Death, Resurrection, and Shrine Visitations: An Islamic Perspective †

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Abstract: This paper discusses the concept of death, resurrection and shrine visitation from an Islamic point of view. It is divided into two integral parts. In the first part, we examine the Islamic eschatological concepts of death, resurrection, and the Day of Judgment. The second part deals with one of the most disputed topics in Islamic thought, those of graves and shrines and the cult of saints. We will be arguing that in spite of the fact that Muslims are not allowed (from a fundamentalist point of view) to construct ornamented tombs or shrines, the cult of saints is widespread in many parts of the Muslim world. We contend that this phenomenon stems from cultural rather than religious factors. In many cases, Muslims were unable to divest themselves of cultural aspects that interfered or were incompatible with their religious beliefs. We assert that the cult of saints is more common in Shia- than Sunni-dominated countries. In response to the ongoing recent attacks on shrines, the researchers suggest dialogue among Muslim sects.

1. Introduction

Death, the Day of Judgment, resurrection, and the visitation of graves and shrines are among the most controversial issues in Islamic thought—past and present. The reason for such difference of opinion is that most of these beliefs belong to the unseen side of the faith (*ghaybiyāt*). In Islam, there is more than one dogma; Islam comprises many sects. Hence, many interpretations of Islam (sometimes contradictory) co-exist, side by side, with the supporters of each arguing that only they have a proper understanding of the religion. Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) and the jurisprudential laws change from one country to another and from one era to another. In other words, just as Judaism and Christianity are marked by divergences in religious understanding, so is Islam. Thus, we have Orthodox and secular Jews, Catholics and Protestants, and Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, each sect with its own doctrines and unique religious codes. The purpose of this paper, however, is not to isolate and discuss each of these sects in all aspects of belief, but rather to discuss the thematic concerns of death, the Day of Judgment, resurrection and visitation of graves and shrines in the context of where it occurs in the belief systems of the sects concerned. This does not mean that we shall be making generalizations; instead, we explore the aforementioned motifs as practiced by their practitioners. To achieve this, we explore the differences between Muslim sects regarding the concept of death, resurrection, and the shrines of *awliyā'*.

The controversy concerning the status of *awliyā'* [1].[1] and the legality of their tombs and shrines is not new; it has often come to the fore in times of uncertainty and political and religious turmoil. In this paper, we explore the differences between Muslim sects regarding the concept of death, resurrection, and the shrines of *awliyā'*. To begin with, it maybe apt to refer to the fact that it is cultural factors rather than religious ones that have quite often played a significant role in the shaping of controversial Islamic concepts throughout the Islamic world [2]. In Saudi Arabia, for example, women are not allowed to drive cars due to Bedouin cultural practices rather than religious rulings. In Afghanistan, Taliban hardliners have banned girls and women from attending schools and have forbidden all people living under their rule from watching TV. In other Muslim countries (mainly Shia), visitations to the shrines of *awliyā'* to ask for blessings are permitted, while in others these are not.

2. Death and Resurrection

From an Islamic point of view, human beings pass through three main states: birth and life, death and *barzakh* (the period from death to resurrection) and resurrection and reckoning. When people die, they are in a transitional period (*barzakh*) [1],[2] between death and resurrection. Upon being laid in the grave, a dead person is questioned by two angels about his/her religion and Prophet or Messenger. Believers are able to respond correctly to these questions while non-believers are not (Q 14: 27[3]; [3], vol. 5, p. 147, hadith no. 3120). The dead do not feel the passing of time; once a person is dead, he/she inches closer to an eternal destiny in paradise or hell. Time, argues Philips, "only exists for those living on earth, and once man dies he leaves the time zone and a thousand years (or more) becomes a blinking of an eye" ([4], p. 44).

The *Qur'an* and many *hadiths* of the Prophet speak of Islamic eschatology. According to Al-Nursi (1877–1960), about one-third of the *Qur'an* concerns itself with the hereafter ([5],.p. 99)[4] When Muhammad (PBUH) was still alive, many of his companions asked him about the timing of the Day of Judgment, but he answered that it is only Allah Who knows when it will come (Q 7: 187, 16: 77, 31: 34). Even during Muhammad's lifetime, the *Qur'an* spoke about the imminence of the final day in the *Al-Qamr* (literally the Moon) *sura*. This *sura* starts with "The Hour has come near, and the moon has split (in two). And if they see a miracle, they turn away and say, "Passing magic." (Q 54: 1). According to *Qur'anic* verses and the *hadiths*, minor and major signs must occur before this day. The most common minor signs include, but are not limited to, immorality, the construction of skyscrapers, the prevalence of unruly rulers, the spread of disease, sudden death, crime, and adultery ([6], vol. 1, p. 36, hadith no. 8). Among the major signs are the appearance of the Beast, the anti-Christ; *Ya'joj* and *Ma'juj* (Gog and Magog); the occurrence of three eclipses of the Sun; the rising of the Sun from the West, not the East; and the destruction of al-Ka'ba in Mecca (Q 27: 82, 18: 85, 21: 96; [7], pp. 7–78, 152–60). Both Sunni and Shia Muslims believe in the coming of the *Mahdi*, who, they say, will fight the Antichrist along with Jesus and the believers [7,8].[5] Islamic eschatology speaks about a final and decisive battle between the Muslims and the Jews in which the latter will be utterly defeated ([6], vol. 4, p. 2239, hadith no. 2922). Some Muslim scholars speak of less common signs, such as the decrease

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[1] Acknowledgments: All Arabic translations quoted in this paper are those of Elaskary and Korean translations are those of Eun Kyeong Yun, for the definition of the term *awliyā'*, see Lane 1968 [1].

[2] The word *Barzakh*, linguistically, means a thing that intervenes between any two things, or a bar, an obstruction, or a thing that creates a separation between two things. Edward William Lane, *Arabic–English Lexicon* ([1], vol. 1, p. 187).

[3] The translation of the Qur'anic verses are quoted from *Sahih International* on www.tanzil.net, Q refers to Quran followed by *Sura* [Chapter] and verse numbers.

[4] He refers us to Q 21: 1, 78: 1, 81: 1, 82: 1, 84: 1, 88: 1, 99: 1.

[5] Ibn Kathīr ([7], pp. 50–52). It must be noted here that in spite of the fact that both Sunni and Shia Muslims believe in the coming of Al-Mahdi at the end of time, they differ regarding his identity; Sunni Muslims argue that he has not yet been born, and Shia Muslims claim that he was born in the second century A.H., but that he disappeared and will return in time. Shia Muslims give the name of the expected Mahdi as "Ibnul-Hassan Al-Askari" ([8], p. 98).

of the number of women compared to that of men (with some accounts mentioning a 50 to 1 ratio) and the gushing of a mountain of gold from the Euphrates River in Iraq. Shia scholars speak of one unique sign for Shia Muslims: the appearance of Al-Sufyīnī, a wicked ruler who will dominate the Levant, just prior to the coming of al-Mahdi ([9], pp. 177–78; [8], pp. 42, 58–59).

After these signs have been fulfilled, the first trumpet will be blown (by Isrāfīl, one of the archangels) and then the second ([10], p. 55).[6] After the second trumpet, people will be raised from the dead, and all will account for their deeds, good or bad (Q 39: 68). According to Al-Nursi, the resurrection comprises three stages: souls are returned to bodies, which "will be reanimated, and … rebuilt and resurrected" ([5], p. 126). This will be a serious day; the skies will be folded; the earth will be flattened; and thunder, smoke, and floods will be present (Q 82: 1–4, 81: 1–13; [11], vol. 6, pp. 17, 78–103). This is the Day of Reckoning, when the deeds of everyone will be weighed by God. On this day, the wrongdoers and sinners will suffer most while those who behaved well during their lifetimes will endure much less pain (Q 23: 102–103, 101: 6–11). It is the day of requital. God will settle scores among all humans; the good deeds of the transgressors (if they have any) will be waived for the benefit of those whom they offended; if they lack good deeds, the evil actions of their victims will be added their records ([12], vol. 8, p. 111, hadith no. 6534; [10], pp. 260–66, 321–32). Everyone will be busy with himself or herself; even parents will forsake their siblings and friends their comrades (Q 23: 101).

On the Day of Judgment, people will frantically hurry to Prophets/ Messengers and ask them to intercede on their behalf before God for forgiveness ([12], p. 166; [10], pp. 61–64). After that, people will be dispersed either to heaven or to hell. Selected pious believers from all faiths will be able to see God in heaven (Q 83: 15; [13], pp. 13–23). People will be divided into three main groups: believers (mainly followers of the heavenly revealed religion i.e. Islam), non-believers, and *Ahl-A'rāf* (the inhabitants of the heights, a place between Heaven and Hell, (Q 7: 44–46)). Prophets, messengers, *awliyā'* and pious men and women will be admitted into paradise; believers who have sinned and committed crimes during their lives may endure some punishment in hell before proceeding to heaven while unbelievers will be driven to hell. Heavenly justice entails that those unbelievers who were not sent a prophet or messenger to tell them about the true One God, those living in deserted areas (such as forests or jungles), and those who did not have the means to know about Him (the lack of faculty/sense or other reasons) will not go to hell (Q 17: 15). Understandably, not all nations believe in the resurrection after death. The majority of ancient generations did not believe in life after death. The *Qur'an* refers to this fact in more than one verse (Q 45: 24). For Muslims, our worldly life is just a temporal stage, after which all humans will be resurrected and raised from their graves to stand trial before God; the outcome will be either paradise or hell. Life in the second world is eternal; those in paradise will enjoy unimaginable blessings, while those in hell will suffer the severest punishment.

3. Graves and Shrines

These observations take us to the core of this paper. Burial rites, graves/shrine construction or visitation and the status of *awliyā'* differ from one Muslim country to another, largely due to ethnic, economic, educational, and political conditions. Thus, ornamented graves and shrines can be seen in abundance mainly in Shia-dominated and South Asian countries (such as Pakistan, India, Bengal, Indonesia, or Malaysia), while they are generally absent in the Gulf areas where traditional Sunni Islam prevails. Egypt, dominated by the Shia Fatimids and Ayubbids during the medieval period, is a special case with thousands of shrines scattered throughout the country and these can be seen in today's Egypt. Again, it should be stated here that visitations to shrines and their *awliyā'* is common in South Asian countries and those with Shia majorities (such as Iran, Kazakhstan, or Iraq), but not in Sunni-dominated ones. A poll conducted by the PEW Research Center [14] in 2011–2012 shows that the majority of Shia Muslims regularly visit shrines, while the majority of Sunnis do not. According to the same poll, 98% of Shia Muslims in Iraq visit the shrines of Muslim saints (65% in

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6　　The Trumpet is mentioned in the Qur'an at least eight times; see Sura 27: 87, Sura 36: 29, 49 and 53, Sura 38: 15, Sura 39: 68, Sura 69: 13–18, and Sura 78: 18–20.

Iran), compared to 28% of Sunni Muslims. Less than half of the Sunnis and Shias who participated in the questionnaire in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, and Afghanistan agreed that Islam allows people to appeal for aid from deceased relatives or ancestors. However, Shias are significantly more likely than Sunnis to accept this belief. The gap is wider in Iraq (+36) and Afghanistan (+34) [14].

People (mostly the uneducated and the poor) tend to visit the shrines of *awliyā'* in times of calamity and hardship or when they encounter a serious or unmanageable problem. Thus, they go to seek the help (and intercession) of a *wali* whom they believe will act on their behalf.[7] In spite of the fact that all Muslims believe in *awliyā'*, not all of them endorse the notion of their ability to intercede with God on behalf of those who ask them to do so. The majority of Sunni Muslims accept the special status of *awliyā'* before God and sanction their *karamāt* (supernatural deeds, not miracles), but they deny them the right of intercession in this life; on the Day of Judgment, they may be permitted to mediate on behalf of some person, but not in this worldly life (Q 2: 255, 39: 44, 53: 26; [10], pp. 235–59).

However, other Muslims sects, such as the Shia and the *Aḥmadīyyah* (known also as Al-*Qadiāniyyah*) believe that *awliyā'* are alive and that they can physically and emotionally help those who pray to them and ask for their help. In this regard, Lapidus argues that these variations and contradictions can be attributed to the "non-Islamic sides of their cultures," such as "national, ethnic, tribal, and folk cultures" ([15], p. 148). Thus, quite often, people (especially Muslims converts) cannot easily rid themselves of their ethnical and tribal traditions. According to Mir, this is especially the case in the Indian subcontinent ([16], p. 3).

During the medieval period, many Muslim countries were lax regarding the construction of graves and shrines, especially in Egypt and the Levant countries during the 10th to the 13th centuries. Ibn Taimiyah (1263–1328) argued that Muslims were imitating Jewish and Christian traditions of venerating their saints ([17], p. 11) . That is why he took a strong stance against this practice. His *fatwas* (legal verdicts) have been exploited by radical groups for centuries as a justification for the extremist acts they have been committing. He was jailed for these *fatwas* in Syria, where he died in prison in 1328 [18].[8] Ibn Taimiyah's strong stance against *awliyā'* and shrines did not come out of a vacuum. He lived during the golden age of Sufism, when shrines and the cult of saints were widespread ([17], p. 3) . Pilgrims may have come up with some "*shirk*" (the worship of gods other than Allah) rituals while visiting shrines, such as slaughtering animals in shrine yards or praying to *awliyā'* or asking for their help; something which is totally rejected in Islam and which should have angered Ibn Taimiyah and his sympathizers (Q 2: 186; 6: 121).

As has been suggested earlier, *Awliyā'* and their shrines are among the most controversial and contentious jurisprudential issues in Islamic thought. Regrettably, the issue of the permissibility or prohibition of grave and shrine visitations has intermittently come to the surface of Islamic religious discourse. Beranek and Tupek argue that however "medieval this topic may sound, the issue of visiting graves is in fact even today a highly contested area in religious practice" ([17], p. 3). Most recently, Salafi, ultra-Salafi, and radical groups (such as *al-Qaeda*, the *Nusra Front*, or *ISIL/ISIS*) have taken it on their shoulders to free Islam from what they take to be the "impurities" and "innovations" that have crept into the religion. Here it is worth mentioning that in traditional Islam, there are *awliyā'* but there are no saints. In other words, an order of saints, as known in Christianity, is not to be found in mainstream Islam. Moreover, from a conservative Islamic viewpoint, the construction of ornamented graves and shrines is forbidden; graves must be dug beneath the ground and not to be adorned by visible markers or domes ([6], vol. 2, p. 666, hadith no. 969; [17], p. 7). Muslim scholars justify this restriction through the fact that some Muslims, with the passing of time, may imitate ancient peoples who came to take their holy men for gods and worship them. In this regard, Muslim jurists usually give the example of the Jews and Christians, who idolized some of their rabbis and saints (Q 9: 31). The common theme in the writings of Salafi scholars, such as Ibn Taimiyah, Ibn Abd

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[7]　Mainstream Sunni Islam opines that none in this worldly life can harm or benefit but God, the Almighty; a fact which is proven by many Qur'anic verses and prophetic hadiths. Prophet Muhammad himself, as stated in the Qur'an, declared that he could neither harm nor benefit himself (Q 7: 188, 10: 94).

[8]　See M. K. Harras's introduction to the translation of Ibn Taimiyah's *Sharḥ al-ʿAqīdat-ul-Wāsiṭiyah* ([18], p. 12).

al-Wahhāb, and Ibn 'Uthaymīn, is that the cult of *awliā'* must be curbed so that Islam would be kept *shirk* free ([19]; [4], pp. 1–40).

As has been brilliantly demonstrated by Beranek and Tupek, the visitation of graves and shrines "has gone through a long evolution" ([16], p. 6). At the beginning of the Islamic mission, the Prophet Muhammad forbade his companions from visiting graves, but later waived this ban ([6], vol. 2, p. 672, hadith no. 977). On more than one occasion, the Prophet himself visited the graves of some of his companions who had died fighting for the cause of Islam and prayed for them ([19], vol. 2, p. 91, hadith no. 1344; [17], p. 14). This license to visit graves does not, however, mean that visitors are allowed to perform any act that contradicts the main tenets of Islam, i.e. performing sacrifices for/or on behalf the dead (or praying to them with aim of seeking their intercession) at graveyards. Muslim scholars have differentiated between what they termed "lawful" or "permissible" and "heathenish" or "innovative" *ziyāra* ([20], p. 115). Basically, travelling to graves or shrines, staying in their vicinity, treating them as holy places, or worshipping *awliyā'* are not Islamic. Prophet Muhammad warned his followers not to imitate Jews and Christians who excessively venerate their saints and pray to them. He did so not because these places are unclean or evil in their own right but to safeguard against the possibility that they may be used by vulnerable or uneducated people as places of worship ([21], vol. 2, p. 88, hadith no. 1330). It is not permissible for Muslims to ask the dead, including the Prophet Muhammad himself or any other *wali* or saint, to intercede or mediate between them and God. The aim is to keep the Islamic faith true to its original sources and not to mix it with general, tribal, or folk traditions that are incompatible with the religion. The visitation of graves/shrines is not forbidden in itself; what renders such visits lawful or unlawful are the practices worshipers may perform during *ziyāra*. If people pass by graves or shrines, pray for the dead, or read some *Qur'anic* verses, this is acceptable; however, an unlawful *ziyāra* is regarded as "innovative" and "forbidden" if visitors do any of the forbidden acts associated with visiting the graves/shrines.

In traditional Islamic thought (as clarified in a Prophetic *hadith*), Muslims can only travel to three mosques: al-Haram Mosque (in Mecca), Prophet Muhammad's Mosque (in Medina), and al-Aqsa Mosque (in Jerusalem). A controversy exists regarding the legality of visiting the grave of Prophet Muhammad. This issue was raised by Ibn Taimiyah as early as the 13th century, after coming back from pilgrimage to Mecca in 1293. During his journey, Ibn Taimiyah saw what he labeled as "heresies" at the site of the grave of the Prophet, of which the most serious were the dome added (by the Egyptian Mamluk ruler Al-Manṣūr Ibn Qalāwūn) to the grave and the gathering of many worshipers around it. Customarily, when Muslims travel to perform the *Hajj* in Mecca and Medina, it is recommended for them to visit the grave of Prophet Muhammad, but they should not set out to specifically visit it ([17], pp. 14–15). Prophet Muhammad himself warned his followers against being fanatical in their love for him.) In one of the *hadiths*, he is reported to have said, "You should not deify (praise) me in the same way Christians have deified Jesus, son of Mary. I am only a slave of Allah, and I am His Messenger" ([21], vol. 4, p. 167, hadith no. 3445).

3.1. The Awliyā' of Allah

In general, Muslims believe in *awliyā'*. The *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* speak of *awliyā'*: they mention their characteristics and their potential intercessions on the Day of Judgment, but not in this worldly life (Q 10: 62–63). Various Muslim sects, however, differ regarding the role that *awliyā'* may play and on their intercessional powers. Schimmel argues that Sufi Islam is characterized by tombs as institutional structures, where "faithful Muslims gathered to worship God, praise his Prophet, and ask the *wali*, living or dead, for intercession on their behalf" ([22], p. 1). This was not the case, however, for every Muslim. According to the dominant Islamic jurisprudential schools, Muslims worship, trust, pray to, fear, and invoke only one God (Allah), whom they take to be the same and the One God of all believers, be they Jews, Christians, or others. Invoking other deities or saints is prohibited in Islam.

Sunni, Sufi, and Shi'ite Muslims differ dramatically when it comes to *awliyā'* and their veneration of the Prophet Muhammad and his family. In general, it is incumbent on Muslims to love Muhammad and his household but not to love him excessively or deify him or his family ([19], pp. 99–107). Sunni

Muslims take a hardline stance on *awliyā'*, shrines, and their worshippers. Strangely, however, a former Sunni Egyptian Mufti (Sheikh Alī Jom'ah) endorsed the idea that *awliyā'* can hear the prayers of those who pray to or for them and that it is not *shirk* to rub one's body against a *wali*'s shrine [23]. Sufis and Shi'ites, in comparison, venerate *awliyā'* and, above all, those who belong to the household of the Prophet Muhammad. Shi'ites believe that, after the death of Prophet Muhammad, the leadership of the Muslim community should have been passed to his cousin, Alī Ibn Abī Ṭāleb, and not to Abū Bakr, 'Umar, or 'Uthmān. For them, Sunni caliphs and rulers usurped the throne of Islam from the household of Muhammad, and hence they must be damned and cursed from the pulpit. For Shi'ite Muslims, members of Muhammad's family should have been allowed to take turns in ruling over the Muslim *Ummah* from the death of Muhammad until the Day of Judgment ([24], pp. 33–35). Moreover, they give the household of Prophet Muhammad an exalted rank above ordinary Muslims claiming that they are infallible and never commit sins. Ibn Taimiyah, a Sunni scholar who is classified as belonging to radical Islam, argues that it is incumbent on all Muslims to love and respect Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and his household. This is actually in line with the Qur'an and hadith (Q 42: 23; [21], vol. 1, p. 12, hadith no. 16). Regarding the miracles of *awliyā'*, that Sunnis believe in the "*karamāt*" (supernatural deeds) of *awliyā'* but not in miracles, since miracles apply only to Prophets and Messengers ([18], pp. 196–200).

Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, another strict exegetist, makes it clear that Sunni Muslims "love and honor them (Muhammad's household) out of their love for the Prophet, [...] on the condition that the members of his household must follow the *Sunnah* [sic] and remain steadfast on the *dīn* [sic]. As for those who do not remain steadfast on the *dīn* (religion, sic), no love or honor should be extended to them, even though they belong to the household of the Prophet" ([19], p. 115). Revering *awliyā'* or sacrificing animals at shrines or for saints, venerating shrines or making offerings at/near them are ranked by Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb as "major *shirk*" which takes a person a way from Islam rending his belief null and void ([19], p. 55).

Accordingly, the veneration of *awliyā'* and pilgrimage to their shrines are among the most contested points between Sunni and Shia Muslims. In addition to the Shia and Sufis, it is mainly the poor, the illiterate, and the common people who believe in the intercession of the *awliyā'*. Arabs in the pre-Islamic era venerated saints, whom they worshipped after their death and took for gods. Even today, some Muslims travel to shrines to worship and donate money to a saint or his ancestors; they believe that such places are holy because they contain the corpses of these holy men or women. For this reason, argues Philips, some people "collect the earth in the vicinity of the graves in the vain belief that the earth has special healing powers due to the effect of the blessings manifested in those buried there" ([4], p. 177).

From a strict Islamic point of view, no human being can harm, benefit, or intercede on behalf of other human beings in this life. One can only pray to God for assistance. This is the case when the well-wisher is a *wali* or an ordinary human being. In spite of the fact that the majority of Sunni Muslims do not deify or pray to *awliyā'* or visit their shrines, all Shia Muslims believe in the cult of saints and rank *awliyā'* far more highly than ordinary human beings. Not only do Shia Muslims believe in *awliyā'*, they also think that they are alive and that they perform miracles and intercede on behalf of those who pray to them. For these believers, pilgrimage to the holy shrines of their *imams* and *awliyā'* is equal to if not greater than a pilgrimage to Mecca. Sufi Muslims, to a great extent, stand between Sunni and Shia Muslims. They believe in *awliyā'*, but they do not insist that they are infallible.[9] Philips [4] argues that unlike other religions that endorse saints and holy men for intercession and that are sometimes subjects of worship, Islam "opposes even the excessive praise of Prophet Muhammad" ([4], p. 156). Yet, in spite of all the anti-*awliyā'* fatwas, the cult of *awliyā'* is widespread all over the Muslim world, Sunni and Shia, from the former USSR republics to Iran and from Afghanistan to Morocco ([25], p. 117). Even in non-Muslim countries, such as China and India, there are Muslim *awliyā'* and shrines. Despite the fact that Islam opposed the designation of saints or prayers to them, "a hierarchy of so-called Muslim saints has become a prominent feature in *Sufi*

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[9]　Mainstream Sunni Islam believes that infallibility is restricted only to the Prophets and Messengers of God.

circles and…the masses blindly follow them" ([4], p. 159). As indicated above, the cult of *awliyā'* is more common in Shia-dominated than Sunni-dominated countries. In addition, South Asian countries, the presence of *awliyā'* and saints is quite marked. The reason for this, as Singh points out, is that in these nations, Islamic values have been mixed with local doctrines (such as those of Hinduism and Sikhism) to the extent that some Muslims have come to revere the Ganges river and its water as holy, as the water of *zamzam* ([26], p. 142).

3.2. Using awliyā' *and Their Shrines for Political Gains*

Shrines, *awliyā'* and Sufis have been used by rival religious political parties in the Muslim world and beyond. In some countries, they were used to foster amicable and friendly relations between people from different faiths. In this context, Mir argues that Sufi tenets of tolerance and love can be the cure for many calamities that have plagued our turbulent world affairs. He adds, "Jews, Muslims, and Christians shared sacred places and undertook sacred journeys together" ([16], p. 281). Thus, according to Mir, shrines and *awliyā'* have been used in Kashmir to build "bridges within the community in toning down the differences and respect for one another" ([16], p. 47). On the other hand, Sufis have been used by dictator rulers in many parts in the Muslim world to curb the insurgence of Islamic opposition groups. From the early 1990s, religious rivalry between Sunnis and Sufis has been utilized by the military in Algeria, Morocco and Egypt in curbing the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and other political Islam parties/groups in these countries; something which resulted in the overthrow of the two democratically elected regimes in Algeria in the 1990s and in Egypt in 2013. Recently, dictatorial rulers in the major Arab countries have used Sufism as leverage in their political fight against surging Islamic parties, moderate and radical alike. Early in 2009 (two years before Arab Spring), Barbara Plett contends that the question, "Can Sufism counter radicalism?" was raised [27,28]. Algeria was the first Arab country to apply this policy, as early as 2009 and Morocco followed suit in 2010 [29,30]. Less than four months from the kick-off of the Arab Spring, Al-Azhar which has been manipulated by dictator Egyptian rulers since 1954, formed what its Grand Imam, a Sufi himself, called "The World Union of Sufi Scholars" whose task is to curb the surge of extremism in the Muslim world [31]. Sufis, it is true, do not only oppose radical Islamic groups but they go up against moderate Islamic parties and groups, such as the Brotherhood, whom they think would fight Sufism once they are in power. That is why Sufi sects in Egypt and other Muslim countries condoned and supported military interference that led to the ousting of Islamist rulers in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. In the presidential elections in Egypt in 2014, Sufis called on the people to vote for General al-Sisi and not for his civil counterpart promising those who vote for him a place in Paradise [32,33]. That is why William Dalrymple, a leading scholar on Islamic studies, thinks that the rift between Sufis and radical Islamists is "irreconcilable" and that Western governments dealing with the issue of terrorist groups should keep this in mind and try to reach out to moderates among Muslims in addition to Sufis [34].

4. A Verdict on the Destruction of Shrines

Only five days before his death, Prophet Muhammad warned his companions not to make his grave or those of other holy men or women places of worship. Radical groups, such as *Al-Qaeda* and *ISIS*, use such *hadith* and others to promote their hardline stance on shrines and *awliyā'*. From their point of view, the ideal way to treat shrines is to demolish them. Thus, they never forgo a chance to fulfill this "holy" task, whether these shrines are Islamic or non-Islamic, throughout the Muslim world. They argue that the Prophet did the same himself ([4], p. 195). It is true that the Prophet Muhammad instructed his companion Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib to level some graves that he deemed at odds with Islamic codes [35]. Extremist Islamic factions take this incident as a justification to destroy shrines. However, they do not understand that these graves had idols on them and that is why the Prophet ordered Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib to destroy them.

Inspired by the *fatwas* issued by radical clerics, such as Ibn Taimiyah, Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb [36], and others, zealous Muslims have targeted Sufi shrines throughout the Muslim world. As early as the first quarter of the twentieth century, when the Wahhābīs took over the Arabian Peninsula, which came to be known as Saudi Arabia, they embarked on a campaign of demolishing domed

tombs/shrines and holy places or artifacts. When Ibn Saʿūd, the founder of Saudi Arabia, seized Mecca, he "entered the Prophet's grave himself, penetrated behind the curtain, and seized every valuable thing he found; he sold some to the Sharif of Mecca" ([17], p. 20). In the 1920s, the Wahhābīs demolished the grave of the mother of the Prophet, with some fanatics even calling for the annihilation of the dome over the Prophet's mosque and the leveling of his grave (which also holds the bodies of his companions Umar and Abū Bakr) to the ground. In 1994, extremists in Yemen used explosives and tractors to demolish a local shrine in Aden ([17], pp. 4–5).

More recently, Ibn Taimiyah and Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb [36] have been surpassed by another Saudi radical cleric, Ibn Bāz [37], who has called for the razing of tombs and shrines all over the Muslim world. As a result, the attacks on Sufi shrines have intensified because of the rise of militant Islamic groups [38]. From 2005, attacks on Sufi shrines in Pakistan have been the norm, with scores of innocent civilians killed in these attacks [39]. In April 2011, radicals attacked Sufi mosques in more than one Egyptian city [40]. In July 2007, Ansar Dine (Ansar-uldin), the Taliban group in Mali, attacked shrines in Timbuktu in Mali [41]. In Libya, attacks on Sufi shrines and mosques have occurred in more than one city [42–44]. The most dangerous attack, however, was the destruction of the tombs of prophets Jonas and Daniel by ISIS militants in Iraq in July 2014 [45–47]. Because of these acts, the world powers are working hard to halt the rise of fundamentalism in the Middle East and Asia. Beside legislative, judicial, and police-military procedures, local governments have turned to the Sufi Orders and their sympathizers to fight orthodox and radical groups.

5. Conclusions

Literature on the thematic concerns of death, resurrection and shrine visitation is vast. Although we are aware of the views expressed by scholars like Philips [4], our counter-argument to these views is that the practice of shrine visitation is not merely a ritual but an archetype which provokes profound spiritual impact. By visiting the shrine, pilgrims go for the long-hoped-for and expected triumph of consciousness over the unconscious. From the paper, we can aptly conclude further that every ritual, and therefore by every sort of significant action, the practitioners place themselves in a moment of cathartic function. The rituals are deeply embedded in Sufi traditions. It is interesting to note that veneration of saints, ancestors and men of honour is a universal practice. In this regard, it may be useful to mention the *Chuseok* festival in South Korea. During this festival, there are performances of ancestral rites and visitations of an ancestral graveyard. Because of the Confucius philosophy of veneration and eulogizing of ancestors, it will be useful if researchers embarked on a comparative study of Korean *Chuseok* and Islamic practices of grave visitation and rituals arising therefrom. In every society, there has always been a yearning for the sacred past—the bliss of the "origin" and "beginnings" of the human being. In addition, we delved into the volatile area of Islamic eschatology and the world of *awliya'* and their shrines. We examined this issue in the light of the controversy between the various Muslim factions regarding the legality of visiting shrines or praying in their vicinities and offered what we believe to be the correct perspective on it. It must be stated here that the issue is complex and any solution must bear in mind the religious and cultural sensitivities of each Muslim country. In other words, what takes place in Saudi Arabia cannot be easily applied in Iran, Pakistan, or Egypt. We agree with Uzma Rehman that the low level of literacy, lack of freedom, and divergent local cultures of the Islamic world make any attempt to reform the popular Islamic tradition of visiting shrines the source of division among various sects ([48], p. 22). Each Muslim country regards the issue of shrines and *awliya'* from a different perspective. In Egypt, for example, Muslims and Christians alike retain some Pharaonic rituals and customs ([15], p. 156). In Pakistan, Sufi shrines are part of the lives of the majority of Pakistanis ([49], p. 374). In regions where Muslims are minorities—such as China or India—shrines and *awliya'* are viewed by many as a sign of the survival of the religion, thus enhancing religious identification with them.

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