



What is the Sufism in Islam?

Publishing Date: 19.01.2016

The word Sufi has emerged in the second Hijri century. We do not come across its trace in the Quran, Hadiths and in the words of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad (sav). It is known that this word emerged later. Two origins of the word Sufi have been suggested. The lexical root of the word is traced to “safâ” which in Arabic means “purity”. Another origin is “suf” which means “wool”.

However, the essence of Sufism was present in the periods of Prophet and his companions. The mystical science has begun with the prophethood. The Prophet(sav) has taught the mystical science to his companions, Abu Bekir,

Omar, Osman and Ali who were close to him. Secrets knowledge has been passed up by Muslims in this way to each other. Therefore the lineages of all Sufi orders are reunited with The Prophet (sav).

In the period of Prophethood and in the subsequent periods the lifestyles of the people have conformed to the conditions of Sufism which were necessary to obtain the knowledge of secrets. These conditions are the purification of the soul, the accordance with the morality of Prophet, obeying to the orders of Quran and Prophet.

The real Sufism until today is a continuation of that period. However, many superstitions have emerged up to this time. This confusion is present in today's world of Sufism. Today it is not easy to distinguish the true Sufism from the superstitions. But if the fundamental principles of Sufism we explain below are used as a criterion, it would be easy clearly to see the truth.

It is certain that the first condition of real Sufism is to adhere fully to the Islamic Sharia. It is not possible for a person to be Sufi, if he does not conform to the Islamic Sharia. Some people who does not conform to Sharia, try to be Sufi using some concepts as love, peace, heart, holy man. But it is an uselessly effort. In this way one will never get the knowledge of secrets.

Sufism is a moral purified in front of God. Human is an entity of soul and body in the world. This presence is accompanied by a subtle entity called "nafs". Nafs is in a position which is always desirable for all tastes and blessings. People has to follow the orders of Islam and to do good deeds for the hereafter. But Nafs does not like these good deeds and oppose them. One ought prevail in this fight because it is a most important issue. The only way to save the afterlife is to fulfill the all Islamic laws and orders. One needs here the ways and means to prevail in this struggle. Sufism specifies you a method in this regard. Keeping the heart away from the longing of Nafs, giving up the actions strengthening the Nafs, raising the human spirit and bringing it about perfection.

In this regard, the struggle with one's own nafs has been called the greater struggle or greater "holy war" in contrast to the lesser struggle, which is against injustice and oppressors in this world. The concept derives from the popular hadith of Prophet (sav), in which he said to Muslims returning from a battle. "You have returned from the lesser struggle to the greater struggle." And he was asked, "What is the greater struggle?" He answered "The struggle against one's self (nafs), which is between the two sides of your body."

Definition of Sufism

There are different definitions for Sufism:

- ▶ A science whose objective is the reparation of the heart and turning it away from all else but God.
- ▶ A science through which one can know how to travel into the presence of the Divine, purify one's inner self from filth, and beautify it with a variety of praiseworthy traits.
- ▶ Sufism as purely based upon the tenets of Islam and the teachings of Muhammad (sav).
- ▶ Sufism as simply is the name for the inner or esoteric dimensions of Islam, which is supported and complemented by outward or exoteric practices of Islam, such as Islamic law. In this view, "it is absolutely necessary to be a Muslim" to be a true Sufi, because Sufism's methods are inoperative without Islamic affiliation.
- ▶ Sufism should govern the internal or spiritual world to rid the internal world of evil and impurity, just as Sharia (Islamic law) should govern the external or outer world to rid the external world of evil and impurity. Therefore Sufism is considered as inseparable from Islam and an integral part of Islamic belief and practice.
- ▶ Sufism is a mystical –ascetic aspect of Islam. It is not a sect, rather it is considered as the part of Islamic teaching that deals with the purification of inner self.

► Sufism is a cleaned morality in the face of Divine. Sufism means to behave himself with the rules of God's morality. It is impossible to be success in Sufism if one limits himself to the beauty of the world and the outward knowledge. Because the first step in Sufism is to forsake everything other than God. In other words Sufism is dying before physical dying.

The methods you need to keep away the heart from the nafs are all available in Sufism. In Sufism is aimed to get rid of the desires of the nafs. So Sufism is regarded as "dying before you die". In this regard the following hadith has been stated for Abu Bekir(ra):

"Who wants to see a dead walking among people, you look at Abu Bekir. His body is alive, but his nafs is dead."

The following verse of Quran is about the nafs:

"He who purifies it will indeed be successful, and he who corrupts it is sure to fail." (Al-Shams, verses 9-10)

The Aim of Sufism

The aim of Sufism is to know God. The Sufi who knows God is called wisdom. Wise is to know God by living heavenly pleasure. Therefore to learn the Sufism and to enjoy it is necessary first of all to have a perfect faith in Islam and place it strengthened at the heart. After this he must learn the Islamic science. The foundation of knowledge of Islam is to know the verses of Quran and the hadiths of our Prophet (saw) and it is also to act according to this information. Those who practices the Islamic faith and knowledge may begin to learn and live Sufism. The heart for this aim has to be cleaned from all kinds of worldly greed and love. It is easy to test, if the heart is cleaned from them or not. If any worldly damage and evil produce any suffering and trouble in your heart, you are not ready yet for the education of Sufism. But if such worldly matters do not produce any hurt in your heart, it means that your heart is cleaned from the worldly love and greed. With such a cleaned heart if Muslims continue the obligatory worships regularly and as prescribed by the Sharia, will be felt manifestations of wisdom in the heart. In this way Muslim will be guided by God's grace and taught

him the ways and the wisdom of mystical knowledge. This way is rather trouble. Many challenges, trials and sufferings are waiting for him. But it is possible to overcome these difficulties with the help of God if Muslim has a pure faith and a full knowledge and practice of sharia. If one tastes the spirituality, do not want to leave it never. He waits for passing to the afterlife with the highest gained knowledge of God. With this knowledge the life hereafter will continue infinitely. That is why is Sufism such a perfect beauty bestowed by God.

Basic Principles of Sufi Path

It is possible to gather the basic principles of Sufi Path in ten terms. If one wants to be successful in the Sufism, he must put these principles into practice.

Repentance

Repentance is to turn to God with the request of Muslim. He decides to give up the sins and not to return them again for ever. He turns to God to forgive the sins committed. Sin is a veil between God and His servants. He must be cleaned of sin in order to achieve a clean state in front of God. For this reason Muslim must turn to God with a trustworthy repentance.

Asceticism

Asceticism is to stay far away from the worldly unnecessary wealth, property and beauty. People should be satisfied with just having enough to him. All the unnecessary things should be left. The unnecessary things occupy the heart and prevent the remembrance of God.

Trusting to God

Everything is caused by God's will and power. So Muslim must rely primarily to God in every job. However, he must not abstain from taking preventive measures. But he should think that the measures taken would work only by the will of God.

Contentment

Contentment is to leave something other than the needs and desires which are essential to live. In the fulfillment of essential needs, eating, drinking and household, is not to waste and not to go beyond necessities. Decreasing in eating and drinking reduces the desiring power of nafs. The reduction of lust power of nafs relaxes the heart.

Solitude

Solitude means being with the public as being in need of. So Muslim refrains from engagement with people except the needs. Because the excessive engagement with the public causes heart to be busy with them. Most of these associations are to engage in business with leisure. But in Sufism it is not recognized as a nice behavior for heart not to mention God even for a moment. Besides solitude would weaken the lust power of nafs. This also provides great benefits in the not affecting of the nafs to heart.

Continuous Remembrance

Continuous remembrance means to mention only Him forgetting all except God. It is ordered in many verses of Quran that people ought to mention God often. All obligatory worship as each of supererogatory worship are the glorification of God. If it is required to be close to God, Muslim should increase his supererogatory worships. He should also insert the remembrance of God in his heart by making the mention of God frequently. Apart from that in every things he sees and hears, must cite the evidence pointing to God.

Turning to God

The main aim of Muslim is to know God and to attain Him. Therefore, he must turn Him with all his heart and with action. The aim of these every job should be to win His pleasure. There is no any desired, loved and intended other than God. Even if people turn away from God though for a moment, he losses a lot. Whereas the aim of people must always be with Him and gain His approval.

Patience

Patience is to stay away from everything which nafs likes. A way to stand against non-essential demands of nafs is to be patient by not carrying out the demands of nafs. But this not an easy deal. Nafs wishes always to eat much, to live without working, to be in public. If one conforms to lust and desires of nafs, would have wasted his life. The life is the unique capital of people in order to win his afterlife. For this reason, it is said in a hadith :

“Heaven is surrounded by hardship and difficulties, and Hell is surrounded with desires and pleasure.” (Bukhari, Muslim)

Contemplation

People should have the longing to be reunited with God. For this aim one should contemplate God in his every acting. Because there is no other trustful shelter than God. One should ask only God for help. He should wait in front of the door of God by begging and crying for the diving into His spiritual ocean. Finally God opens the door and shows His servant the beauty of His light and knowledge.

Consent

The aim of Muslim must be to win the consent of God. He should not raise any objection against the decisions and deeds of God. He submits himself to the will of God by deputing Him in his all businesses.

If Muslims complies with these principles, gives God him a light through that he walks among the people sagaciously and observes the real situation of people. This means the servant is the owner of exploration. So he knows divine sense of unseen without thinking and contemplation. This is a very honorable beauty bestowed to people by Sufism.

What is Wisdom?

Wisdom is to know God through pleasure. Wisdom is knowledge obtained without any intermediary through exploration and inspiration. Therefore it is an divine attribute. According to Sufi, wisdom is a great and wide way. It is a science which is obtained by deeds and piety. This science is derived from the explorations of Sufi. There is no doubt, uncertainty, defect, lack and deficiency in this science.

If a wise man wants to know God, looks first for the messages about himself in Holy Quran and the hadiths of Prophet (sav). Because, the Messenger of God has said who understands himself, understands God. So your self understanding is an evidence on the understanding of God. You would be an evidence because of being in existence.

In Quran it is said about the wisdom:

“We will show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is the witness of all things?” (Fussilat, verse 53)

By this verse God points us first our outside then our inside. When we are aware of these two issues, then we could understand God.

Knowledge of God can only be notified by imitation of Prophet. It is not possible to have the knowledge of God through the theoretical thinking. Therefore, it is forbidden for us to think about the essence of God.

If a person is bounded by the worldly knowledge and information and is embedded in the ornaments of world, is despised and discredited in Sufism. So to forget everything other than God is the first condition of Sufi path and the first step to be with God together.

God is neither in the universe nor out of it. God is neither adjacent to the world nor separated from it. This view has been taken from the lamp of Prophet and from the light of being subject to the Prophet (sav).

Progress Stages in Sufism

The spiritual ascent in Sufism is achieved by proceeding step by step through spiritual ranks. This proceeding is called the progress stages in Sufism. This progress is only possible for a people who belongs to a dervish order (tariqat).

Sufi exceeds the veil between God and his own by the struggle with his own nafs. Such a passenger of God struggles with his own nafs by asceticism, that is, by less eating, less drinking, less sleeping, less speaking and by being busy with his spiritual duties. This is a kind of spiritual walk. This walk is not physical and spatial. But it is moving to acquire the science of secrets. This spiritual walk is possible only under the management of mentor.

This walk is a four step walk. Its stages will be considered in the following.

- Walking to God,
- Walking by God,
- Walking from God,
- Walking in public.

Walking to God

In this stage Sufi walks to God to proceed continuously from least to most high profile information. This stage ends in Allah Almighty after the possessing of all knowledge of creations. When the knowledge of God becomes visible, the knowledge of creatures is lost. This stage is called as “not to be”.

Walking by God

This stage means the advancement of knowledge in the names, in the adjectives and in the blessings of God. But this progress can not be expressed in the phrases, and can not be shown by any marks, and can not be called by a name. No scholar will know and realize this stage. It is a scientific walking which ends in the position of absolute indispensability. It is called the remaining in perpetual state.

Walking from God

This is the third course. This is the scientific moving from the most sublime to the lowest information continuously up to arriving to the creations. In this walk Sufi walks with God, but guide the people to the right way as if he forgot God. He is in the state that even though he lost although he gained, and even though he is far away although he is closed to, and even though he is separate although he is reunited.

Walking in public

This the fourth hike. In this stage Sufi reaches gradually the real information of creations which he lost in the first walk. This walk is in return to the first hike. The third walk is also in return to the second hike.

The first and the second walk are to achieve the degree of guardianship. The third and the fourth walk is to arrive to the degree of guiding people to the right way. This authority belongs to the prophets. Peace and blessing be upon all of them. There is also a grant of authority to the Sufi who follows the prophets perfectly in Sufism. This is expressed in the following verse:

“Say, “This is my way, on the basis of sure knowledge, I call on you to have faith in God, I and those who follow me. God is Holy, I am not one of those who associate partners with God.” (Joseph, verse 108)

That is the case at the beginning and end of the journey. The purpose of this describing is to commemorate the greatness of Sufism and to encourage the people who desires to be Sufi.

References

“Fusus al-Hikam, (The Wisdom of the Prophets)”, Ibn Al-Arabi, Beshara Publications, 1975

“Futuh al-Makkiyya, (The Meccan Revelations)”, Ibn Al-Arabi, Pir Press, New York, 2002

“Mektubat-I Imam Rabbani”, Ahmed Nur, Ed. Karachi, Education Press

“The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari”, Muhammed Muhsin Khan, Darussalam Publications, 1997

“Worship in Islam, Imam Gazali, Edwin Elliot Calverley, Gorgios Press, 1992

For your comments: <mailto:oryanmh@gmail.com>

[Homepage](#) [Articles](#)