

# The Sufi Tradition



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# Divine knowledge is large and deep as an ocean

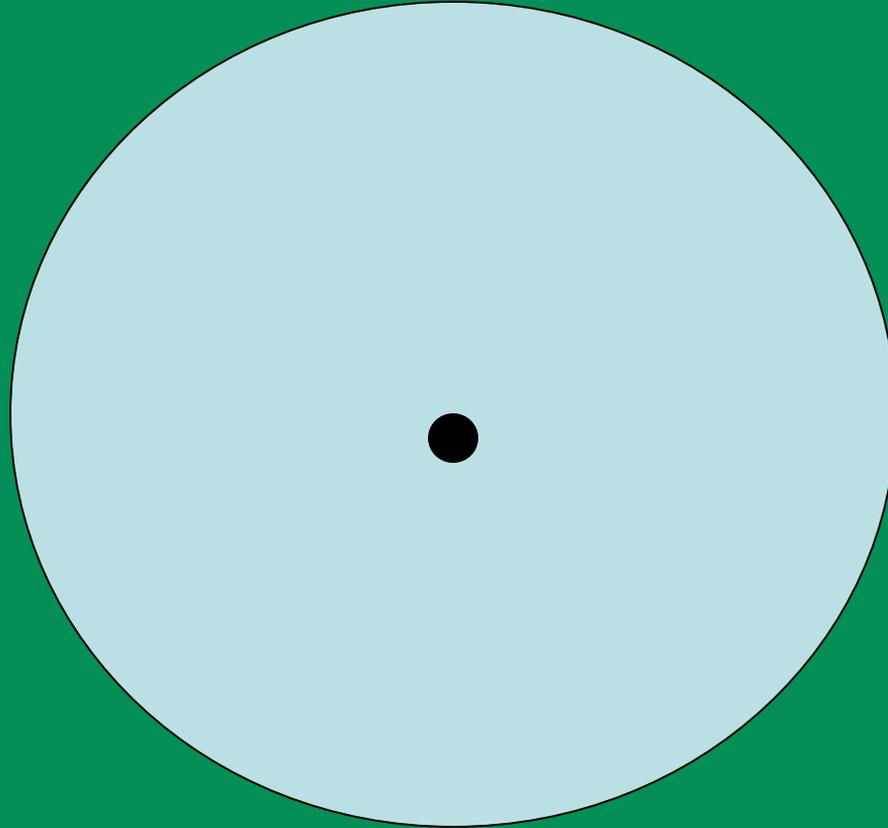
## Sufism and *Irfan* ( *Ma'rifah* )

There is no clear distinction between the two terms designated to the schools of Divine knowledge in Islam that often interchangeably referred to as:

- *Sufism*, associated more with cults and practices, and more emphasis on the Way of Love (*Mahabbah*), to deal with *Ultimate Reality* (*Haqiqah*)
- *Irfan*, is gnosis that uses philosophy as means to deal with *Ultimate Reality*, and have more emphasis on the Way of Knowledge (*Ma'rifah*)

In no instances does one find in Sufism a path of knowledge completely separated from a path of love without the element of gnosis, however there are emphasis characterizing each Sufi individual for example, Ibn Arabi, Ibn Ata'illah al-Iskandari, Shabistari, may speak more of gnosis (*ma'rifah*) while Rumi, Attar, Hafiz, Sa'di more of love (*mahabbah*)

# Knowledge of the self



Modern man has simply forgotten who he is. Living on the periphery of his own circle of existence, he has been able to gain a qualitatively superficial but quantitatively staggering knowledge of the world. He has projected the externalized and superficial image of himself upon the world.

❖ The decadence of humanities in modern times is caused by man's loss of the direct knowledge of himself and also of the **Self** that he has always had

❖ He tries to study himself by reliance upon an externalized, indirect knowledge of himself which he seeks to gain from the outside, which is literally superficial.

❖ This way, he never realizes the axis of the wheel, and the spokes which connect him to the Center like a ray light to the sun

# Traditional Psychology

is closely wed to the traditional metaphysic, because it contains the means whereby **the soul can understand its own structure** and with the help of appropriate spiritual disciplines transform itself so as to finally realize it - **Self**.

This is as much true of the *Yogacara* school of *Mahayana* Buddhism, as various forms of *Yoga* in Hinduism or of the contemplative schools within Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

A whole science of the soul has been developed based on the progressive perfection and transformation of the **self** towards the **Self**.

# Modern Psychology

The piecemeal scientific evidences about human behavior can be related to the *'traditional concept of man'* (such as of the Sufi) provided there is already an awareness of the whole, to which the fragment can be related.

Fragmented knowledge of human behavior is related to human nature the same way that waves are related to the sea. Certainly there is causal and substantial relationship between them, but unless one has had a vision of the sea in its vastness and illimitable horizons – one can not gain an essential knowledge of it through the study of its waves.

# Modern Psychology

There are some important conditions which has colored deeply the mental process of modern man:

1. The advancement and success of physical science in the West has made humanities studies became 'inferior' and tried to become 'scientific' only to degenerate into a state of superficiality
2. Empiricism and rationalistic philosophy have reduced the existence into a single level of reality
3. Cartesian dualism, has divided reality into:
  - Material
  - Non-Material  
(without discrimination between Spirit and the psyche, or the *ruh* and the *nafs* in Sufism)

# What Cartesian dualism has caused to spirituality?

Because of Cartesian dualism, the reaction against Materialism for a number of people means to turn towards the other pole, **Non-Materialism**, but because there is no fundamental distinction between the *ruh* (Spirit) and the *nafs* (psyche), therefore psychic and mental come to replace spiritual and Religious

A number of non-material faculties of human being are known in Sufism by the following terms:  
*Ruh* (Spirit); *Nafs* (psyche); *Qalb* (heart); *Aql* (intellect)

# The Ultimate Reality (Haqiqah)

In Islamic metaphysics, four basic qualities are attributed to Ultimate Reality, based on the Quranic verses (57:3)

1. He is the First
2. and the Last
3. and the Outward
4. and the Inward

God, the Ultimate Reality, is both the Inward (*al-Batin*) and the Outward (*al-Zahir*), the Center and the Circumference. The religious man sees God as the Inward; the profane man who has become completely oblivious to the world of the Spirit sees only the Outward, but precisely because of his ignorance of the Center he does not realize that even the outward is a manifestation of the Center or of the Divine.

Hence his fragmented knowledge remain incapable of encompassing the whole of the rim or circumference and therefore, the Center. Without a point of reference or the Center, a segment of the rim remains nothing more than a figure.

**In essence, therefore, everything is sacred, nothing is profane, because everything bears within it the fragrance of the Divine**

**Therefore, knowledge of Ultimate Reality (*Haqiqah*) is knowledge about 'everything'**

# What is the uniqueness of Sufism?

There is no outward monasticism in Islam and the most intense contemplative life in Islam is carried out within the matrix of life within society. The sufi has died out to the world inwardly while outwardly he still participates in the life of society and bears the responsibilities of the station of life in which destiny has placed him.

So, in fact he performs the most perfect action, because his acts emanate from an integrated will and an illuminated intelligence. This way contemplative and active lives complement each other.

# Discussion

## **Materialism from the Sufi's point of view:**

The Sufi has always taught that man is in quest of the Infinite, and that even his endless effort toward the gaining of material possession and his dissatisfaction with what he has is an echo of this thirst, which can not be quenched by the finite. That is why the Sufi consider the station of contentment (*rida*) to be an exalted spiritual condition attainable only by those who have reached the proximity of the Infinite and have shed the bonds of finite existence.

## **❖ The significance of training and discipline to the psyche**

Islam teaches that the rebellion against God takes place on the level of the psyche, not on that of the body. The flesh is only an instrument for the tendencies originating within the psyche. It is the psyche that must be trained and disciplined so as to become prepared its wedding to the Spirit. Both the angelic and the demonic forces manifest themselves in this intermediate psychic plane, which is neither purely material nor purely spiritual.

# Sufi Spiritual Journey

*Is like polishing a mirror so that it can reflect the 'ray' of God (God's qualities)*

➤ In Arabic the word *nafs* means at once soul, self and ego. As ordinary understood the *nafs* is the source of limitation, passion and gravity the source of all that makes man selfish and self-centered. This *nafs* which is called the *al-nafs al-ammarah* (the soul which inspires evil), following the terminology of the Quran, must be transfigured through death and purgation.

➤ It must be controlled by the higher self. With the help of the spirit the *nafs al-amarah* becomes transform into *the nafs al-lawwamah* (the blaming soul), gaining greater awareness of it own nature, an awareness that is made possible through the transmutation of its substance.

➤ In the further stage of inner alchemical transmutation the *nafs al-lawwamah* becomes transform into the *nafs al-mutma'innah* (the soul at peace).

➤ Attaining its stage in which it can gain knowledge with certainty and repose in peace because it has discovered its own center which is the **Self**.

➤ Finally, according to certain Sufis the *nafs al-mutma'innah* becomes transmuted into the *nafs al-radiah* (the satisfied soul), which has attained such perfection that it has now become worthy of being the perfect bride of the Spirit, thus returning to its Lord, as the Quran asserts and finally realizing the Self through its own annihilation (*fana*) and subsequent subsistence (*baqa*) in God.

(Seyyed Hossein Nasr, The Need for Sacred Science: Curzon Press, London, 1993).

- Spiritual journey is not speculative philosophy or dogmatic theology but an experimental science.
- It ends the struggle between lower and higher selves. The Pilgrim enters a condition of perfect peace of purity, of rectitude, and of knowledge.

# Conclusion

Sufism is a living tradition with a vast treasury of metaphysical and cosmological doctrines, including:

- A sacred psychology and psychotherapy
- Sacred arts
- Traditional sciences

Sufism can bring back to life many aspects of the Western tradition forgotten today and reawaken Western man to many of his own forgotten treasures.

## Tips

1. Beware of the danger of false masters, find authentic ones<sup>\*)</sup>  
(= the danger of “false prophets” mentioned by Christ)
2. Spirit bloweth where it listeth (Gospel)
3. The real reform of the world begins with the reform of oneself, and only the spiritually revived is able to revive the world about him
4. He who conquers himself conquer the world

**Note:**

<sup>\*)</sup>for the ones persistent in seeking the Truth there is in the Sufi tradition a belief for special individuals who are the disciples of the ever-living but hidden prophet *Khadir* and who are in any case chosen for the way of Heaven

## In his Mathnawi, Jalaluddin Rumi says about the false masters:

*Since there is many a devil who hath the face of Adam, it is not well to give your  
hand to every hand.*

*The vile man will steal the language of dervishes, that he may thereby chaint a  
spell over (fascinate and deceive) one who is simple,*

*The work of (holy) men is as light and heat, the work of vile men is trickery and  
shamelessness*

*They make woolen garb<sup>\*)</sup> for the purpose of begging*

*They give the title Ahmad (Muhammad) to Ba-Musaylim*

*The wine of God, its seal (last result) is pure musk, (but) as for (the other) wine  
its seal is stench and torment*

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