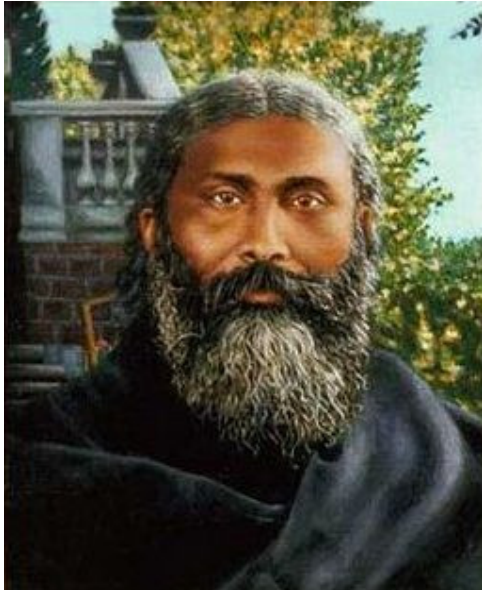


## Inayat Khan: On Sufism



Sufism originated from the ancient school of Egyptian mysteries, a school which existed even before Abraham, the father of three great religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Those who know Sufism from superficial writings, and, sometimes, from translations of the Arabic or Persian literature, are apt to think that Sufism is the mystical side of Islam. In reality, it is not true. Sufism existed before Mohammed, before Jesus Christ, before Abraham.

It is true that the mystics in the world of Islam are called Sufis, but that does not mean that "Sufi" means the mystics of Islam. For instance, the green color is the national color of the Irish, but that does not mean that everybody who dresses in green is from Ireland. The green color existed even before people inhabited Ireland.

### Background on Sufism

What is meant by the word Sufi? The word Sufi is derived from the Arabic word Safa, or Saf, which means, literally, pure, i.e. pure from distinctions and differences. In Greek the word means wise. Sufism cannot be called deism, for the Sufi does not consider God as an entity separate from oneself. Neither can it be called pantheism, because the Sufi not only sees the immanence of God in nature, but also realizes God's Essence in the infinite, naming God Allah, the Formless, the Colorless. The Sufi is neither a believer in the unrealized God nor an unbeliever in the idealized Deity, and thus one is distinguished from godly and ungodly alike. The Sufi is not an atheist, for the Sufi denies neither God nor God's Messengers.

To the question, "Are you a Christian?", "Are you a Muslim?", "Are you a Jew?", the Sufi's answer would be "yes" rather than "no", for the Sufi opposes no religion but sympathizes with all. In fact Sufism cannot be called a religion, for it does not impose either belief or principle upon anyone, considering that each individual soul has its own principles best suited for it, and a belief which changes with each grade of evolution. Sufism is not an intellectual philosophy, because it does not depend merely upon cold reasoning, but develops a devotional tendency in one. Sufism cannot be called occultism, for the Sufi does not give any importance to the investigation of phenomena; seeing the brevity of life, a Sufi deems that a worthless pursuit: the Sufi's aim is God alone.

### The Origin of Sufism

The germ of Sufism is said to have existed from the beginning of the human creation, for wisdom is the heritage of all; therefore no one person can be said to be its propounder. It has been revealed more clearly and spread more widely from time to time as the world has evolved.

Sufism as a brother/sisterhood may be traced back as far as the period of Daniel. We find

among the Zoroastrians, Hatim, the best known Sufi of his time. The chosen ones of God, the salt of the earth, who responded without hesitation to the call of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed, were Sufis, and were not only simple followers of a religion but had insight into divine knowledge. They recognized God's every messenger and united with them all. Before the time of Mohammed they were called Ekuanul Safa, Brothers of Purity, but after his coming they were named by him Sahabi Safa, Knights of Purity. The world has called them Zoroastrian, Christian, Jewish, or Islamic mystics, and the followers of each religion have claimed them as their own. For instance, a Christian would claim that Saint Paul was a Christian and a Muslim that Shams Tabriz was a Muslim. In reality Christ was not a Christian nor was Mohammed a Muslim, they were Sufis.

## Relation to Other Religions

Although Sufism is the essence of all religions and its influence is upon all, yet it can more justly be called the esoteric side of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But it is not a purely Zoroastrian esotericism devoid of Jewish influence, nor is it a solely Jewish mysticism free from the influence of Christianity, nor is it entirely Christian wisdom untouched by the morals of Islam. Therefore it is justifiable to call it the true spirit of all religions, even of those as foreign to it as Vedanta and Buddhism. We see Zoroaster in the Sufi in one's purity, one's love for light and one's worship of God in the sublimity of nature. We see Moses in the Sufi in one's constant communion with God. We see Christ in the Sufi in one's charity and self-renunciation. The true meaning of the sacrament is seen in the daily life of the Sufi, who readily shares one's all with another. The life of a true Sufi is an open Bible for anyone to read. We see Mohammed in the humanity of the Sufi, in one's strength in facing the struggle of life and bearing with equanimity its responsibilities.

## The Sufi Movement

Sufism was intellectually born in Arabia, devotionally reared in Persia, and spiritually completed in India. For the last forty years the direct and indirect influence of the East has prepared the ground in the West for the seed of the Sufi message. Every event has its time, and it has been ordained by the Supreme Will that East and West shall now unite in the bond of love and wisdom which neither politics nor commerce can bring about, but only the call of God, the Lord of both East and West.

## Sufism - The Spirit of All Religions

The word Sufi, or Saf, implies purity, which contains two qualities. That is pure which is unmixed with any element other than its own, or in other words, that is pure which existed in its own element unalloyed and unstained. And secondly, that is pure which is most adaptable. Pure water, for instance, is water without the mixture of anything else, and the test of its purity is that it can adapt itself to whatever is mixed with it. If it is mixed with a red powder it becomes red, if with a green powder, green.

Such is the nature of the Sufi. In the first place the Sufis purify themselves by keeping the vision of God always before them, not allowing the stains of earthly differences and distinctions to be mirrored upon their heart. Neither good nor bad society, nor intercourse with people of high or low class, nor faith or belief can ever interfere with one's purity.

The Sufi shows universal kinship in one's adaptability. Among Christians one is a Christian, among Jews one is a Jew, among Muslims, a Muslim, among Hindus, a Hindu, for a Sufi is with all and thus all are with the Sufi. Sufis allow everyone to join with them in the brother/sisterhood, and in the same way allow themselves to join in any other. The Sufi never questions, "What is your creed, nation, or religion?" Neither does a Sufi ask, "What are your teachings or principles?" If you call a Sufi brother or sister, one answers as brother or sister.

The Sufi has no fixed principles, because what is sweet may be beneficial to one and harmful to another, and it is thus with all principles, good or bad, kind or cruel. If you require of soldiers that they should be merciful during a battle they will at once be defeated. This shows that each person has one's own principles for each action and situation.

## Sufism - Beyond Religion

Modern writers have often made mistakes by writing of Sufism as a Persian philosophy or the esoteric side of Islam. Some have erroneously believed it to be a borrowed influence of Vedanta or Buddhism upon Islam. Some Oriental writers have patriotically called it an outcome of Islam in order to secure the credit for their own religion, while some Occidental writers have attempted to win it for Christianity.

In fact, according to the sacred history which the Sufis have inherited from one another, it is clear that Sufism has never been owned by any race or religion for differences and distinctions are the very delusions from which Sufis purify themselves. It might appear that Sufism must have been formed of the different elements of various religions which are prominent today, but it is not so, for Sufism itself is the essence of all the religions as well as the spirit of Islam.

Sufism reveals all the shades and colors which represent the various religions of the world, having no particular color itself. All prophets, saints, sages, and mystics are practically owned by their followers, as Christ by the Christians and Moses by the Jews. Yet Christ was not a Christian nor Moses a Jew, all being Sufis, pure from earthly distinctions. The Beloved Ones of God are even as God, impervious to religious dogmas and principles.

Sufism is not a religion nor a philosophy, it is neither deism nor atheism, nor is it a moral, nor a special kind of mysticism, being free from the usual religious sectarianism. If ever it could be called a religion, it would only be as a religion of love, harmony, and beauty. If it be called a philosophy it is beyond that because a Sufi, through the study of metaphysics, escapes the selfishness produced by philosophy and kindles the fire of devotion with one's eyes open to reason and logic. The Sufi prays to Allah every moment in one's life, invoking God's Name and realizing at the same time that the self is no other than God. For to a Sufi God is not a personal being but a mighty healer to awaken the soul from its delusion of earthly individuality, and a guide to lead it to self-realization, the only aim in life.

The Sufi, by learning the greatest of all morals, which is love, arrives at the stage of self-denial, wherein one liberates oneself from all earthly morals. Mysticism has several aspects but the Sufi strives towards the path of truth, its ultimate goal. The truth of the Sufi is the one truth which is common to all religions and philosophies, and in the realization of which one finds one's salvation, or Najat. Sufism, being the first brother/sisterhood of purity, has been known under different names, such as that of the Brothers of Purity, the Knights of Purity, the Brotherhood of the Cave, on which initiative several other institutions have established kinships under different names.

## Sufism: Wisdom Of All Faiths

The word Sufi comes from a Persian word meaning wisdom. From the original root many derivations can be traced; among them the Greek word Sophia is one of the most interesting. Wisdom is the ultimate power. In wisdom is rooted religion, which connotes law and inspiration. But the point of view of the wise differs from that of the simple followers of a religion. The wise, whatever their faith, have always been able to meet each other beyond those boundaries of external forms and conventions, which are natural and necessary to human life, but which none the less separate humanity.

People of the same thought and point of view are drawn to each other with a tendency to form an exclusive circle. A minority is apt to fence itself off from the crowd. So it has been with the mystics. Mystical ideas are unintelligible to the generality of people. The mystics

have, therefore, usually imparted their ideas to a chosen few only, to those whom they could trust, who were ready for initiation and discipleship. Thus great Sufis have appeared at different times and have founded schools of thought. Their expression of wisdom has differed to suit their environments, but their understanding of life has been one and the same. The same herb planted in various atmospheric conditions will vary in form accordingly, but will retain its characteristics.

The European historian sometimes traces the history of Sufism by noticing the actual occurrence of this word and by referring only to those schools which have definitely wished to be known by this name. Some European scholars find the origin of this philosophy in the teaching Of Islam, others connect it with Buddhism. Others do not reject as incredible the Semitic tradition that Sufism's foundation is to be attributed to the teachings of Abraham. But the greater number consider that it arose contemporary to the teaching of Zoroaster. Every age of the world has seen awakened souls, and as it is impossible to limit wisdom to any one period or place, so it is impossible to date the origin of Sufism.

Not only have there been illuminated souls at all times, but there have been times when a wave of illumination has passed over humanity as a whole. We believe that such a period is at hand. The calamity through which the world has lately passed, and the problems of the present difficult situations are due to the existence Of boundaries; this fact is already clear to many. Sufism takes away the boundaries which divide different faiths by bringing into full light the underlying wisdom in which they are all united.

## Different Schools of Sufism

Sufism is the old school of quietism; the ancient school of wisdom which has been the origin of many cults of a mystical and philosophical nature. As the origin of all the occult and mystical schools has been the ancient school of Egypt, so Sufism has always represented that school, and has worked out its destiny in the realm of quietude.

From this school of Sufism came four schools. The first was the Nakshiabandia, which worked with symbolism, ritualism and ceremony. The second was the Kadaria, which taught wisdom in the realm of the existing religion of the East. The third was the Soharvardia, which taught the mystery of life by the knowledge of metaphysics and the practice of self-control. The fourth was the Chistia, which represented the spiritual idea in the realm Of poetry, music, etc. From these schools many branches sprang forth in Arabia, Turkey, Tartary, Russia, Turkestan, Bokhara, Afghanistan, India, Siberia, and other parts of Asia.

With the different schools the ideal remained the same, but the method was different. The main ideal of the Sufi school has been to attain that perfection which Jesus Christ taught in the Bible: "Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect." The method of the Sufis has always been that of self-effacement, but the effacement of which self? Not of the real self, but of the false self (on which one depends, priding oneself on being something) I in order to allow that real self to manifest in the world of appearances. Thus the Sufi method works toward the unfoldment of the soul, the self which is eternal, to which all power and beauty belong.

## The Sufi Message

In all periods of the history of the world and in all ancient traditions one finds traces of a call from above being given to communities, nations, races and the world at large. In the Koran it is said, "We have sent our messengers to every part of the earth, that they may not say they were not warned in time." All traditions declare that a messenger is given to the world at the time of the world's need.

No doubt people have given an unnecessary and excessive importance to the personality of the messenger rather than to the message, and this is the very great error that humanity has made in every age. In taking the messenger instead of recognizing the message, they

regarded the pen that wrote the letter instead of the contents of the letter. The letter and the writer are important; the pen is only the instrument. Thus differences came about in religion. The message has always been given at all periods; when it was more needed it was given with a loud voice, when it was less needed, gently. Christ has said, "I am Alpha and Omega." This means that he is first and last and thus is ever there, not that he is absent between time. The prophesy of Mohammed was: "Now that all the world has received the message through a man who is subject to all limitations and conditions of human life, the message will in the future be given without the claim."

The Sufi message is destined to reawaken the world and to be a warning. The power of the inner force is constantly at work and this promises much for what is now formed as a nucleus composed of a few mureeds under the name of the Sufi Order to be the servant of the new era in the path of God and truth.

I wish that my mureeds who feel in their hearts this trust shall not only receive the sacred message for their own unfoldment but shall feel the privilege of being a nucleus for the coming spiritual reconstruction of the world. The more conscious they will be of this, the more they will feel the responsibility they have in their life and the duty they must perform. Mureeds can show their devotion to Murshid and to the cause by doing their very best and be devoting their thoughts and efforts in action to the rebuilding of the spiritual world.

A Sufi is one who guards one's knowledge and wisdom and power in humble guise. A Sufi does not dispute on spiritual subjects with everyone, for this reason: the spiritual evolution of each one differs from that of the other, the knowledge of one cannot be the knowledge of the other, nor is the understanding of one the understanding of the other. A Sufi does not discuss beliefs, for the Sufi knows that at every step in spiritual evolution a person's belief changes until one arrives at a final belief which words cannot explain.

The Sufi learns not only by the study of books but by the study of life. The whole of life is like an open book to a Sufi and every experience is a step forward in one's spiritual journey. A Sufi would rather team than teach. A Sufi begins one's life by discipline and resignation, realizing that the path that leads to the goal of freedom is the path of self-control, patience, resignation, and renunciation.

Freedom is the object of all esoteric schools, but one must not make the mistake of thinking that one can begin with that which is the end. To expect liberty in the beginning is to be like the seed thinking, I must be a tree at once and bear fruit." The fruit is the outcome and object, the culmination of its existence; so is freedom the result of the journey. The path of freedom is an ideal, to understand the real meaning of which is not everyone's work.

The method of the Sufi consists in this: that the Sufi unites with one's innermost being; one's heart is the shrine of one's God and one's body is God's temple; the Sufi considers every person not only as one's brother and sister but as oneself. At the same time, the Sufi never claims spirituality or goodness, neither does the Sufi judge anyone, except oneself in one's own doings. The Sufi's constant attitude towards others is that of love and forgiveness. The Sufi's attitude towards God is that one's innermost being is the object of one's worship and the Beloved Whom one loves and admires. The Sufi's interest in life is art and beauty, and one's task the service of humanity in whatever form possible.