

A LIFE OF LEARNING

Annemarie Schimmel

Charles Homer Haskins
Lecture for 1993



American Council of Learned Societies

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A Life of Learning

by

Annemarie Schimmel

Once upon a time there lived a little girl in Erfurt, a beautiful town in central Germany—a town that boasted a number of gothic cathedrals and was a center of horticulture. The great medieval mystic Meister Eckhart had preached there; Luther had taken there his vow to become a monk and spent years in the Augustine monastery in its walls; and Goethe had met Napoleon in Erfurt, for the town's distance from the centers of classical German literature, Weimar and Jena, was only a few hours by horseback or coach.

The little girl loved reading and drawing but hated outdoor activities. As she was the only child, born rather late in her parents' lives, they surrounded her with measureless love and care. Her father, hailing from central Germany, not far from the Erzgebirge, was an employee in the Post and Telegraph service; her mother, however, had grown up in the north, not far from the Dutch border, daughter of a family with a centuries'-long tradition of seafaring. The father was mild and gentle, and his love of mystical literature from all religions complemented the religious bent of the mother, grown up in the rigid tradition of northern German protestantism, but also endowed with strong psychic faculties as is not rare in people living close to the unpredictable ocean. To spend the summer vacations in grandmother's village was wonderful: the stories of relatives who had performed dangerous voyages around

Cape Horn or to India, of grandfather losing his frail clipper near Rio Grande del Sul after more than a hundred days of sailing with precious goods—all these stories were in the air.

Mother's younger sister was later to weave them into a novel and to capture the life in the coastal area in numerous radio plays.

Both parents loved poetry, and the father used to read aloud German and, later, French classical literature to us on Sunday afternoons.

The little girl owned a book of fairy tales, printed in 1872, and at the age of seven she enjoyed correcting what appeared to her as spelling mistakes, that is, the old-fashioned orthography before the language reform of 1900, thus preparing herself as it were for the innumerable page proofs she would have to read later in life. In the book there was one story which she almost knew by heart—a story not found in any book she would read in her entire life. It was called "Padmanaba and Hasan" and told of the visit of an Indian sage to Damascus where he introduces an Arab boy into the mysteries of spiritual life and guides him to the subterranean hall where the mightiest king's catafalque is exposed amidst incredible jewelry. Over it was written: "People are asleep, and when they die they awake." Ten years later, when the little girl was 18, she realized that this was a *hadith*, a word ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad and dearly loved by the mystics and poets in the Islamic world.

She enjoyed school, especially languages such as French and Latin, and shocked her teacher by writing her first essay in high school, entitled "A Letter to my Doll" about the Boxer rebellion in China. She tried to copy little texts in foreign characters from a small publication of the British Bible Society, entitled *God's Word in Many Languages*, and loved poetry. One of her favorite poets was Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866), the ingenious Orientalist-poet, whose versions of Persian and Arabic literature impressed her deeply. Her most ardent wish was to learn more about Oriental culture, and when she was 15 she found a teacher of Arabic. After a week she was absolutely infatuated with her studies for her teacher not only introduced her to Arabic grammar, but also to Islamic history and culture. Weeks were counted only from Thursday to Thursday (that was the day of the Arabic class) although

she had to keep this to herself. For whom among her classmates would have understood, whom of her relatives and acquaintances would have appreciated a girl's learning a Semitic language at a time when nationalism and political fanaticism filled the air?

Somewhat later the girl skipped two levels to finish high school at 16. Alas, she had to attain seven years of English in six months so that the grade in English was the lowest in her otherwise brilliant grade sheet—that is probably the reason why the Good Lord found it necessary later to send her to Harvard to improve her skills a bit.

Before joining the university we had to undergo the trial of *Arbeitsdienst*, a forced labor service during which we lived in the countryside to serve as unpaid maids and agricultural help in poor areas, and I learned such useful things as cleaning pig sties and harvesting beets—and desperately tried to keep up my Arabic. This stubborn clinging to my ideals resulted in the fact that I was probably the only girl in my age group who was not automatically transferred into the Nazi party as was customary when one reached the age of 18.

It was in the camp that we heard the news of the Second World War breaking out, and our leader proudly told us that we could now stay much longer than the usual six months to serve our herrlicher Führer. My non-existent love for the Führer certainly did not increase at hearing this news.

My father had been transferred to Berlin on the very first day of the war. Soon my resourceful mother found out that I could be released from the *Arbeitsdienst* provided I studied natural sciences. Why not? After all, I loved physics and immediately imagined that I would work later in the history of Islamic science, especially mineralogy. After reaching Berlin and registering in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, I also continued Arabic and took courses in Islamic Art, and by the end of the first trimester (the semesters had been shortened), in Christmas 1939, Professor Kühnel, the doyen of historians of Islamic Art, smilingly encouraged me to forget science and to concentrate upon Islamic studies by promising that I would become his assistant after completing my doctorate. This, however, remained a dream. After I had finished my Ph.D., in November 1941, I joined the Foreign

Service as a translator, for from the Museum, which was not important for war activities, I would have been drafted into the army. But 40 years later my initial dream was fulfilled when I was invited to join the Metropolitan Museum on a part-time basis to do what Kühnel had hoped—that is, to work on Islamic calligraphy, a field which I also taught during my Harvard years.

To study in wartime Berlin was—at least for me—like living far away from the stark realities of political life. My professors were the most outstanding representatives of their respective fields. Importantly for me, we had a woman professor, Annemarie von Gabain (d.1993), to whose introduction into Turcology I owe much and whom I considered my "elder sister," my *apa*. And while Richard Hartmann taught us the patient historico-critical approach to classical Arabic and Ottoman Turkish, Hans Heinrich Schaeder, a true genius, carried us to the farthest shores of history, nay of culture in general. Discovering my interest in Maulana Rumi (kindled by Rückert's free translations of his poems), he suggested that I read R. A. Nicholson's *Selected Poems from the Divan-i Shams-i Tabriz* (which I copied by hand) as well as Louis Massignon's studies on the martyr-mystic Hallaj (executed in 922 in Baghdad)—and three months later, Christmas 1940, I surprised him with a set of German verse translations from Rumi and Hallaj which, I feel, are still valuable. After the war it was Schaeder who introduced me to the work of T.S. Eliot, and instead of spending a brief visit in Göttingen with discussions about Persian poetry, we read the Four *Quartets*, just arrived on his desk. As a corollary he suggested that I should read John Donne, whose poetry fascinated me so much that 20 years later I published a collection of my German verse translations of his work because his style seemed so close to that of my beloved Persian poets.

Both Schaeder and Kühnel were married to academic women who generously encouraged me in my work. This certainly contributed to the fact that I never felt a stranger in the academic world and took it for granted that women had the same role to play in the academic community as did men.

Six terms of study were, however, by no means a quiet time of learning: during every vacation we had to work in a factory, 10 hours a

day, and I would return home, often with my hands bleeding, to write my dissertation on Mamluk history. I learned much about the hard life of the women in the factory and was grateful for the understanding they showed to the stranger whose work was meant to guarantee some days of paid leave for a few of them. After finishing my studies I worked not only in the Foreign Office, but also prepared the great index for a 16th-century Arabic chronicle of some 1,500 pages, which appeared—still during the war—in Istanbul.

The dark clouds of war became more and more terrifying; the bombing stronger—I remember walking for four hours through burning streets in search of a lost colleague, of giving shelter to friends who had lost everything, and reading about the worsening political situation in the telegrams we had to decipher in our office. Yet, I remained, in my spare time, faithful to my Mamluk officials about whom I was writing my *Habilitationsschrift*. I submitted it on April 1, 1945, the day when our office was sent to central Germany for security reasons. In a small Saxonian village we were captured by the Americans, spent a week in a subterranean prison, and were transported to Marburg on the day of the armistice to remain interned during the summer in one of the students' houses. It was the best thing that could happen to us: at least we had a roof and regular, though, of course, minute rations of food, and we soon arranged something like a camp university, teaching and learning to adapt to life in a strange little community.

One day an important visitor came to look after us. It was Friedrich Heiler, the famed historian of religions, then Dean of the Faculty of Arts in the yet to be re-opened old University of Marburg. He spoke about Nathan Söderblom, the leader of the Ecumenical Movement, Archbishop of Sweden, and historian of religion (d. 1931). Although I had the impression that the learned speaker barely noticed me during the discussion, two months later, when the internment was drawing to a close, he called me at home. Would I like to stay in Marburg? They were in need of a professor of Arabic and Islamic studies as the former chair holder was such a terrible Nazi. I was barely prepared, but as I had—along with some Persian and Arabic text—a copy of my *Habilitationsschrift* in the one suitcase I could bring with me, I agreed, and after three months with my aunts in northern Germany I delivered my inaugural address on January 12, 1946, not even 24

years old. It was quite an event in the conservative little town of Marburg, and the only woman on the Faculty, Luise Berthold, specialist in medieval German, congratulated me with the words: "My dear child, remember *one* thing—men are our enemies!"

Despite her warning, I enjoyed teaching immensely. No one can image how happy both teachers and students were during those years—no more war, freedom to speak, to read books of which we had not known anything, listening to inspiring lectures of returning emigrants, and although we had barely anything to eat, we ate and drank knowledge. Every class—be it Arabic, Persian, or Turkish, or first ventures into the history of Islamic literature and art—was an adventure, especially since quite a few of my students, returning from the war, were senior to me. Besides, I became closely attached to Heiler and worked with him on history of religions, supplementing his classes with Islamic materials and learning much about the phenomenological approach to religion, about Church History and its intricacies, and enjoyed the German Mass which Heiler used to celebrate on Sundays in the small chapel in his house.

However, it was also the time of learning of the atrocities that had been taking place during our childhood and youth, atrocities which seemed too shocking to be true—and of which most of us had been unaware.

In my discovery of new areas of knowledge I was supported by my mother who had joined me in May 1946 after my father had been killed in the battle of Berlin, one of the numerous elderly men who, without even knowing how to handle a shotgun (and there were six guns for 25 people!), were sent against the Russians as "the main defense line".

One interesting aspect of my life in Marburg was that Friedrich Heiler was one of the first to realize the importance of women's contribution to religion and scholarship. His seminars and his book, *Die Frau in den Religionen*, tackled the problem long before it became an issue in the clerical and academic world. We jokingly called him "the patron saint of women professors." In this quality he warmly advocated the role of women as ministers of the church and a Swedish champion of this cause, Märta Tamm-Götlind, visited him in 1948. She invited me

to come to Sweden in 1949, and, after many "external" difficulties, I went to spend two weeks with her on a small island on Sweden's West coast to polish up my Swedish which, at that point, was purely theological. Days in the beautiful setting of Sigtuna north of Stockholm followed and for a whole month I enjoyed Uppsala. I was fortunate enough to meet the great masters of Oriental studies, such as H.S. Nyberg and Zetterstéen as well as the numerous historians of religion, in the first place Geo Widengren. But the high point was the connection with *gamla ärkebiskopinna*, Archbishop Söderblom's widow, Anna, who received the young colleague of her husband's friend with affectionate warmth. I enjoyed every minute of my stay and felt thoroughly spoiled—but how could I foresee that 35 years later the Faculty of Divinity in this very place would confer upon me an honorary degree? I confess that I was proud, at that occasion, to be able to express part of my vote of thanks on behalf of the foreign recipients of degrees in Swedish, a language filled with precious memories, and I again enjoyed the fragrance of the lilacs around the Domkyrkan and tried to read the lines which the ravens around the church spire kept on writing on the crystalline blue sky.

For a modern student of Oriental languages it seems unbelievable that we never saw an Arab, let alone studied in an Arab country. But for post-war Germans even the smallest excursion into a neighboring country was a major event. One event of this sort was my participation in the first International Conference for History of Religion in 1950 in Amsterdam, where I saw and heard the giants in that field. Among them was Louis Massignon, a figure that seemed to consist of white light, with barely any trace of a material body—a mystic, but a mystic who fought relentlessly for the underprivileged, for the Algerian Muslims, and who incorporated passion and love. Years later he talked to me in an overcrowded elevator in Tokyo about the secrets of the mystical rose, unaware of the noisy human beings around us.

Amsterdam opened my eyes to the numerous possible ways to interpret religion in its essence and its manifestations, philological, historical, theological, sociological, and shortly afterwards I obtained a doctorate in the History of Religion from the Faculty of Divinity in Marburg. Yet, the Protestant church of the province Hessen very soon prohibited the faculty to offer such a degree because its ideals did not

tally with the church's attitude toward the study of non-Christian religions. And was there not the danger that a non-Protestant might receive a degree from a Protestant faculty?

A brief visit to Switzerland in the spring of 1951 brought me in touch with the philosopher Rudolf Pannwitz, whose fascinating thought system—much too little known even in German-speaking countries—helped me appreciate better the philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal, the Indo-Muslim poet-philosopher. For the first time I also met Fritz Meier, the best authority on the study of Sufism—an admired model and, later, a wonderful friend to this day.

A decisive event took place in 1952: my first visit to Turkey. I had received a small grant to study manuscripts on Islamic prayer life in Turkish libraries, and fell immediately in love with Istanbul and with the wonderful hospitality of Turkish friends from whom I learned so much about Islamic culture as well as of Turkey's classical past. At the end of my first stay I had still enough money left to fulfill my heart's wish: I flew to Konya to visit the mausoleum of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi who died in this place in 1273. After reading and translating his ecstatic verse for so many years, I simply *had* to go, and Konya, then a small sleepy town, did not disappoint me (as it does now, surrounded by rows of high-rise apartment buildings that seem to bar off spirituality). A thunderstorm at night transformed the greyish streets and little gardens into a veritable paradise; the roads were filled with the heavy fragrance of *igde* (musk willow), and I understood why Rumi's poetry is permeated with spring songs. It is not a logos or a worn-out image based on a Koranic reference to the resurrection—rather, he knew that the thunder was indeed like the sound of Israfil's trumpet which announces the resurrection of the seemingly dead bodies. And did not the trees now don green silken robes, fresh from Paradise?

I loved Turkey so much that I returned next fall without a grant. In retrospect, these two stays look like a time of perfect ecstasy, and my major joy—besides the library work—was to discover Istanbul on foot. The librarian of the delightful Aya Sofya library took me around after work, reciting a poem at each corner, so that I experienced the city through poetry. And often did I sit with the well-known poets of the country to discuss with them problems of modern

literature—problems of a people that had been deprived of its time-honored Arabic alphabet in 1928 and was trying to shed its historical fetters.

During my second stay, new friends helped me to gain access to another part of Turkish culture, to the best traditions of Turkish Sufism. There were successful businessmen who yet would spend night after night in silent meditation, and there was Samiha Ayverdi, the towering figure among mystics and writers, author of numerous books and articles in which she conjures up the traditional life. In her house I was introduced to the culture of Ottoman Turkey, and she and her family opened my eyes to the eternal beauty of Islamic fine arts, in particular calligraphy. I loved to listen to her discourses which went on in long, swinging sentences, while the sky over the Bosphorus seemed to be covered with clouds of roses. A few weeks ago, in March 1993, she passed away on the eve of the Feast of Fastbreaking, three days after I had kissed her frail hands for the last time.

After experiencing such generous friendship by people from all walks of life, Germany appeared cold and unfriendly to me, and the prediction of my old colleague in Marburg seemed to be much more true than at the beginning of my career—there were enough people who did not like a young woman who, to add to this in itself negative aspect, had published a book of verse translations of Oriental poetry, not to mention a volume of German verse in Persian style and who was—even worse!—fascinated by the mystical dimensions of Islam instead relying solely on the hard external facts, be it history or philology. Therefore I more than gladly accepted the offer of Ankara University to join the recently created Faculty of Islamic Theology and to teach, in Turkish, history of religions although I was a Christian woman. The five years that followed were beautiful, hard, and instructive. My mother joined me for many months every year and shared my love of the Anatolian landscape through which we traveled on long, dusty roads—the poetry of Yunus Emre, the medieval Turkish bard, was my company. The years in Ankara gave me the chance to visit villages and small towns, to observe "the piety of the old women", and to discuss questions of religious truth with Sufis and lay people, to learn much about Islamic customs and practices. At the same time I had numerous friends who espoused Ataturk's ideals, and I saw how a

gap was widening, year by year, between the two faces of contemporary Turkey. Its result is a superficial Americanization of those who have forsaken their moorings in the Islamic-Turkish tradition, and a hardening stance of those who, as a reaction to such a development, seek help in a legalistic "fundamentalism."

Of course, we visited Konya time and again. Shortly after our arrival I was asked to give a paper during the first public celebration of Rumi's anniversary on December 17, 1954. It was the first time that the old dervishes could get together for the *samac*, the mystical concert and the whirling dance, after Ataturk had banned the mystical fraternities in 1925 and prohibited their activities. There they were—we saw them first in an old private mansion, whirling like big white butterflies and listened to the enchanting music. Thus Rumi became even more alive and stayed with me as an unfailing source of inspiration and consolation to this day. Now, however, dervish dance and whirling have in most cases degenerated into a folkloristic play or a tourist attraction, just as much as those who claim to translate Rumi's poems into a western language usually cling to a few, often misunderstood, concepts which would make the great mystical thinker-poet shudder. But who can still undergo the hard training of 1,001 days, during which Rumi's Persian works would be studied while music, whirling, and meditation slowly "cooked" the dervish until he was spiritually matured?

Having reached a certain impasse in my scholarly work after five years, I decided to return to Marburg, not exactly welcomed by my colleagues.

But in the meantime another strand appeared in my life's fabric. Even since I was a student I had admired the work of Muhammad Iqbal, the Indo-Muslim poet (1877-1938) who is regarded as Pakistan's spiritual father and in whose poetical work Eastern and Western ideals, personified by Rumi and Goethe, are blended in a fascinating way. After Pakistan came into existence in 1947 I was able to procure some studies about him, and a wonderful coincidence brought me, thanks to Rudolf Pannwitz, in touch with an old German poet who once had translated some of Iqbal's poems from an English version into German verse. He had sent them to Lahore where they are now on display in the Iqbal Museum, and as he could not read the two Persian works

Iqbal offered him as a token of gratitude, Harms Meinke gave them to me. It was the poet's *Payam-i mashriq*, his answer to Goethe's *West-Östlicher Divan*, and the *Javidnama*, the soul's journey through the seven spheres. I could not help translating the latter work into German verse, and my enthusiasm was so great that I talked incessantly about his wonderful, reformist and yet deeply mystical thought so that my Turkish friends urged me to translate the epic into Turkish—not in verse, to be sure, but with a commentary. This led to my invitation to Pakistan at the beginning of 1958.

There it was not only Iqbal's memory and the repercussions of his work that I found; I became interested in the different languages and literatures of the country and fell simply in love with Sindhi, the language of the lower Indus Valley. To read the mystical songs of Shah Abdul Latif (d.1752) and his successors proved a never ending spiritual adventure, for classical Islamic thought, mystical trends, the admixture of Indian *bhakti* elements, and especially the concept of the woman as the representative of the soul in her quest for the Eternal Beloved fascinated me for years. I often remembered the wise old Padmanaba of my childhood tale who introduced the young Arab into the mysteries of Sufism, for from the walls of the innumerable saints' tomb in the countryside resounded the word: "People are asleep, and when they die they awake." And the undulating cadences of Sindhi music led to a deeper love for Indian and, in general, Oriental music.

Pakistan remained my main field of work after I left Turkey. Numerous journeys have led me there in the following years to this day, and I came to know the different nooks and corners of the vast country—not only the steppes of Sind, dotted with little mausoleums, but also, at a much later stage, the mountains in the north, and I often wonder what was the highpoint of some 30 visits to Pakistan. Was it the radiant morning in Islamabad when I was awarded the *Hilal-i Pakistan*, the highest civil distinction of the country, in a ceremony in which the Aga Khan also participated? Was it the drive to the Khunjrab Pass of 15,000 feet at the Chinese border? Or the flight along the Nanga Parbat into the gorges of the young Indus? Or was it the incredible hospitality of the people even in the poorest village, the gentle gesture of an unknown guard who hurried to bring a glass of water for the honored guest from Germany? Or was it perhaps the flight in a small

helicopter across southern Balochistan to Las Bela and then to the sacred cave of Hinglaj in the Makran mountains, a Kati sanctuary which we finally reached on camel back? I watched the political changes; had long talks with Mr. Bhutto and with General Zia ul-Haq; saw the industrialization grow; the old patterns of life slowly disappear; tensions between the different faction intensify; ministers and heads of states changing or being killed. But the variegated cultural trends and the friendship of so many people (who usually knew me from my frequent appearance on TV) makes me very much feel at home in Pakistan.

My fascination with Pakistan—and the whole Subcontinent—was supported in a quite unexpected way. In 1960, before being called to the University of Bonn to teach Islamic studies and the related languages, I had helped organize the International Congress for the History of Religion in Marburg. Five years later American colleagues invited me to assist them a bit in organizing the next conference in Claremont, California. It was my first visit to the United States. I enjoyed it, taking in everything from Disneyland to the Grand Canyon as well as New York, which never ceases to excite me. The conference itself clearly showed the historical approach to religious studies of the majority of Europeans and a more dynamic attitude advocated by a number of North American scholars. But more confusing for me than this somewhat worrying tension between schools of thought was Wilfred Cantwell Smith's question whether I would consider coming to Harvard to teach Indo-Muslim Culture. It was the famous Minute-Rice Chair which a wealthy Indian Muslim, infatuated with the Urdu poetry of Mir (d.1810) and Ghalib (d.1869), had dreamt of in the hope that his favorite poets would be translated into English to enchant the West as much as Fitzgerald's renderings of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* had done more than a century ago. No, I said; I was not interested at all—Urdu was not my field. And America? I had never thought of settling there.

At that point I had still another reason to refuse the offer or, at least, to hesitate to accept it: after moving to Bonn in 1961, I was editing from 1963 onward an Arabic cultural magazine with Albert Theile, one of the most ingenious creators of high-class cultural publications. Our *Fikrun wa Fann* was often praised as the most beautiful journal

printed in Germany, and as I was not only responsible for the Arabic texts but in part also for the composition, I learned how to make a classical layout with scissors and glue until a perfect piece of work was achieved. In connection with our selection of articles, authors, and illustrations, we had to visit numerous museums, theaters, and ballets, and my horizon widened thanks to the lovely work which enabled me to indulge in my artistic interests and thus in a certain way supplemented my academic teaching. To leave my journal? No!

And yet, who could resist a call from Harvard? I finally accepted, all the more since I did not see any chance for further promotion in Germany—as my chairman remarked: "Miss Schimmel, if you were a man, you would get a chair!"

My contract with Harvard began in July 1966, but I used the first months to buy books in India and Pakistan. Coming from Iran I stopped in Afghanistan whose natural beauty captured my heart—was not the sapphire lake of Band -i Amir taken out of a childhood dream? Later I was to return several times to this country with its hospitable people, traveling from Sistan to Balkh, from Ghazni to Herat, and each place was fraught with memories of Islamic history, resounding with Persian verse. I stayed again in Lahore and then proceeded to India, which in the following years was to become more and more familiar to me—not only the north with its Moghul heritage but perhaps even more the south. I found in the old royal cities of the Deccan—Gulbarga, Bidar, Bijapur, Aurangabad, and Golconda—Hyderabad—so many things that gave witness to the vast but little-known literary and artistic heritage of that area that again a new world unfolded, a world which I tried to open up to my students at Harvard and which enabled me to be of some help when Cary Welch prepared the glorious "INDIA!" exhibition in 1985 at the Metropolitan Museum.

In March 1967 I arrived in Harvard to experience the very first morning a terrible blizzard. Nobody had ever told me that such events were quite common, just as nobody ever bothered to introduce me into the secrets of Harvard administration: the mysterious proceedings that ruled grades, term papers, admission meetings, the difference between graduates and undergraduates, and so on. How could one, acquainted with a completely different academic system (that held true for both

Germany and Turkey), know all these things? The first semester was hard: not only was I made to teach an introduction to Islamic history besides Persian, Urdu, and quite a few other subjects, but I also spent every spare moment in the bowels of Widener making the first list of the hundreds and hundreds of Urdu books which by then had arrived from the Subcontinent. While we had only six or seven Urdu publications when I checked the catalogue first, Widener now boasts one of the finest libraries of Urdu and Sindhi in the United States.

"Harvard is the loneliest place on earth." Thus an American colleague had told me, and it was only thanks to my wonderful students that I survived those first years—students from India and Pakistan, from the Carolinas and from the West Coast, from Iran and from the Arab world, Jesuits and Muslims as well as Buddhists. They were my children, and they supported me when I went through phases of despair, and trying to help them solve some of their problems (not only scholarly ones but personal ones as well) helped me overcome some of my own problems. And as I had seen Istanbul through the eyes of poets, so I learned something about "the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls" through e.e. cummings' verse.

My problem was that I had to teach in a language not my own, and while I had thoroughly loved teaching in Turkish, I always remembered my near-failure in English in high school, even though I had already published quite a few books in English. And worse: In Germany I could use the magnificent poetical translations of Oriental poetry made from 1810 onward, and when there was none available I translated a poem myself into verse. Here, I was like mute, unable to get across these treasures to my students—or so I thought. After Harvard had offered me tenure in 1970, I grew more secure, and the arrangement to teach one semester with a double teaching load while spending most of the fall in Germany and in the Subcontinent was, I think, beneficial both for my research and for my students. That such an arrangement was accepted by the university was largely due to the efforts of the trustee of the Minute-Rice money, Mr. James R. Cherry, whose friendship and wise counsel I have enjoyed ever since I came to this country. In the course of time, especially after moving into Eliot House, I felt more and more a veritable member of the Harvard community, meeting colleagues from different fields of specialization through the Senior

Common Room—something the member of a small, exotic department really needs in order to develop a sensitivity to the problems facing a major elite university.

Strangely enough, with my life on three continents, my literary output kept on growing. The United States compelled me to publish in English, which meant reaching a much wider readership than previously when I wrote mainly in German. I also enjoyed the chance to learn more about North America since numerous conferences led me to most of the major campuses. Everywhere I found friends. UCLA was an almost regular site where I attended many of Levi-della-Vida conferences and was honored myself, quite unexpectedly, by receiving the Levi-della-Vida medal in 1987. There was Salt Lake City and the stunning beauty of southern Utah; there was Eugene (Oregon) and Dallas; Chapel Hill and Toronto and many more; and there was Chicago with its fine group of historians of religion who included me among the editors of Mircea Eliade's prestigious *Encyclopedia of Religion*. It is fitting to mention here the ACLS lectures in the History of Religion in the spring of 1980, which brought me from Tennessee and Duke to Edmonton, Alberta. I think I broke the records with the sheer number of my lectures on various aspects of mystical poetry in Islam, published in the book *As Through a Veil*. The time on the other side of the ocean was filled with lecture tours to Switzerland and Scandinavia, to Prague and to Australia, to Egypt and Yemen, not to forget my participation in the festivities on occasion of the 2,500 years of Iran in 1971.

Often people ask me whether such a life between classes, typewriter, and ever so many lectures on a variety of topics is not exhausting. It may be at certain moments, but the joy one experiences when meeting so many interesting people indulging in lively discussions after the lectures—over breakfast, lunch, and dinner—is certainly rejuvenating for it fills the mind with fresh ideas, and even the most stupid question of an untutored journalist or an inquisitive high school student may tell you that you could have tackled a certain problem more skillfully, or defined a formulation more lucidly. To be sure, the constantly repeated question: "How is it that you as a woman became interested in Islam, of all things?" makes me increasingly impatient and even angry!

The circle of my scholarly life, and that is almost a coterminous with my life in general, expanded. The fact that my American cousin Paul Schimmel (named after my father who never knew of his existence) teaches at MIT and was elected on the same day as I to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences was and still is a great source of joy for me, and I feel proud of him and his loving family, with the two girls deeply interested in Islamic culture.

It was certainly an experience to watch not only the development of my students (some of whom by now are retired ambassadors or greybearded professors), but also to observe how spiritual seeds that existed long ago matured into wonderful flowers and fruits. When I learned how to handle the phenomenological approach to religion, which seems to facilitate the understanding of the external manifestations of religions and slowly guides the seeker into the heart of each religion, I was and still am convinced that such an approach can lead to much-needed tolerance without losing oneself in sweeping, dangerous "syncretistic" views that blur all differences.

But could I have ever dreamt in those early years that one day I would be elected (in 1980) President of the International Association of the History of Religion, the first woman and the first Islamologist to occupy this office? Or could anyone have foreseen that I would be invited to deliver, in 1992, the prestigious Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh, the dream of every historian of religion, theologian, or philosopher? When I read in my second semester of Persian, at age 17, the *Safarnama* of the great medieval Ismaili philosopher Nasir-i Khusraw (d. after 1071), could I have imagined that some of my best students at Harvard would be members of the Ismaili community or that I was to become closely associated with the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, where I like to teach summer courses and for whom I translated (and now—thank heaven!—into English verse) poems from the pen of this very Nasir-i Khusraw?

And when I, near despairing in the *Arbeitsdienst* before entering the university, wrote a letter to the imam of the Berlin mosque asking him whether he could find a family in Lahore with whom I could spend some time to learn Urdu (which, of course, was a purely utopian

idea!)—who could have foreseen that more than 40 years later, in 1982, one of the most beautiful alleys in Lahore would bear my name?

My entire life, lived in widening circles, as Rilke puts it, was a constant process of learning. To be sure, learning and re-learning history, as it happened several times in my life, made me somewhat weary of the constant shift of focus or of perspective in the political life of the countries I was associated with. Perhaps, looking at the Islamic (and not only Islamic!) societies in modern times, one should keep in mind the ingenious insight into the patterns of ebb and flood of the tides of history as expressed by the 14th-century North-African historian Ibn Khaldun in his *muqaddima*, parts of which I translated in my early days—and one tends (at least I do) to look out for the unchanging power behind the fluctuating surface of the ocean of events.

My parents, wise as they were, taught me this in different ways. Without my father's understanding of the very heart of religion and without my mother's even deepening wisdom, her infinite patience with a somewhat unusual daughter, and her never failing support, my life would have been quite different. A village girl who never had been to high school but was completely self-taught, my mother read the manuscripts and proofs of all my German books and articles and acted, as she loved to say, as the "people's voice" and thus taught me to write with non-specialist readers in mind. But she also tried to check my tendency to enter too deeply into dreams of mystical love for, being supersensitive herself, she was afraid lest I lose my sobriety and my critical mind.

Although it seems that the time of learning might now draw to a close, yet I understand that every moment—even the most unpleasant one—teaches me something and that every experience should be incorporated into my life to enrich it. For there is no end to learning as there is no end to life, and when Iqbal says in a daring formulation: "Heaven is no holiday!" he expresses the view, dear to Goethe and other thinkers, that even eternal life will be a constant process of growing, and, that is, of learning—learning in whatever mysterious way something about the unfathomable mysteries of the Divine, which manifests itself under various signs. Suffering, too, is part of it; and the most difficult task in life is to learn patience.

Learning is, to me, transforming knowledge and experience into wisdom and love, to mature—as according to Oriental lore, the ordinary pebble can turn into a ruby provided it patiently takes into itself the rays of the sun, shedding its own blood in a supreme sacrifice. Perhaps a few lines which I once wrote after visiting Maulana Rumi's mausoleum in Konya can express what learning means to me:

Never will you reach that silver mountain
which appears, like a cloud of joy,
in the evening light.

Never can you cross that lake of salt
which treacherously smiles at you
in the morning mist.

Every step on this road takes you farther away
from home, from flowers, from spring.
Sometimes the shade of a cloud will dance on the road,
sometimes you rest in a ruined caravansary,
seeking the Truth from the blackish tresses of smoke,
sometimes you walk a few steps
with a kindred soul
only to lose him again.

You go and go, torn by the wind,
burnt by the sun
and the shepherd's flute
tells you "the Path in blood".

until you cry no more
until the lake of salt
is only your dried-up tears

which mirror the mountain of joy
that is closer to you than your heart.