



What is Sufism?

The word Sufi means wisdom as well as purity, according to ancient Greek and Arabic etymologies, and both concepts suggest one and the same quality. Wisdom is only there when the mind is purified from preconceived ideas and illusory interpretation of the undefinable. There are as many descriptions regarding wisdom and purity, as there are seekers on the path, but these qualities could never be honestly identified as being the property of just one belief. As soon as one attempts to define abstract concepts, one gets lost in the labyrinth of one's thoughts, and one builds up illusions, fashioned according to the limited horizon of one's own mind-world, assuming thereby that one is in possession of the only Truth.

Some declare having found truth in Hinduism, others in Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, as well as many other religious denominations, known or unknown to the world at large; but when truth is formulated at the level of human understanding, it is then diversified in various interpretations, just as pure water poured into coloured glasses gives the impression of being shaded to the colour of the glass.

The call for 'Unity of Spiritual Ideals' is an awakening to a broader outlook with deeper insight into the tragic misunderstandings, which divide earnest followers of various cultures. As to the origin of the Sufi outlook, one could say that it is just as ancient as the concepts of wisdom and purity, which have always been the source of inspiration traced in devotional worships all down the ages; and even though the Sufi outlook has often been periodically appropriated by various cultural streams during different periods of history, it has never lost its own identity.

Another subject found in Sufi traditions is the *Alchemy of Happiness* experienced at a spiritual level in Love, Harmony and Beauty, as told in fairy tales related to a magic formula used in transforming base metal into gold. This historical legend symbolises the melting of the ego along the course of a thorny path known as the *Art of Personality*, where false identifications are overcome. This requires constant efforts in forging the character into a living example of wisdom and purity, becoming thereby a bringer of happiness to brothers and sisters of all beliefs.

Happiness is only there to the extent that one becomes oneself a true source of understanding, appreciating the good in others and overlooking that which disturbs when it is not agreeable to one's own thinking; thereby attuning oneself to the rhythm of all those whom one meets, and from whose example there might be a lesson to learn.

The Message of 'Spiritual Liberty' in our time implies being liberated from such feelings as 'my belief', as opposed to 'your belief'. This Message is destined to be the religion of the heart; and since there are many hearts, there are just as many spiritual ideals springing forth from one and the same source. When the doors of the heart are open, humility awakens, finding oneself face to face with the 'All Pervading', guiding one onwards, in line with the great Ideals of Wisdom and Purity, thereby revealed as the true essence of all that is understood by the term 'Sufi'.

*'O Seeker,
did you know that inner awakening
is like being on a ship,
sailing on the great waters of destiny,
in attunement to the compass of the spirit of guidance,
and driven by the energy of free will,
while heading towards mastery over the ego,
where one may begin to realize,
that in reality,
the sailor is only a ray of the all pervading,
shining in the past, present and future
on the waves of illusion.'*

Hidayat Inayat-Khan

