

# We Are the Whirled

How to spin like a dervish without getting (too) dizzy

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(Brief Excerpts)

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Whirling is an ancient devotional **exercise** associated with Sufism, a mystical (and sometimes controversial) branch of **Islam**. It originated among communities of Sufi holy men in Persia (modern-day Iran and Turkey, approximately) in the late 1200s. As the dervishes turned, they fell into ecstatic, trance-like meditative states. As part of a larger **spiritual** program, whirling is supposed to help you abandon your ego and, ideally, achieve union with God.

... After 45 minutes of hypnotic **music** and spoken Sufi poetry, we folded up the chairs, took off our shoes, and spread out so that we all had room to whirl.

... frenzied speed was not the goal. The teacher [**Shahram Shiva**] insisted that gentle whirling was easy enough, and wouldn't make us dizzy, as long as we followed his four simple rules: stand straight and make an axis of your spine; turn slowly counter-clockwise ("towards your heart"), using your right foot to pivot around your left one; keep your eyes open, unfocused, and level; when you stop, stare at a fixed spot on the floor until you feel yourself stabilize.

**... It was also tricky to keep your eyes level, yet not really look directly at anything. After a few minutes, though, most of the whirlers got into the groove. There was a quiet intensity in the room, the way there is when many people focus on the same work.**

**As we continued to turn, the teacher asked us to stretch our arms out a bit, raising our right hand slightly up and our left one down. In principle, we were receiving divine energy in our right hand, transferring it through ourselves, and emptying it into the earth via our left hand. Here again, some bumping and knocking occurred, but nothing that spun us out of control.**

**We whirled for about ten minutes, then slowly came to a halt and fixed our eyes on our chosen carpet thread. It seemed to work--no one reeled drunkenly, though the teacher had to grab one lady who stumbled.**

**After a five-minute breather, we started again. We were to create our "own spinning galaxy," the teacher urged. He also noted that the Earth and tornadoes whirl counterclockwise, so our cyclical movements were truly in tune with nature.**

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