearer to perjure himself without danger. So Holy a Book can be used, therefore even to drive away demons. No evil spirit visits the room where it rests on the highest shelf,—the place of honor. This belief in the Koran to drive away devils is exactly paralleled by practices in China. De Groot writes (*The Religion of the Chinese*, p. 51) "I have said that classical works are among the best weapons in the war against specters. Even the simple presence of a copy, or a fragment, or a leaf of a classic is a mighty preservative, and an excellent medicine for spectral disease. As early as the Han dynasty, instances are mentioned of men having protected themselves against danger and misfortune by reciting classical phrases. But also writings and sayings of any kind, provided they be of an orthodox stamp, destroy specters and their influences. Literary men, when alone in the dark, insure their safety by reciting their classics; should babies be restless because of the presence of specters, classical passages do excellent service as lullabies."

Again he speaks of the magical power of the Almanack (De Groot, p. 53) "No house in China may be without a copy of the Almanack, or without at least its title-page in miniature, printed on purpose with one or two leaves affixed, as a charm, in accordance with the *pars pro toto* principle, and sold in shops for one coin or cash. These charms are deposited in beds, in corners and cupboards, and such-like places, and worn on the body; and no bride passing from her paternal home into that of her bridegroom may omit the title page among the exorcising objects with which her pocket is for that occasion filled."

It is not generally known that portions of the Koran are lithographed in colors and sold for the same purposes in Cairo, Bombay, Singapore and Madras. The fantastic combination of Arabic script and the intaglio of the design make the charm all the more potent. Men cannot decipher it but demons can.⁵

In the use of the Rosary (*Subha*) and its gradual spread throughout the world of Islam, we also find animistic superstition.

⁵ Cf. The frontispiece in the July Number (1919) of THE MOSLEM WORLD.

According to Dr. Goldziher, who has written a special essay on the subject: "It is generally admitted that the use of the rosary, which was imported into Islam, was not adopted by the disciples of Mohammed until the third century of the Hegira. The following story can, at any rate, be cited in this connection. When the 'Abbaside Khalif Al-Hadi forbade his mother Cheizuran who tried to exercise her influence in political affairs, to take part in the affairs of state, he used the following words: 'It is not a woman's business to meddle with the affairs of state; you should occupy your time with your prayers and your *subha*.' From this it seems certain that in that century the use of the *subha* as an instrument of devotion was common only among the inferior classes, and had no place among the learned. When a rosary was found in the possession of a certain pious saint, Abu-l-Kasim al Junaid, who died in 297 of the Hegira, they tackled him for using it, although he belonged to the best society. 'I cannot give up' said he, 'a thing that serves to bring me nearer to God.' This tradition furnishes us with rare facts since it shows us on the one hand that in the social sphere the use of the rosary was common even among the higher classes; and on the other hand, that the strict disciples of Mohammed looked on this foreign innovation which was patronized by saints and pious men with displeasure. To them it was '*bid' a*' that is an innovation, without foundation in the old Islamic *Sunna*, and was consequently bound to stir a distrust among the orthodox."

Later on, when the use of the rosary had long ceased to provoke discontent in the orthodox Moslems, the controversialists, whose principle was to attack all "innovations" still distrusted any exaggerations in its usage. But like a great many things that were not tolerated at the beginning under religious forms, the rosary introduced itself from private religious life to the very heart of the Mosques and the theological schools.

Abu Abdullah Mohammed Al-'Abdari who died 737 A. H., wrote a work in three volumes called "*Al-Madkhal*," which contains a lot of interesting matter on the in-

timate life of Islamic society, their superstitions and their popular customs, and should be studied by all who are interested in the history and civilization of the Moham-medan Orient. "Among the innovations," writes Al-Ab-dari, the "rosary is to be noted. A special box is made where it is kept; a salary is fixed for some one to guard and keep it, for those who use it for Zikr. A special Sheikh is appointed for this, with the title of *Sheikh-al-Subha* and with him a servant with the title of *Khadim-al-Subha*. These innovations are quite modern. It is the duty of the imam of the mosque to suppress such customs as much as it is in his power to do so."

"The appearance of the rosary" says Goldziher, (to quote again from his paper) "and the way in which it had been adopted by the faithful did not pass unperceived by the *Hadith*. I believe that the following story which we read in the book called "*Sunan*" written in the third centry, has to do with the entrance of the rosary:

'Al-Hakam b. al-Mubāarak relates on authority of Amr b. Jahja, who heard it was from his father and who in his turn had heard from *his* father: we were sitting before the door of 'Abdallah b. Mas'ud, before the morning prayer, for we were in the habit of going to the Mosque in his company. One day we encountered Abu Musa al-Ash'ari * * * and very soon Abu 'Abd al-Rahman came in his turn. Then Abu Musa said: "In former times, O Abu Rahman, I saw in the mosque things that I did not approve of; but now, thank God, I see nothing but good." "What do you mean by that?" said the other. "If you live long enough," answered Abu Musa, "you will know." I have seen in the mosque people who sat round in circles (*kauman hilakan*) awaiting the moment of Salat. Each group was presided over by a man and they held in their hands small stones. The President said to them: "Repeat 100 *Takbirs*"⁶ and for a hundred times they recited the formula of the *Takbir*. Then he used to tell them "Repeat a hundred *Tahlil*"⁷ and they

⁶ *Takbir*—to repeat Allahu Akbur, God is great.

⁷ *Tahlil*—to repeat Lailaha illa Allah, the Creed.

recited the formula of *Tahlil* for a hundred times. Then he told them also: "Repeat a hundred times the *Tasbih*"⁸ and the persons who were in the group equally went through this exhortation also. Then Abu Abd al-Rahman asked: "What did'st thou say when thou sawest these things?" "Nothing" answered Abu Musa, "because I first wanted to find out your view and your orders." "Did you not tell them that it would have been more profitable for them to have kept account of their sins and did you not tell them that their good actions would not have been in vain?" So we together repaired to the mosque, and we soon came across one of these groups. He stopped before them and said "What do you here?" "We have here" they answered, "small stones which help us to count the *Takbir*, the *Tahlil* and the *Tasbih*, which we recite." But he answered them in these terms: "Sooner count your sins and nothing will be lost of your good works. Woe to thee, O community of Mohammed! with what haste you are going toward damnation? Here are also in great numbers, companions of your Prophet. Look at these garments which are not covered with dust, these vessels that are not yet broken; verily by him who holds my soul in his hands, your religion can lead you better than the contemporaries of Mohammed; will you not at least open the door of wrong?" "By Allah, O Abu 'Abd al-Rahman," they cried, "we mean but to do right!" And he answered them: "There are many who pretend to do right, but who cannot get at it, it is to them that the word of the Prophet applies: 'There are of those who read the Koran, but deny its teaching, and I swear it by God, I doubt whether the majority of these people are not among yourselves.'"

Other traditions show us the prophet protesting regarding some faithful women against the use of these small stones when reciting the litanies just mentioned and recommending the use of the fingers when counting their prayers. "Let them count their prayers on their fingers (*ja'kidna bil anāmīl*) for an account will be taken of them."

⁸ *Tasbih*—to repeat Subhan Allah, God be praised.

"All these insinuations found in traditions invented for the purpose, denotes a disapprobation of the use of the rosary, at the moment of its appearance. The use of small stones in the litanies was it seems an original form of the *subha*, very much like the later use of the rosary. It is said of Abu Huraira, that he cited the *Tasbih* in his house by the aid of small stones which he kept in a purse (*jusabbih biha*). Let us also mention the severe words of Abdallah, son of the khalif Omar, which he addressed to a person who rattled his stones in his hands during prayers (*juharrikk al-hasa bijedihi*) 'Do not do that, for that is prompted by the devil.' "

Others beside Goldziher believe that the Moslem litanies were counted in this way before the rosary was introduced. One can not be sure. In any case it seems very probable that the traditions against this custom date from the time when the rosary was introduced into Islam. The Tibetan Buddhists, long before the Christian era, used strings of beads, generally 108 in number and made of jewels, sandal wood, mussel shells, and the like, according to the status of their owners. Whether Islam adopted the rosary from India during the Moslem conquest is uncertain, but not at all improbable.

Regarding the Christian use of the rosary we read "The custom of repeatedly reciting 'Our Father' arose in the monastic life of Egypt at an early time, being recorded by Palladius and Sozomen. The Hail Mary, or Ave Maria, on the other hand, first became a regular prayer in the second half of the eleventh century, though it was not until about the thirteenth that it was generally adopted. The addition of the words of Elizabeth, 'Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus' (Luke 1. 42), the angelical salutation, 'Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed are thou amongst women' (Luke 1. 28) is first mentioned about 1130; but Bishop Odo of Paris (1196-1208) requires the recitation of 'Hail Mary' together with 'Our Father' and the Creed as a regular Christian custom. The closing petition 'Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death,' developed gradually in the sixteenth cen-

ture, and was regarded even by the council of Besancon (1571) as a superfluous but pious custom. These facts show that the traditions which ascribe the invention of the rosary to Benedict of Nursia, Bede, or Peter the Hermit, are untrustworthy, and the same statement holds of the Domincian tradition which speaks of a vision of the Virgin commanding the use of the rosary. At the same time, the rosary was originally an essentially Domincian mode of devotion, though first arising long after the death of the founder of the order; but *while some influence may have been exercised by the acquaintance of Oriental Christians with the Mohammedan Tasbih*, all the characteristics of the recitation of Our Father, like the meditations connected with it, can only be explained by the operation of specifically Christian ideals.”⁹

The rosary in Islam is at present used for three distinct purposes. It is used in prayer and *Zikr* for counting pious ejaculations or petitions. It is used for divining the will of God; and it is used in a magical way for healing.

The second practice is called *Istikharah*. It is related of one of the wives of Mohammed that she said: “The Prophet taught us *Istikharah*, i. e. to know what is best, just as he taught us verses from the Book, and if any of you want anything, let him perform ablution and pray two *rakk’as* and read the verse: “There is no other God,” etc. To use the rosary in this way the following things must be observed: the rosary must first be grasped within the palms of both hands which are then rubbed together; then the *Fatiha* is solemnly repeated after which the user breathes (*nafatha*) upon the rosary with his breath in order to put the magic power of the chapter into the beads. Then he seizes a particular bead and counts towards the “pointer” bead using the words God, Mohammed and Abu Jahal. When the count terminates with the name of God, it means that his request is favourably received, if it terminates with Abu Jahal, it is bad, and if with Mohammed the reply is doubtful. Others consider it more correct to use the three words: Adam,

⁹ Schaff Herzog Encyclopedia. Vol. 10.

Eve, the devil. When these words are used, the Adam-bead signifies approval, the devil-bead disapproval and the Eve-bead uncertainty, because woman's judgment they say is fickle. This use of the rosary is almost universal among the common people of North Africa and Egypt.

When we remember the high idealism with which Edwin Arnold has clothed the ninety-nine names of Allah in his book on the Moslem rosary entitled "Pearls of the Faith" we must surely enter a word of protest against the use of these glorious names for magic and sorcery.

In this connection a ceremony practiced among the Mohammedans of India on special occasions is worthy of mention; it is called *Subha*, and usually performed on the night succeeding a burial. The soul is then supposed to remain in the body, after which it departs to Hades, there to await its final doom. The ceremony is thus described: "At night, derwishes sometimes as many as fifty assemble, and one brings a rosary of 1000 beads, each as large as a pigeon's egg. They begin with the 67th chapter of the Koran, then say three times, 'God is one,' then recite the last chapter but one and the first, and then say three times, 'O God, favor the most excellent and most happy of thy creatures, our lord Mohammed, and his family and companions, and preserve them.' To this they add: 'All who commemorate Thee are the mindful, and those who omit commemorating Thee are the negligent.' They next repeat three thousand times, 'There is no God but God,' one holding the rosary and counting each repetition. After each thousand, they sometimes rest and take coffee; then 100 times, '(I extol) the perfection of God with his praise,' then the same number of times: 'I beg forgiveness of God the Great,' after which fifty times: 'The perfection of the Lord the Eternal'; then 'The perfection of the Lord the Lord of might,' etc. (Koran 37, last three verses.) Two or three recite, then two or three more verses; this done, one asks his companions 'Have ye transferred (the merit of) what ye have recited to the soul of the deceased?' They reply,

'We have'; and add 'Peace be on the Apostles.' This concludes the ceremony, which, in the house of the rich, is repeated the second and third nights."

In Algeria, the rosary is used by the *Tāleb* in divining whether the sick will die or not. The beads are counted off in threes; if this leaves an odd number, the beads must be recounted in two, if ending evenly, the patient will live, if an odd number remains, it means death. The rosary which is a holy thing is never used in low magic.

In Tunisia, the fortune-teller marks a place on the rosary with a thread and counts off the beads while chanting certain words, sometimes the names of the father or mother of the sick person. The required information is found by the number of beads remaining over after the recitation; if three remain to the thread, it is sickness; if two, it is health.

Mr. G. B. A. Gerdener, of Capetown writes: "The rosary is sometimes worn round the neck as a cure for sickness. The kind most in use is made of sandal wood, said to come from Mecca. For magical purposes, the rosary is used by counting the beads to a certain number."

Miss G. Y. Holliday of Tabriz, Persia, gives the following information: "The rosary is used to decide what medicine should be given, what physician should be called; whether his advice should be followed or not, etc. It is also used about all the affairs of life; it is called taking the *istikhara*. In using it, the rosary is grasped by the first bead the hand happens on; from which they count to the *Khalifa*, or the large bead which is the most prominent object, saying 'bad—good,' the last bead giving the decision."

In Java, the rosary is used as follows for healing the sick, or *for inducing sickness*. With the rosary in the hand, one reads any chapter from the Koran and up to the fifteenth verse; this verse always contains a word of talismanic power, and while this verse is being read, the rosary is counted and the result follows according to the desire of the operator.

In Egypt the rosary is widely used not for divining sickness but for the cure of sickness as well. In this case,

it depends on the material from which the beads are manufactured. Those made of ordinary wood, or of mother-o'-pearl are not valuable, but a rosary made of jet (*yusr*) or *kuk* (a particular kind of wood from Mecca) is invaluable. In Egypt, both among Copts and Moslems, the rosary is specially used for the cure of "retention of urine" in children. It is put on the infant's neck, or is laid on the roof in the starlight to catch the dew, then it is washed and the water given to the child to drink.

"In India," writes Mr. K. J. Khan of Poona, "the rosary is used to protect against the evil eye, and other dangers, sometimes it is washed in water and the water given as medicine to the sick to drink."

When we consider how in all these many superstitions, the original use of the rosary with its ninety-nine beads for the remembrance of the one true God has been lost or obscured, we are forcibly reminded of the words of Warneck, "Animistic heathenism is not a transition stage to a higher religion. I think I have adduced sufficient facts to establish that, and facts do not vanish before hypothesis. Let them produce facts to prove that animistic heathenism somewhere and somehow evolved upwards towards a purer knowledge of God, real facts, not imaginary construction of such an evolution. Any form of Animism known to me has no lines leading to perfection, but only incontestable marks of degeneration."¹⁰

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¹⁰ *The Living Christ and Dying Heathenism.* (p. 10)