THE SUFIS

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THE SUFIS

IDRIES SHAH



INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT GRAVES

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Illustration: *The Islanders*. Sufic illustrative calligraphy, in the hand of "Mohamed, son of Shafiq, 1291," of the Mevlevi ("Dancing") Dervishes. The image of a ship with people standing in it is apparent.

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Introduction

The Sufis are an ancient spiritual freemasonry whose origins have never been traced or dated; nor do they themselves take much interest in such researches, being content to point out the occurrence of their own way of thought in different regions and periods. Though commonly mistaken for a Moslem sect, the Sufis are at home in all religions: just as the "Free and Accepted Masons" lay before them in their Lodge whatever sacred book—whether Bible, Koran, or Torah—is accepted by the temporal State. If they call Islam the "shell" of Sufism, this is because they believe Sufism to be the secret teaching within all religions. Yet according to Ali el-Hujwiri, an early authoritative Sufi writer, the Prophet Mohammed himself said: "He who hears the voice of the Sufi people and does not say *aamin* [Amen] is recorded in God's presence as one of the heedless." Numerous other traditions link him with the Sufis, and it was in Sufi style that he ordered his followers to respect all People of a Book, meaning those who respected their own sacred scriptures—a term later taken to include Zoroastrians.

Nor are the Sufis a sect, being bound by no religious dogma however tenuous and using no regular place of worship. They have no sacred city, no monastic organization, no religious instruments. They even dislike being given any inclusive name which might force them into doctrinal conformity. "Sufi" is no more than a nickname, like "Quaker," which they accept good-humoredly. "We friends" or "people like us" is how they refer to themselves, and they recognize

one another by certain natural gifts, habits, qualities of thought. Sufi schools have indeed gathered around particular teachers, but there is no graduation and they exist only for the convenience of those who work to perfect their studies by close association with fellow Sufis. The characteristic Sufic signature is found in widely dispersed literature from at least the second millennium B.C., and although their most obvious impact on civilization was made between the eighth and eighteenth centuries A.D., Sufis are still active as ever. They number some fifty million. What makes them so difficult to discuss is that their mutual recognition cannot be explained in ordinary moral or psychological terms—whoever understands it is himself a Sufi. Though awareness of this secret quality or instinct can be sharpened by close contact with Sufis of experience, there are no hierarchical degrees among them, only a general undisputed recognition of greater or lesser capacity.

Sufism has gained an Oriental flavor from having been so long protected by Islam, but the natural Sufi may be as common in the West as in the East, and may come dressed as a general, a peasant, a merchant, a lawyer, a schoolmaster, a housewife, anything. To be "in the world, but not of it," free from ambition, greed, intellectual pride, blind obedience to custom, or awe of persons higher in rank—that is the Sufi's ideal.

Sufis respect the rituals of religion insofar as these further social harmony, but broaden religion's doctrinal basis wherever possible and define its myths in a higher sense—for instance, explaining angels as representations of man's higher faculties. The individual devotee is offered a "secret garden" for the growth of his understanding, but never required to become a monk, nun or hermit, like the more conventional mystics; and he thereafter claims to be enlightened by actual experience—"he who tastes, knows"—not by philosophic argument. The earliest known theory of conscious evolution is of Sufi origin but, though much quoted by

Darwinians in the great nineteenth-century controversy, it applies to the individual rather than to the race. The child's slow progress into manhood or womanhood figures as only a stage in his development of more spectacular powers for which the dynamic force is love, not either asceticism or the intellect.

Enlightenment comes with love—love in the poetic sense of perfect devotion to a Muse who, whatever apparent cruelties she may commit or however seemingly irrational her behavior, knows what she is doing. She seldom rewards her poet with any express sign of her favor, but confirms his devotion by its revivifying effect on him. Thus Ibn El-Arabi (1165–1240), a Spanish Arab from Murcia whom the Sufis call their Master Poet, wrote in his *Tarjuman el-Ashwaq* (Interpreter of Desires):

> If I bow to her as is my duty
> And if she never returns my salutation
> Have I just cause for complaint?
> Lovely woman feel no obligation.

This love theme was later used in an ecstatic cult of the Virgin Mary, who until the Crusades had occupied an unimportant position in the Christian religion. Her greatest veneration today is precisely in those parts of Europe that fell strongly under Sufic influence.

Ibn El-Arabi says of himself:

> I follow the religion of Love.
> Now I am sometimes called
> A Shepherd of gazelles [divine wisdom]
> And now a Christian monk,
> And now a Persian sage.
> My beloved is Three—
> Three yet only one;
> Many things appear as three,
> Which are no more than one.

Give her no name,
As if to limit one
At sight of whom
All limitation is confounded.

The poets were the chief disseminators of Sufi thought, earned the same reverence as did the *ollamhs*, or master poets, of early medieval Ireland, and used a similar secret language of metaphorical reference and verbal cipher. Nizami the Persian Sufi writes: "Under the poet's tongue lies the key of the treasury." This language was a protection both against the vulgarizing or institutionalizing of a habit of thought only proper to those that understand it, and against accusations of heresy or civil disobedience. Ibn El-Arabi, summoned before an Islamic inquisition at Aleppo to defend himself against charges of nonconformity, pleaded that his poems were metaphorical, the basic message being God's perfection of man through divine love. He had, for precedent, the incorporation in the Jewish Scriptures of the erotic Song of Solomon, which was officially interpreted by the Pharisee sages as a metaphor of God's love for Israel; and by the Catholic authorities as a metaphor of God's love for his Church.

In its most advanced form the secret language uses Semitic consonantal roots to conceal and reveal meanings; and Western scholars seem unaware that even the popular *Thousand and One Nights* is Sufic in content, and that its Arabic title *Alf layla wa layla* is a code phrase indicating its main content and intention: "Mother of Records." Yet what seems at first sign Oriental occultism is an ancient and familiar Western habit of thought. Most English and French schoolchildren begin history lessons with a picture of their Druidic ancestors lopping mistletoe from a sacred oak. Although the Druids are credited by Caesar with ancestral mysteries and a secret language, the lopping seems so simple a ceremony, mistletoe being still used in Christmas decora-

tions, that few readers pause to consider what it means. The current view that the Druids were virtually emasculating the oak makes no sense.

Now, all other sacred trees, plants and herbs have peculiar properties. The alder's timber is waterproof and its leaves yield a royal red dye; birch is the host of the hallucigenetic fly-cap mushroom; oak and ash attract lightning for a holy fire; the mandrake root is antispasmodic. The foxglove yields digitalis which accelerates the beat of the heart; poppies are opiates; ivy has toxic leaves and its flowers provide bees with the last honey of the year. But the berries of the mistletoe, widely known in folklore as an "allheal," have no medicinal properties, though greedily eaten by wood pigeons and other nonmigratory birds in winter. The leaves are equally valueless; and the timber, though tough, can be put to few uses. Why then was the mistletoe singled out as the most sacred and curative of plants? The only answer can be that the Druids used it as an emblem of their own peculiar way of thought. Here is a tree that is no tree, but fastens itself alike on oak, apple, poplar, beech, thorn, even pine, grows green, nourishing itself on the topmost branches when the rest of the forest seems asleep, and the fruit of which is credited with curing all spiritual disorders. Lopped sprigs of it are tied to the lintel of a door and invite sudden and surprising kisses. The symbolism is exact, if we can equate Druidic with Sufic thought, which is not planted like a tree, as religions are planted, but self-engrafted on a tree already in existence; it keeps green though the tree itself is asleep, in the sense that religions go dead by formalism; and the main motive power of its growth is love, not ordinary animal passion or domestic affection but a sudden surprising recognition of love so rare and high that the heart seems to sprout wings. Strangely enough, the Burning Bush from which God appeared to Moses in the desert is now thought by Biblical scholars to

have been an acacia glorified by the red leaves of a *locanthus*, the Eastern equivalent of mistletoe.[1]

The Irish Muse-goddess Bridget was threefold like the Muse celebrated by Ibn El-Arabi; and not threefold merely in the sense of being at once maiden, nymph and crone, but in that of presiding over three spiritual realms—poetry, healing and handicraft. It need not greatly concern us whether this concept is native to Ireland, or whether it came from the East along with the complicated arabesques of medieval Irish illumination art and the curiously Persian or Arabian forms of ninth-century Irish poems. Certainly a well-known ninth-century Celtic cross is distinguished by bearing the Arabic formula *Bismillah er-Rahman, er-Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful) as proof that Sufism is consistent with both religions.

It should perhaps matter more that all the noblest Islamic art and architecture is Sufic, and that healing, especially of psychosomatic disorders, is every day practiced by Sufis today as a natural love duty, though not until they have studied for at least twelve years. The *ollamhs* were also healers and studied twelve years in their woodland schools. The Sufi physician must not accept any payment more valuable than a handful of barley, nor impose his own will on the patient, as most modern psychiatrists do; but having put him into deep hypnosis he must make him diagnose his own disorder and prescribe the cure. The physician then gives advice on how to prevent a recurrence of the symptoms, though the demand for a cure must come directly from the patient, not from his family or well-wishers.[2]

[1] The great Sufi poet Rumi wrote:

In Winter the bare boughs that seem to sleep
Work covertly, preparing for their Spring.

Though he did not mention the mistletoe, or any other *locanthus*, here is the visible emblem of the secret process of thought to which his lines refer.

[2] A clinical account of one aspect of this practice is contained in Dr. Jafar Hallaji's "Hypnotherapeutic Techniques in a Central Asian Community," International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, October, 1962, pp. 271 et seq.

After their conquest by the Saracens beginning in the eighth century A.D., Spain and Sicily became centers of Moslem civilization renowned for religious austerity. The northern scholars who flocked there to buy Arabic works for translation into Latin did not however demand orthodox Islamic doctrine but only Sufi literature and occasional scientific treatises. The songs of the troubadors—the word is unconnected with *trobar*, "to find," but represents the Arabic root TRB, meaning "lutanist"—are now authoritatively established as of Saracen origin. Yet Professor Guillaume points out in *The Legacy of Islam* that poetry, romances, music and dance, all Sufi specialties, were no more welcomed by the orthodox authorities of Islam than by Christian bishops. Arabic, in fact, although a carrier both for the Moslem religion and for Sufi thought, remained independent of either.

In 1229, the island of Majorca, where I have lived since 1929, was captured by King James of Aragon from the Saracens, who had held it for five centuries. He thereupon chose as his emblem a bat, which still appears above the arms of Palma, our capital. This bat emblem had long puzzled me, and the local tradition that it stood for "vigilance" did not seem a sufficient explanation, because the bat, in Christian usage, is an ill-omened creature associated with witchcraft. But I remembered that James I stormed Palma with the help of the Knights Templars and of two or three dissident Moorish noblemen living elsewhere in the island; that the Knights Templars had educated James in *le bon saber*, or wisdom; and that during the Crusades, the Knights Templars were accused of collaboration with Saracen Sufis. It therefore occurred to me that "bat" might have another meaning in Arabic, and be a signal to James's local Moorish allies, presumably Sufis, of his schooling in their own wisdom.

I wrote to Idries Shah Sayed, who replied:

> The Arabic for bat is KHuFFaaSH, from the three-consonant root KH-F-SH. A second meaning of this

root is "to overthrow," ruin, trample down, probably because bats haunt ruined buildings. James's emblem was thus a simple rebus proclaiming himself "the Conqueror;" as in Spanish he was known as *El Rey Jaime, el Conquistador*. But this is not the whole story. In Sufi literature, especially the love poetry of Ibn El-Arabi of Murcia which was current throughout Spain, "ruin" stands for the mind ruined by unregenerate thought and awaiting reedification.

The only other meaning of this root is "weak-eyes, seeing only by night." This can convey much more than to be "blind as a bat." Sufis speak of the unregenerate as blind to true reality; but also of themselves as blind to things which are important to the unregenerate. Like the bat, the Sufi is asleep to "things of the day"—the familiar struggle for existence which the ordinary man finds all-important—and vigilant while others are asleep. In other words, he keeps awake the spiritual attention dormant in others. That "mankind sleeps in a nightmare of unfulfillment" is a commonplace of Sufi literature. Your Palma tradition of "vigilance" as a meaning of "bat" need not therefore be discounted.

Thus the palma emblem combines King James's overt boast that he has broken the power of the fanatical Moslems who ruled Majorca, with a covert use of metaphor reassuring his allies that he is one of their fraternity. It may be questioned whether King James spoke Arabic fluently, but for most of his advisors it will have been their second language, if not their first. Moreover, many thousands of writers have made play with the associated meanings of Arabic roots, even in countries where the language itself is not spoken. Urdu and Persian poets, whose languages are Indo-European and not Semitic, treat the roots somewhat as if they were algebraic formulae.

A coronation robe worn by Roger II, King of Sicily (1093–1154) and later also used by Frederick II of Hohen-

staufen, Holy Roman Emperor (1194–1250) is on display at the Weltliche-Schatzkammer, Vienna. Idries Shah Sayed has explained its symbolism to me:

> In the center stands a palm tree, containing the nine elements of the "magic square of fifteen," a complicated diagram attributed to Geber (Jabir) the Sufi and reverenced alike by the Latin alchemists and the Chinnese Taoists. The palm tree (NaKHL) is chosen because the triconsonantal root NKHL also means "a fine essence descending almost impalpably," such as the divine element *baraka* or "blessedness." Words from the same root include sifted flour and a gentle drizzle of rain. Since the palm is a holy tree associated with birth among the Arabs, its appearance on a coronation robe means "Source of Blessedness." Moreover, the word for "palm tree" is *tariqat*, which is the Sufi technical term for "Being on the Path"—that is to say, Sufism. On either side of the palm a tiger is shown dragging down a camel. NMR is the Arabic root for "tiger," and JML for "camel." Thus the NMR overcomes the JML. But NMR also stands for "woolen garment" and for "unimpaired honor;" and since "Sufi" can mean "clad in wool," and since unimpaired honor is, with love, one of the two main pillars of Sufism, "Sufi" can be substituted for "tiger." Thus "The Sufi overcomes JML." JML, too, means not only "camel," but also "elegance." As an indication that both the tiger and the camel are human, they wear similar stripes, but the camel has fewer, meaning that unimpaired honor is not altogether inelegant. Thus: "Under this divine source of Sufic blessedness, the unimpaired honor of the Wool-clad overcomes mere elegance."

That absorption with the theme of love leads to ecstasy, all Sufis know. But whereas Christian mystics regard ecstasy as a union with God, and therefore the height of religious attainment, Sufis admit its value only if the de-

votee can afterward return to the world and live in a manner consonant with his experience. Western literature has been profoundly affected by the theme of man's spiritual tempering through love, spread mainly by such Spanish Arabs as the tenth-century Ibn Masarra of Córdoba, Ibn Barrajan of Seville, Abu Bakr of Granada (a Majorcan by birth), and Ibn Qasi of Agarabis in Portugal. The best known Sufi scholar was the twelfth-century Averroës (Ibn Rushd) who transformed Christian scholastic thought.

Sufis have always insisted on the practicality of their viewpoint. Metaphysics for them are useless without practical illustrations of prudent human behavior, supplied both by popular legends and fables. Since the Popes had excommunicated the Donatist heretics for denying that a blessing conferred by an evil-living priest was equal to that conferred by a saint, the attitude "Don't do as I do, but do as I tell you," had become a commonplace in Catholic churches. Gospel authority was found in Matthew xxiii, 2 et seq., where Jesus tells his disciples to obey the Pharisaic teaching in every detail but not to model themselves on the more formalistic Pharisees. Christians are content to use Jesus as the perfect and final exemplar of human behavior. The Sufis, however, while admitting him as a divinely inspired prophet, quote the text from the fourth Gospel: "Is it not written in your Law, I said, ye are gods?"—which means that judges and prophets are entitled to interpret God's law —and hold that this quasi divinity should suffice any man or woman, there being no god but God. They have similarly refused to accept the Lamaism of Tibet, and Indian theories of divine incarnation; and though charged by orthodox Moslems with being influenced by Christianity, they accept the Nativity only as a parable of the powers latent in man which can set him apart from his unilluminated brothers. Likewise they interpret the supernatural traditions of the Koran as metaphorical, and to be literally believed in by the unenlightened alone. Paradise, for example, has not, they say, been experienced by any living man; its *houris* ("crea-

tures of light") offer no analogy to any human beings and should be given no physical attributes, as in vulgar fable.

Instances abound in all European literature of the debt to the Sufis. The legend of Wilhelm Tell is found in Attar's *Parliament of the Birds* (twelfth century) long before its appearance in Switzerland; and that the Germanic archer guilds (if we can trust the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a witch-hunting manual of 1460), shot "in the Devil's name" at apples similarly placed suggests Saracen influence. Although Don Quixote (pronounced "Kishotte" by the Aragonese and Provençals) seems the most Spanish of all Spaniards, Cervantes himself acknowledges his indebtedness to an Arabic source.

This attribution has been dismissed as a quixotic joke by scholars; but Cervantes' stories often closely follow those of Sidi Kishar, a legendary Sufi teacher sometimes equated with Nasrudin, including the famous incident of his mistaking mills (water mills, however, not windmills) for giants. The Spanish word *Quijada* (Quixote's real name, according to Cervantes) derives from the same Arabic root KSHR as Kishar, and retains its sense of "threatening grimaces." The Blessed Raymond Lully, a Majorcan mystic and martyr, admits to having written his famous poem *The Book of the Lover and His Beloved* (1283) on the Sufic model. And Brother Anselm of Turmeda, a Catalan Christian mystic, was well known also as the illuminated Sufi sage Abdulla el-Tarjuman, "the Interpreter."

Friar Roger Bacon, who lectured on philosophy at Oxford and is buried there, had studied in Saracen Spain; but carefully avoiding a direct reference to the "Illuminates," for fear of offending the university authorities, he calls this way of thought merely "Eastern," a word which in Arabic is formed from the same root as "illuminism." Professor Asín of Madrid and his associates have traced Bacon's indebtedness to the illuminates of the Córdoba school founded by Ibn Masarra (883–931). This school was developed by the Jewish Sufic sage Solomon ben Gabirol (1021–1058) known

to the Saracens as Suleiman ibn Yahya ibn Jabriol, and to the Christians as Avicebron. Avicebron has now been established as the vital influence behind St. Francis of Assisi's founding of the Franciscan Order, which Bacon joined in 1247. A passage from one of Bacon's Latin works refers to the Sufic evolutionary theory:

> Nor do the natural philosophers know of this, neither the whole assembly of Latin writers. And because this science is not known to the generality of students it necessarily follows that they are ignorant of all that depends upon it, as regards the generation of animate things, of plants and beasts, and men; for, being ignorant of what comes before, they are necessarily ignorant of what follows.

Though Friar Bacon has been looked on with awe and suspicion because he studied the "Black Arts," the word "black" does not signify "evil." It is a play on two Arabic roots FHM and FHHM, pronounced *fecham* and *facham*, one of which means "black" and the other "wise." The same play occurs in the arms of Hugues de Payns ("of the Pagans"), born in 1070,[8] who founded the Order of Knights Templars: namely three Saracen heads sable, blazoned as if cut off in battle, but really denoting heads of wisdom.

The Moslem Sufis were fortunate enough to protect themselves against charges of heresy by the efforts of El-Ghazali (1058–1111), known in Europe as Algazel, who became the highest doctrinal authority in Islam and reconciled Koranic religious myth with rationalistic philosophy, thus earning the title "Proof of Islam." Nevertheless, they were frequently the victims of pogroms in less enlightened regions, and were forced to adopt secret passwords, grips, and other

[8] *Les familles chevelresques du Lyonnais.* His father's surname was "The Moor." Count de Pagan, the family's historian, refers to the very early contact with the Spanish Arabs which produced this unusual surname.

ruses in self-protection. In the West, no Christian Sufi of sufficient ecclesiastical authority could be found to protect his fellows at the great Church councils, but Sufi thought continued to be a secret force running parallel to orthodox Christianity. Hence the admiration, mixed with suspicion, which greeted Friar Roger Bacon, the Blessed Raymond Lully (who has waited seven hundred years for canonization), and other Sufis credited with strange powers and stranger doctrines. Yet the Sufic works of Ghazali were cited by Averroës and Abu Bakr—"Abubacer"—writers of immense prestige at the Christian universities.

"The Sufis are an ancient spiritual freemasonry. . . ." Indeed, Freemasonry itself began as a Sufi society. It first reached England in the reign of King Aethelstan (924–939) and was introduced into Scotland disguised as a craft guild at the beginning of the fourteenth century, doubtless by the Knights Templars.[4] Its reformation in early eighteenth-century London, by a group of Protestant sages who mistook its Saracen terms for Hebrew, has obscured many of its early traditions. Richard Burton, translator of the *Thousand and One Nights,* being both a Freemason and a Sufi, first pointed out the close relation between the two societies, but he was not sufficiently advanced in either to realize that Freemasonry had begun as a Sufi group. Idries Shah Sayed now shows that it was a metaphor for the "reedification," or rebuilding, of spiritual man from his ruined state; and that the three working instruments displayed on modern Masonic lodges represent three postures of prayer. "Buizz" or "Boaz" and "Solomon, Son of David," who are honored by Freemasons as builders at King Solomon's temple at Jerusalem, were not Solomon's Israelite subjects or Phoenician

[4] There is a shadowy tradition among Masons of the Craft's Saracenic origins. Haydn's *Dictionary of Dates* (1867, p. 347) quotes Masonic historians in saying that "it is said that architects from the African coast, Mahometans, brought it into Spain, about the ninth century." That the successive degrees mark the actual passing through certain definite spiritual experiences, allegorized by their rituals, is less understood.

allies as is supposed, but Abdel-Malik's Sufi architects who built the Dome of the Rock on the ruins of Solomon's temple, and their successors. Their real names included Thuban abdel Faiz ("Izz"), and his "great grandson," Maaruf, the son (disciple) of David of Tay, whose Sufic code name was Solomon, because he was the "son of David." The architectural measurements chosen for this Temple, as for the Kaaba building at Mecca, were numerical equivalents of certain Arabic roots conveying holy messages, every part of the building being related to every other in definite proportion.

According to English academic principle, a fish is not the best teacher of ichthyology, nor is an angel of angelology. Hence most authoritative modern books and articles about Sufism are written by historically minded European and American university professors who have never swum in Sufic depths nor soared to ecstatic Sufic heights, and do not even understand Perso-Arabic poetic wordplay. I pleaded with Idries Shah Sayed to remedy this lack of accurate public information, if only to reassure natural Sufis in the West that they are not alone in their peculiar habits of thought, and that their intuitions can be sharpened by others' experience. He consented, though aware that this would be a task of great difficulty. Idries Shah Sayed happens to be in the senior male line of descent from the prophet Mohammed, and to have inherited the secret mysteries from the Caliphs, his ancestors. He is, in fact, a Grand Sheikh of the Sufi *Tariqa* ("Rule"), but since all Sufis are by definition equal and responsible only to themselves for their own spiritual achievements, "Sheikh" is a misleading title. It does not mean "leader" so much as "fugleman," the old army term for the soldier who stood in front of a company on the parade ground as an exemplar in arms-drill.

The difficulty that he foresaw (though many years resident in Europe and as conversant with English and the main European languages as with Arabic, Pushtu, Urdu, classical and modern Persian) is that readers of this book

must be assumed to have perceptions out of the ordinary, a poetic imagination, a strong sense of honor, and to have already stumbled on the main secret, which is a great deal to expect. Nor does he wish to be thought a missionary. Sufi teachers do their best to discourage disciples, and accept none that come "empty-handed," that is to say, who lack an inborn sense of the central mystery. A disciple learns less from his teacher in the way of literary or therapeutic tradition than from watching him deal with the problems of daily life; and must not plague him with questions but accept on trust a great deal of apparent illogic and foolishness which will make eventual sense. Many of the main Sufic paradoxes are current in the form of comic stories, especially those centered around the Khoja (schoolmaster) Nasrudin, and occur also in the fables of Aesop, whom the Sufis accept as one of their ancestors.

The court fool of the Spanish kings with his bladder stick, his motley clothes, cock crest, jingling bells, simple wisdom and utter disrespect of authority is a Sufi figure. His jokes were accepted by the sovereigns as having a deeper wisdom than the most solemn advice of eldest councillors. When Philip II of Spain was accentuating his persecution of Jews, he decided that every Spaniard with Jewish blood must wear a hat of a certain shape. Foreseeing trouble, the fool appeared the same evening with three such hats. "For whom are these, fool?" asked Philip. "One for me, nuncle, one for thee, and one for the Grand Inquisitor." And since it was true that numerous medieval Spanish aristocrats had married into rich Jewish families, Philip thereupon abandoned his plan. In much the same way, Charles I's court fool Charlie Armstrong (once a Scottish sheep stealer), whom he had inherited from his father, tried to oppose Archbishop Laud's Arminian Church policy, which seemed bound to end in an armed clash with the Puritans. Charles scornfully asked Archie's advice in religious policy, and was told: "Give great praise to God, nuncle, and little laud to the Devil." Laud, who was touchy about his smallness, had Charlie

Armstrong expelled from court; which brought his master no luck.

In effect, this book is not addressed to intellectuals or other orthodox thinkers, or to anyone who will fail to recognize it at once as addressed to himself. The economics of publication will of course distribute the book mostly among readers without much sense of what the author is saying; yet if he had written in a way that they clearly understood, he would have been saying something altogether different. An awkward position; and if anyone deserves the blame for publication, it is myself. Nevertheless Idries Shah Sayed supplies a great deal of unexpected information—besides what I have already quoted—such as the Saracen origin of the rosary and of Hans Andersen's Ugly Duckling, or Chaucer's debt to well-known Sufi poets, emphasizing these secondary phenomena without prejudice to the primary phenomenon of Sufi thought. The book will at least be available to a great number of people who share this peculiar way of thinking with one or two intimate friends, and whom it will doubtless surprise as much as it has surprised me.

Robert Graves

DEYA
MAJORCA

Author's Preface

The last thing that is intended in the writing of this book is that it should be considered inimical to scholasticism or to the academic method. Scholars of the East and the West have heroically consecrated their whole working lives to making available, by means of their own disciplines, Sufi literary and philosophical material to the world at large. In many cases they have faithfully recorded the Sufis' own reiteration that the Way of the Sufis cannot be understood by means of the intellect or by ordinary book learning. That this fundamental has not prevented them from trying to bring Sufism within the compass of their own understanding is a tribute to their intellectual honesty and their faith in their own system of examination.

It would, however, be false to Sufism not to affirm that it cannot be appreciated beyond a certain point except within the real teaching situation, which requires the physical presence of a Sufi teacher. For the Sufi, it is no accident that the "secret doctrine" whose existence has for uncounted time been suspected and sought proves so elusive to the seeker. If, say, communism is a religion without a god, academic study of Sufism without being to any extent a "working Sufi" is Sufism without its essential factor. If this assertion militates against the rational tradition that an individual can find truth merely through the exercise of the faculties with which he finds himself endowed, there is only one answer. Sufism, the "secret tradition," is not available on the basis of assumptions which belong to another world,

the world of intellect. If it is felt that truth about extraphysical fact must be sought only through a certain way of thinking, the rational and "scientific" one, there can be no contact between the Sufi and the supposedly objective seeker.

Sufi literature and preparatory teaching is designed to help to bridge the gap between these two worlds of thought. Were it not possible to provide any bridge at all, this book would be worthless, and should not have been attempted.

Sufism, considered as a nutrient for society, is not intended to subsist within society in an unaltered form. That is to say, the Sufis do not erect systems as one would build an edifice, for succeeding generations to examine and learn from. Sufism is transmitted by means of the human exemplar, the teacher. Because he is an unfamiliar figure to the world at large, or because he has imitators, does not mean that he does not exist.

We find traces of Sufism in derelict organizations from which this element of human transmission of *baraka* has ceased; where the form alone remains. Since it is this outer shell which is most easily perceptible to the ordinary man, we have to use it to point to something deeper. Unlike him, we cannot say that such and such a ritual, such and such a book, incarnates Sufism. We start with human, social, literary material that is both incomplete (because now unaccompanied by the impact of the living exemplar, the teacher) and secondary, in that it is only partially absorbed. Historical facts, such as religious and social organization, when they persist, are secondary, external phenomena which depend upon organization, emotion and outward show for their survival. These factors, so essential for the continuation of familiar systems, are, Sufistically speaking, only the substitute for the vitality of organism, as distinct from appearance and sentiment.[1]

A Sufi school comes into being, like any other natural factor, in order to flourish and disappear, not to leave

[1] See annotation "Outlook."

traces in mechanical ritual, or anthropologically interesting survivals. The function of a nutrient is to become transmuted, not to leave unaltered traces.

The great Sufi teacher Jami refers to this tendency when he says that if the beard is allowed to grow too bushy, it will vie with the hair of the head in its claims for attention or prominence.

It will easily be understood that both the "organic" and "human exemplar" claims of Sufism remove it immediately from the purview of conventional study.

There is, however, some value in paying attention to Sufi influences upon human culture. In the first place, we can observe attempts to bridge the gap between ordinary thinking and Sufi experience, contained in poetic, literary and other media, which have been designed to lead the ordinary, attenuated or embryonic human consciousness into a greater perception and realization. Secondly, it is maintained by Sufis that even in cultures where authoritarian and mechanical thinking have choked comprehensive understanding, human individuality will have to assert itself, somewhere, even if this be only through the primitive sense that life must have more meaning than the officially propagated one.

In this book, emphasis has been placed upon the diffusion of Sufic thought during a certain phase (from the seventh century of the current era) for illustrative purposes. If, in the process, material which is completely new has been presented, this is not done for any purpose of scholastic effort. Scholasticism is interested in accumulating information and making deductions from it. Sufism is engaged upon developing a line of communication with ultimate knowledge, not with combining individual facts, however historically exciting, or theorizing in any way at all.

Sufism, it should be remembered, is Eastern thought only insofar as it retains beliefs—such as the human exemplar—which have fallen into abeyance in the West. It is occult and mystical inasmuch as it follows a path other than that

which has been represented as the true one by authoritarian and dogmatic organization. Sufism claims that the latter attitude constitutes only a part, only a phase, in the human story. Claiming a "real" source of knowledge, Sufism cannot accept the pretensions of the temporary phase which, viewed from within itself, is currently considered to be the "logical" one.

A great deal of the material presented here is incomplete because it is not possible to increase the amount of formal literature about Sufism without the balance of Sufic practice. Much of it, nevertheless, is unknown outside traditional Sufic circles. It is not intended to influence traditional scholasticism, with which it has only the most superficial connection; and one which cannot be carried far without distortion.

Sufism is known by means of itself.

It is interesting to note the difference between science as we know it today, and as it was seen by one of its pioneers. Roger Bacon, considered to be the wonder of the middle ages and one of humanity's greatest thinkers, was the pioneer of the method of knowledge gained through experience. This Franciscan monk learned from the Sufis of the illuminist school that there is a difference between the collection of information and the knowing of things through actual experiment. In his *Opus Maius,* in which he quotes Sufi authority, he says:

> There are two modes of knowledge, through argument and experience. Argument brings conclusions and compels us to concede them, but it does not cause certainty nor remove doubts in order that the mind may remain at rest in truth, unless this is provided by experience.

This Sufi doctrine is known in the West as the scientific method of inductive proceeding, and subsequent Western science is largely based upon it.

Modern science, however, instead of accepting the idea that experience was necessary in all branches of human

thought, took the word in its sense of "experiment," in which the experimenter remained as far as possible outside the experience.

From the Sufi point of view, therefore, Bacon, when he wrote these words in 1268, both launched modern science and also transmitted only a portion of the wisdom upon which it could have been based.

"Scientific" thinking has worked continuously and heroically with this partial tradition ever since. In spite of its roots in the work of the Sufis, the impairment of the tradition has prevented the scientific researcher from approaching knowledge by means of itself—by "experience," not merely "experiment."

The Situation

Humanity is asleep, concerned only with what is useless, living in a wrong world. Believing that one can excel this is only habit and usage, not religion. This "religion" is inept. . . .

Do not prattle before the People of the Path, rather consume yourself. You have an inverted knowledge and religion if you are upside down in relation to Reality.

Man is wrapping his net around himself. A lion (the man of the Way) bursts his cage asunder.

(The Sufi master Sanai of Afghanistan, teacher of Rumi, in *The Walled Garden of Truth*, written in 1131 A.D.)

The Islanders

The ordinary man repents his sins:
the elect repent of their heedlessness.
(Dhu'l-Nun Misri)

Most fables contain at least some truth, and they often enable people to absorb ideas which the ordinary patterns of their thinking would prevent them from digesting. Fables have therefore been used, not least by the Sufi teachers, to present a picture of life more in harmony with their feelings than is possible by means of intellectual exercises.

Here is a Sufic fable about the human situation, summarized and adapted, as must always be, suitably to the time in which it is presented. Ordinary "entertainment" fables are considered by Sufi authors to be a degenerated or inferior form of art.

Once upon a time there lived an ideal community in a far-off land. Its members had no fears as we now know them. Instead of uncertainty and vacillation, they had purposefulness and a fuller means of expressing themselves. Although there were none of the stresses and tensions which mankind now considers essential to its progress, their lives were richer, because other, better elements replaced these things. Theirs, therefore, was a slightly different mode of

existence. We could almost say that our present perceptions are a crude, makeshift version of the real ones which this community possessed.

They had real lives, not semilives.

We can call them the El Ar people.

They had a leader, who discovered that their country was to become uninhabitable for a period of, shall we say, twenty thousand years. He planned their escape, realizing that their descendants would be able to return home successfully, only after many trials.

He found for them a place of refuge, an island whose features were only roughly similar to those of the original homeland. Because of the difference in climate and situation, the immigrants had to undergo a transformation. This made them more physically and mentally adapted to the new circumstances; coarse perceptions, for instance, were substituted for finer ones, as when the hand of the manual laborer becomes toughened in response to the needs of his calling.

In order to reduce the pain which a comparison between the old and new states would bring, they were made to forget the past almost entirely. Only the most shadowy recollection of it remained, yet it was sufficient to be awakened when the time came.

The system was very complicated, but well arranged. The organs by means of which the people survived on the island were also made the organs of enjoyment, physical and mental. The organs which were really constructive in the old homeland were placed in a special form of abeyance, and linked with the shadowy memory, in preparation for its eventual activation.

Slowly and painfully the immigrants settled down, adjusting themselves to the local conditions. The resources of the island were such that, coupled with effort and a certain form of guidance, people would be able to escape to a further island, on the way back to their original home. This

was the first of a succession of islands upon which gradual acclimatization took place.

The responsibility of this "evolution" was vested in those individuals who could sustain it. These were necessarily only a few, because for the mass of the people the effort of keeping both sets of knowledge in their consciousness was virtually impossible. One of them seemed to conflict with the other one. Certain specialists guarded the "special science."

This "secret," the method of effecting the transition, was nothing more or less than the knowledge of maritime skills and their application. The escape needed an instructor, raw materials, people, effort and understanding. Given these, people could learn to swim, and also to build ships.

The people who were originally in charge of the escape operations made it clear to everyone that a certain preparation was necessary before anyone could learn to swim or even take part in building a ship. For a time the process continued satisfactorily.

Then a man who had been found, for the time being, lacking in the necessary qualities rebelled against this order and managed to develop a masterly idea. He had observed that the effort to escape placed a heavy and often seemingly unwelcome burden upon the people. At the same time they were disposed to believe things which they were told about the escape operation. He realized that he could acquire power, and also revenge himself upon those who had undervalued him, as he thought, by a simple exploitation of these two sets of facts.

He would merely offer to take away the burden, by affirming that there was no burden.

He made this announcement:

"There is no need for man to integrate his mind and train it in the way which has been described to you. The human mind is already a stable and continuous, consistent thing. You have been told that you have to become a crafts-

man in order to build a ship. I say, not only do you not need to be a craftsman—you do not need a ship at all! An islander needs only to observe a few simple rules to survive and remain integrated into society. By the exercise of common sense, born into everyone, he can attain anything upon this island, our home, the common property and heritage of all!"

The tonguester, having gained a great deal of interest among the people, now "proved" his message by saying:

"If there is any reality in ships and swimming, show us ships which have made the journey, and swimmers who have come back!"

This was a challenge to the instructors which they could not meet. It was based upon an assumption of which the bemused herd could not now see the fallacy. You see, ships never returned from the other land. Swimmers, when they did come back, had undergone a fresh adaptation which made them invisible to the crowd.

The mob pressed for demonstrative proof.

"Shipbuilding," said the escapers, in an attempt to reason with the revolt, "is an art and a craft. The learning and the exercise of this lore depends upon special techniques. These together make up a total activity, which cannot be examined piecemeal, as you demand. This activity has an impalpable element, called *baraka,* from which the word 'barque'—a ship—is derived. This word means 'the Subtlety,' and it cannot be shown to you."

"Art, craft, total, *baraka,* nonsense!" shouted the revolutionaries.

And so they hanged as many shipbuilding craftsmen as they could find.

The new gospel was welcomed on all sides as one of liberation. Man had discovered that he was already mature! He felt, for the time at least, as if he had been released from responsibility.

Most other ways of thinking were soon swamped by

the simplicity and comfort of the revolutionary concept. Soon it was considered to be a basic fact which had never been challenged by any rational person. Rational, of course, meant anyone who harmonized with the general theory itself, upon which society was now based.

Ideas which opposed the new one were easily called irrational. Anything irrational was bad. Thereafter, even if he had doubts, the individual had to suppress them or divert them, because he must at all costs be thought rational.

It was not very difficult to be rational. One had only to adhere to the values of society. Further, evidence of the truth of rationality abounded—providing that one did not think beyond the life of the island.

Society had now temporarily equilibrated itself within the island, and seemed to provide a plausible completeness, if viewed by means of itself. It was based upon reason plus emotion, making both seem plausible. Cannibalism, for instance, was permitted on rational grounds. The human body was found to be edible. Edibility was a characteristic of food. Therefore the human body was food. In order to compensate for the shortcomings of this reasoning, a makeshift was arranged. Cannibalism was controlled, in the interests of society. Compromise was the trademark of temporary balance. Every now and again someone pointed out a new compromise, and the struggle between reason, ambition and community produced some fresh social norm.

Since the skills of boatbuilding had no obvious application within this society, the effort could easily be considered absurd. Boats were not needed—there was nowhere to go. The consequences of certain assumptions can be made to "prove" those assumptions. This is what is called pseudo-certainty, the substitute for real certainty. It is what we deal in every day, when we assume that we will live another day. But our islanders applied it to everything.

Two entries in the great *Island Universal Encyclopaedia* show us how the process worked. Distilling their wisdom

from the only mental nutrition available to them, the island's savants produced, in all honesty, this kind of truth:

> SHIP: *Displeasing.* An imaginary vehicle in which impostors and deceivers have claimed it possible to "cross the water," now scientifically established as an absurdity. No materials impermeable to water are known on the Island, from which such a "ship" might be constructed, quite apart from the question of there being a destination beyond the Island. Preaching "shipbuilding" is a major crime under Law XVII of the Penal Code, subsection J, *The Protection of the Credulous.* SHIPBUILDING MANIA is an extreme form of mental escapism, a symptom of maladjustment. All citizens are under a constitutional obligation to notify the health authorities if they suspect the existence of this tragic condition in any individual.
>
> See: *Swimming; Mental aberrations; Crime (Major).*
> Readings: Smith, J., *Why "Ships" Cannot be Built,* Island University Monograph No. 1151.
>
> SWIMMING: *Unpleasant.* Supposedly a method of propelling the body through water without drowning, generally for the purpose of "reaching a place outside the Island." The "student" of this unpleasant art had to submit himself to a grotesque ritual. In the first lesson, he had to prostrate himself on the ground, and move his arms and legs in response to the commands of an "instructor." The entire concept is based upon the desire of the self-styled "instructors" to dominate the credulous in barbaric times. More recently the cult has taken the form of epidemic mania.
>
> See: *Ship; Heresies; Pseudoarts.*
> Readings: Brown, W., *The Great "Swimming" Madness,* 7 vols., Institute of Social Lucidity.

The words "displeasing" and "unpleasant" were used on the island to indicate anything which conflicted with the

new gospel, which was itself known as "Please." The idea behind this was that people would now please themselves, within the general need to please the State. The State was taken to mean all the people.

It is hardly surprising that from quite early times the very thought of leaving the island filled most people with terror. Similarly, very real fear is to be seen in long-term prisoners who are about to be released. "Outside" the place of captivity is a vague, unknown, threatening world.

The island was not a prison. But it was a cage with invisible bars, more effective than obvious ones ever could be.

The insular society became more and more complex, and we can look at only a few of its outstanding features. Its literature was a rich one. In addition to cultural compositions there were numerous books which explained the values and achievements of the nation. There was also a system of allegorical fiction which portrayed how terrible life might have been, had society not arranged itself in the present reassuring pattern.

From time to time instructors tried to help the whole community to escape. Captains sacrificed themselves for the reestablishment of a climate in which the now concealed shipbuilders could continue their work. All these efforts were interpreted by historians and sociologists with reference to conditions on the island, without thought for any contact outside this closed society. Plausible explanations of almost anything were comparatively easy to produce. No principle of ethics was involved, because scholars continued to study with genuine dedication what seemed to be true. "What *more* can we do?" they asked, implying by the word "more" that the alternative might be an effort of quantity. Or they asked each other, "What *else* can we do?" assuming that the answer might be in "else"—something different. Their real problem was that they assumed themselves able to formulate the questions, and ignored the fact that the questions were every bit as important as the answers.

Of course the islanders had plenty of scope for thought and action within their own small domain. The variations of ideas and differences of opinion gave the impression of freedom of thought. Thought was encouraged, providing that it was not "absurd."

Freedom of speech was allowed. It was of little use without the development of understanding, which was not pursued.

The work and the emphasis of the navigators had to take on different aspects in accordance with the changes in the community. This made their reality even more baffling to the students who tried to follow them from the island point of view.

Amid all the confusion, even the capacity to remember the possibility of escape could at times become an obstacle. The stirring consciousness of escape potential was not very discriminating. More often than not the eager would-be escapers settled for any kind of substitute. A vague concept of navigation cannot become useful without orientation. Even the most eager potential shipbuilders had been trained to believe that they already had that orientation. They were already mature. They hated anyone who pointed out that they might need a preparation.

Bizarre versions of swimming or shipbuilding often crowded out possibilities of real progress. Very much to blame were the advocates of pseudoswimming or allegorical ships, mere hucksters, who offered lessons to those as yet too weak to swim, or passages on ships which they could not build.

The needs of the society had originally made necessary certain forms of efficiency and thinking which developed into what was known as science. This admirable approach, so essential in the fields where it had an application, finally outran its real meaning. The approach called "scientific," soon after the "Please" revolution, became stretched until it covered all manner of ideas. Eventually things which could not be brought within its bounds became known as "un-

scientific," another convenient synonym for "bad." Words were unknowingly taken prisoner and then automatically enslaved.

In the absence of a suitable attitude, like people who, thrown upon their own resources in a waiting room, feverishly read magazines, the islanders absorbed themselves in finding substitutes for the fulfillment which was the original (and indeed the final) purpose of this community's exile.

Some were able to divert their attention more or less successfully into mainly emotional commitments. There were different ranges of emotion, but no adequate scale for measuring them. All emotion was considered to be "deep" or "profound"—at any rate more profound than nonemotion. Emotion, which was seen to move people to the most extreme physical and mental acts known, was automatically termed "deep."

The majority of people set themselves targets, or allowed others to set them for them. They might pursue one cult after another, or money, or social prominence. Some worshiped some things and felt themselves superior to all the rest. Some, by repudiating what they thought worship was, thought that they had no idols, and could therefore safely sneer at all the rest.

As the centuries passed, the island was littered with the debris of these cults. Worse than ordinary debris, it was self-perpetuating. Well-meaning and other people combined the cults and recombined them, and they spread anew. For the amateur and intellectual, this constituted a mine of academic or "initiatory" material, giving a comforting sense of variety.

Magnificent facilities for the indulging of limited "satisfactions" proliferated. Palaces and monuments, museums and universities, institutes of learning, theaters and sports stadiums almost filled the island. The people naturally prided themselves on these endowments, many of which they considered to be linked in a general way with ultimate

truth, though exactly how this was so escaped almost all of them.

Shipbuilding was connected with some dimensions of this activity, but in a way unknown to almost everyone.

Clandestinely the ships raised their sails, the swimmers continued to teach swimming. . . .

The conditions on the island did not entirely fill these dedicated people with dismay. After all, they too had originated in the very same community, and had indissoluble bonds with it, and with its destiny.

But they very often had to preserve themselves from the attentions of their fellow citizens. Some "normal" islanders tried to save them from themselves. Others tried to kill them, for an equally sublime reason. Some even sought their help eagerly, but could not find them.

All these reactions to the existence of the swimmers were the result of the same cause, filtered through different kinds of minds. This cause was that hardly anyone now knew what a swimmer really was, what he was doing, or where he could be found.

As the life of the island became more and more civilized, a strange but logical industry grew up. It was devoted to ascribing doubts to the validity of the system under which society lived. It succeeded in absorbing doubts about social values by laughing at them or satirizing them. The activity could wear a sad or happy face, but it really became a repetitious ritual. A potentially valuable industry, it was often prevented from exercising its really creative function.

People felt that, having allowed their doubts to have temporary expression, they would in some way assuage them, exorcise them, almost propitiate them. Satire passed for meaningful allegory; allegory was accepted but not digested. Plays, books, films, poems, lampoons were the usual media for this development, though there was a strong section of it in more academic fields. For many islanders it seemed more emancipated, more modern or progressive, to follow this cult rather than older ones.

Here and there a candidate still presented himself to a swimming instructor, to make his bargain. Usually what amounted to a stereotyped conversation took place.

"I want to learn to swim."

"Do you want to make a bargain about it?"

"No. I only have to take my ton of cabbage."

"What cabbage?"

"The food which I will need on the other island."

"There is better food there."

"I don't know what you mean. I cannot be sure. I must take my cabbage."

"You cannot swim, for one thing, with a ton of cabbage."

"Then I cannot go. You call it a load. I call it my essential nutrition."

"Suppose, as an allegory, we say not 'cabbage,' but 'assumptions,' or 'destructive ideas'?"

"I am going to take my cabbage to some instructor who understands my needs."

This book is about some of the swimmers and builders of ships, and also about some of the others who tried to follow them, with more or less success. The fable is not ended, because there are still people on the island.

The Sufis use various ciphers to convey their meaning. Rearrange the name of the original community—El Ar—to spell "Real." Perhaps you had already noticed that the name adopted by the revolutionaries—"Please"—rearranges to form the word "Asleep."

The Background
I. The Travelers and the Grapes

There are three forms of culture: worldly culture, the mere acquisition of information; religious culture, following rules; elite culture, self-development.
(The master Hujwiri, *Revelation of the Veiled*)

There is a story in Aesop's fables about a young mole who went to his mother and told her that he could see. Now, as most people know, sight is something traditionally lacking in moles. This one's mother decided to test him. She accordingly placed in front of him a piece of frankincense, and asked him what it was.

"A stone," said the little mole.

"Not only are you blind," his mother answered, "but you have lost your sense of smell as well."

Aesop, esteemed traditionally by Sufis as a practical teacher in an immemorial tradition of wisdom gained through the conscious exercise of the mind, body and perceptions, is not allowed much distinction by the overt meaning of this tale. The lameness of some of the morals (actually superficial glosses) of the Aesopian stories has been noticed by many students.

We can analyze the story to see what it really means, if we know something of the Sufi tradition and its method of concealing meanings in literature.

"Mole" in Arabic (*khuld,* from the radical KHLD) is written in the same way as *khalad,* which stands for "eternity, paradise, thought, mind, soul," according to the context. Because only the consonants are written, there is no way of telling, in isolation, which word is intended. If this word were used poetically in a Semitic language and then translated into Greek by someone who did not understand the double meaning, the play upon words would be lost.

Why the stone and scent? Because, in Sufi tradition, "Moses [*a guide to his people*] made a stone as fragrant as musk" (Hakim Sanai, *The Walled Garden of Truth*).

"Moses" symbolizes a guiding thought, which transforms something apparently inanimate and inert into something "as fragrant as musk"—something with what might almost be called a life of its own.

Our story now shows us that the "mother" of the thought (its origin, matrix, essential quality) presents "frankincense" (impalpable experience) to the thought, or mind. Because the individual (the mole) is concentrating upon "sight" (trying to develop faculties in the wrong order) it even loses the power to use the ones which it should have.

The human being, according to the Sufis, instead of reaching within himself in a certain manner in order to find and attain his development, searches outside, and follows illusions (metaphysical systems wrongly developed) which in fact cripple him.

What is the inner potentiality of the "mole?" We can now look at the whole group of words in Arabic which belong to the root KHLD which we are considering:

Khalad (KHaLaD) = ever abiding, long-lasting
Khallad (KHaLLaD) = to perpetuate a thing
Akhlad (AKHLaD) = to lean toward, to adhere faithfully to (a friend)
Khuld (KHuLD) = eternity, paradise, continuity
Khuld (KHuLD) = mole, field rat, lark (bird)
Khalad (KHaLaD) = thought, mind, soul

El-Khualid (EL-KHUALiD) = mountains, rocks, supporters (of a pot)

To the Sufi, this grouping of words around a basic root conveys essentials for human forward development. It is almost a map of Sufism. The mole, because of coincidence, can be chosen as the symbol of the mind, or thought. In the same mind there is eternity, continuity, support. Sufism is concerned with the perpetuation of the human consciousness through its source in the mind. Faithfulness in association with others is an essential of this task.

The Aesopian story, therefore, does not mean, as its commentators would believe, that "It is easy to unmask an impostor." We need not deny that the tale could have fulfilled this function for centuries. But the use of the incense and the mole, plus the Sufi tradition that certain secrets are concealed in such words as those of Aesop, helps us to unlock the door. Looking at a great deal of literary and philosophical material in this light, we are irresistibly reminded of the message of Rumi, himself, like Aesop, a great fabulist of Asia Minor. He says that the canal may not itself drink, but it performs the function of conveying water to the thirsty. Those who are interested in this interpretation of the mole symbolism might well feel that the light-hearted potted wisdom of Aesop has been the carrier of the nutrition which we now find in it.

Rumi lived nearly two thousand years after Aesop, and he said: "A tale, fictitious or otherwise, illuminates truth."

There is no need to pursue the Arabic language itself as the actual source of the Semitic version from which this Aesopian tale comes. Arabic is useful to us as a tool because, as philologists have demonstrated, it retains in close association words grouped according to a primitive pattern whose meanings have become very corrupted in the other Semitic languages.

There are, in the West as well as the East, quite nu-

merous examples of similar crystallization of teaching in literature, ritual and folk belief. Many such phenomena are considered unimportant: like the jokes attributed to Nasrudin, Joe Miller and others, read for their face value. Much of Omar Khayyam's poetry, intended to make the reader think clearly through reducing life to absurdity, has been taken in the superficial sense that Khayyam was a "pessimist." Platonic material, intended according to the Sufis to show the limitations of formal logic and the ease of falling into false reasoning, has been considered defective, and nothing more. In some cases, as with Aesop, the canal still carries the water, though it is not recognized as a canal. In other formulations, people carry on meaningless rituals and beliefs which they have rationalized until they have no real dynamic and are really only of antiquarian interest. The great Sufi poet Jami says of them: "The dry cloud, waterless, can have no rain-giving quality." And yet such cults, often mere counterfeits of carefully organized symbolism based on poetic analogy, are often seriously studied. Some people think that they contain certain metaphysical or magical truths, others that they are themselves of historical importance.

In the cases where a cult or grouping of people are following a theme mapped out originally on certain word groupings, it is impossible to understand them or even to trace their history unless we know that this is what originally happened. Because of its peculiarly mathematical nature, and because it was chosen as the framework for presenting certain knowledge to the East and West during the middle ages, Arabic is most important in this study.

Again, because of the almost algebraic method of producing words from a basic three-letter form, Arabic has a great simplicity which would hardly have been expected by anyone who does not know it. In many cases we are dealing only with words, groups of consonants, not with grammar, syntax, even with the Arabic letters, because they can all be rendered sufficiently well for our purpose by means of Latin

letters. We substitute one letter for another. At the most we modify that letter in order to tell us which one the original was. This, in substance, is an art which has been used very widely in the countries of the East where Arabic letters and Sufi lore have penetrated, and used by people who have no deep knowledge of Arabic itself. Arabic, then, was discovered to be susceptible to use as a code by certain people in the East and also in the Latin West of the middle ages.[1]

The relationship of parent to child (mole and mother) is used by Sufis to denote the training toward full "sight" as well as the ultimate relationship between the Sufi and the ultimate "sight" of objective truth. To the Sufi, religious incarnation or effigy conveying this relationship is merely a rough and secondary method of portraying something which has happened to an individual or a group—a religious experience showing them the way to self-realization.

"The perfected Sufi is great, exalted; he is sublime. Through love, work and harmony he has attained the highest degree of mastership. All secrets are open to him; and his whole being is imbued with magical effulgence. He is the Guide and the Traveler on the Way of infinite beauty, love, attainment, power, fulfillment; the Guardian of the Most Ancient Wisdom, the Trailblazer to the highest secrets; the beloved friend whose very being elevates us, bringing new meaning to the spirit of humanity."

This is one portrayal of the Sufi, by a contemporary writer who is not himself a Sufi, though he has lived among the followers of the Way of Love.

The Sufi seems to the unregenerate man to change, but to those with inner perception he remains the same, because his essential personality is within, and not without. A scholar in Kashmir, which for centuries was a center of Sufi teaching, made in the seventeenth century what would today be called a survey of the general characteristics of Sufi mystics. This was Sirajudin, who traveled in all the adjacent coun-

[1] See annotation "Languages."

tries, and even to Java, China and the Sahara, talking to Sufis and collecting their unwritten lore.

"The Sufi," he says, "is the complete man. When he says, 'among roses, be a rose, among thorns, be a thorn,' he is not inevitably referring to social behavior. The Sufis are poets and lovers. According to the ground in which their teaching grows, they are soldiers, administrators or physicians. According to the eyes of the beholder they may seem magicians, mystics, practitioners of incomprehensible arts. If you revere them as saints, you will benefit by their saint-hood; but if you work with them as associates, you will benefit from their company. To them, the world is a fashioning instrument, which polishes mankind. They, by identification with the processes of continuous creation, are themselves fashioners of other complete men. Some talk, others are silent, some walk it seems restlessly, others sit and teach. To understand them you must bring into action an intelligence which is an intuitive one, normally held down by its friendly enemy, the intelligence of the logical mind. Until you can understand illogicality, and the meaningfulness of it, shun the Sufis except for limited, precise, self-evident services."[2]

A Sufi, the Sufis, cannot be defined by any single set of words or ideas. By a picture, moving and made up of different dimensions, perhaps. Rumi, one of the greatest mystical masters, tells us in a famous passage that the Sufi is:

> Drunk without wine; sated without food; distraught; foodless and sleepless; a king beneath a humble cloak; a treasure within a ruin; not of air and earth; not of fire and water; a sea without bounds. He has a hundred moons and skies and suns. He is wise through universal truth—not a scholar from a book.[3]

[2] *Safarnama* of Sirajudin Abbasi, 1649.

[3] The Rev. Canon Sell, a specialist of Sufism, seems to think that this booklessness is something to do with theology, of all things: "Mere learning from books will not make a theologian," he says, in a

Is he a man of religion? No, he is far, far more: "He is beyond atheism and faith alike—what are merit and sin to him? He is hidden—seek him!"

The Sufi, as we are told in these most famous words from the thirteenth-century *Diwan of Shams of Tabriz,* is hidden; hidden more deeply than the practitioner of any secret school. Yet individual Sufis are known in their thousands, throughout the East. Settlements of Sufis are found in the lands of the Arabs, the Turks, the Persians, Afghans, Indians, Malays.

The more the dogged searchers of the Western world have tried to dig out the secrets of the Sufi, the more hopelessly complex the task has seemed to be. Their work thus litters the fields of mysticism, Arabism, Orientalism, history, philosophy and even general literature. "The secret," in the Sufi phrase, "protects itself. It is found only in the spirit and the practice of the Work."

A distinguished professor of archaeology is perhaps the greatest living Western authority on the Sufis—because he is a Sufi, not because he is an academician.

The ordinary man or woman in the East often looks upon the Sufi as the Westerner might imagine an Oriental mystic should be. A man endowed with supernatural powers, inheritor of secrets handed down from uncounted ages, symbolic of wisdom and timelessness. The Sufi can read your thoughts, transport himself from one place to another in an instant, is in a special continuing relationship with things of another world.

Sufis are usually believed to have healing powers, and there is no scarcity of people who will tell you how they were made whole by Sufis through a glance or in some other inexplicable manner.[4] Sufis are thought to excel at their chosen vocations: and numerous individuals are

footnote to this. (Dr. Sell, *Sufism,* Christ. Lit. Soc., 1910, p. 63.) He finds Rumi difficult, saying (*Ibid.,* p. 69), "it is only very patient students who can find the esoteric meaning of the poet."

[4] See annotation "Consciousness."

pointed out as proof of this belief. They make mistakes, so the contention is, far less frequently than other people; and they approach things in a manner which nobody else would. Yet their actions are vindicated by events. This fact is attributed to a form of foreknowledge. They believe themselves to be taking part in the higher evolution of humanity.

If popular beliefs, which may include what amounts to saint worship throughout the Middle East, are far-reaching, they are eclipsed by legends and traditions of Sufi masters, personalities revered by members of all faiths. The Sufi ancients could walk on water, describe events taking place at vast distances, experience the true reality of life. And much more in the same vein. When one master spoke, his hearers went into a state of mystical rapture and developed magical powers. Wherever Sufis went, mystics of other persuasions, often of great prominence, became their disciples—sometimes without a word having been spoken.

In the material world, Sufi ascendancy is based upon work and creativity, and generally accepted because of the achievements of individual Sufis. Sufi philosophical and scientific discoveries are widely considered to have been achieved through their special powers. The conventional theosophist or intellectual finds himself in the uncomfortable position that, although he must often deny the likelihood of a special form of consciousness accessible to an elite of this kind, he has to accept that Sufis are national heroes in some countries, and are responsible for the development of classical literature in others. It is estimated that between twenty and forty million people are members of, or affiliated to, Sufi schools; and the Sufis are increasing in numbers.

The Sufi may be your neighbor, the man across the street, the woman who does your chores; a recluse at times, rich or poor.

No investigation into the reality of Sufism can be made entirely from the outside, because Sufism includes participation, training and experience. Although Sufis have written

innumerable books, these may apply to specific circumstances, seem to contradict one another, cannot be understood by the uninitiated, or are found to have meanings other than the superficial one. They are usually studied by outsiders only very superficially.

One difficulty of getting to grips with Sufism through its Eastern literature has been noticed by many scholars who have made the attempt, including Professor Nicholson, who labored long to understand and make available Sufic thinking to the West. In presenting selections of some Sufi writings he admits that "a great deal is peculiar and unique, so that the writings in which it occurs seldom impart their real significance except to those who possess the key to the cipher, while the uninitiated will either understand them literally or not at all."[5]

A book such as the present one "designs itself" in a Sufistic manner; for by definition it must follow a Sufic, not a conventional, pattern, and hence its material and treatment are of a special nature, not subject to approach by means of familiar criteria. This is the method known as "scatter," by which an impact is considered effective by virtue of its multiple activity.

In ordinary life, certain forms of understanding become possible because of experience. The human mind is what it is partly because of the impacts to which it has been exposed, and its ability to use those impacts. The interaction between impact and mind determines the quality of the personality. In Sufism this normal physical and mental process is engaged in consciously. The result is felt to be more efficient; and "wisdom," instead of being a matter of time, age and accident, is regarded as inevitable. Sufis liken this process to the analogy between a savage who eats everything and a discriminating man who eats what is good for him as well as tasty.

It would be absurd to attempt to convey the meaning of

[5] R. A. Nicholson, *Tales of Mystic Meaning*, London, 1931, p. 171.

Sufi thought and action in a conventional, simplified or conversational manner, for the above reasons. This absurdity is summarized by the Sufi tag as "sending a kiss by messenger." Sufism may be natural, but it is also a part of higher human development, and conscious development at that. An adequate vehicle for its presentation usually does not exist in societies where it has not been operating in this advanced form. On the other hand, a climate for its presentation (part literary, part expository, part example and so on) has been prepared in other areas.

Metaphysically minded people, and especially those who feel that they are comfortable in the domain of mysticism or "inner perception," have no greater start on the generality of humanity where the acceptance of Sufism is concerned. Their subjectivity, especially where it is linked with a strong sense of personal uniqueness "caught" from other people, can in fact be a serious disability.

There is no simplified Sufism; yet it disappears from the area of cognition of such ill-defined minds as may be confident that they can understand it, penetrate anything "spiritual" by virtue of what is truly a woolly, self-assumed perceptiveness. To the Sufi, such a personality, however vocal he may be (and he often is) hardly exists at all.

Anyone who says, "It is all so indescribable, but I just *feel* what you mean," is unlikely to be able to profit by Sufism. For Sufis are working, are carrying out an effort to awaken a certain field of consciousness by means of an approach which is specialized, not fortuitous. Sufism does not trade in airy-fairiness, mutual admiration, or lukewarm generalities. When the "bite" disappears, so, too, does the Sufic element from a situation. The converse is also true. Sufism is not directed to a section of the community—for no such section exists—but to a certain faculty within individuals. Where this faculty is not activated, there is no Sufism. It contains "hard" as well as "soft" realities, discord as well as harmony, the sharp brightness of awakening as well as the gentle dark of a lulling to sleep.

This central factor is well expressed in Sufi poetry, which is often perfect in a technical sense, and sometimes human, sometimes startlingly different. Generations of conventional prosodists have spent their lives analyzing this unique property by a different yardstick—in terms of a poet's "variations in quality." One Sufi poet replies like this:

> O cat with a taste for sour cream; connoisseur of shades of bitterness! You belong to the litter that has agreed about yogurt. You hate with equal meaning the cheese, butter, and milk warm from the udder. You are no cheesemonger, you say? Verily, he is closer to you than your jugular vein.

And another, with an oddly modern echo of reference to slick writings:

> Shall we paint a perfect picture, or design a perfect rug? Then shall we thump our tongues all night to find out wherein each has strayed from perfection? This is good; this is a task for a complete man; and for such a child as is intent upon the consistency of the materials which alone will give perfection to his mud pie.

Anyone who has tasted the firm, but not too hard, aseptic cheeses of the contemporary supermarket will be able to share the poet's feelings about food, if nothing else.

Hilaly, accused of "using a sword to sever a thread," said: "Shall I rather use honey to drown a camel?"

There are imitation Sufis, who try to benefit from the prestige which attaches to the name. Some of them have written books, which only add to a general perplexity among outsiders.

It is possible that much of the Sufic spirit may be transmitted in writing, if one accepts the fact that Sufism has to be experienced continually as well as tested vicariously. It does not depend upon the impact only of artistic forms, but of life upon life.

Sufism, in one definition, *is* human life. Occult and meta-

physical powers are largely incidental, though they may play their part in the process, if not in personal prominence or satisfaction. It is axiomatic that the attempt to become a Sufi through a desire for personal power as normally understood will not succeed. Only the search for truth is valid, the desire for wisdom the motive. The method is assimilation, not study.

In observing the Sufis by means of what are in fact derivations of Sufi techniques, we shall have to look at many things which may be important at first, but which will cease to have the same significance as we proceed. This technique can easily be illustrated. A child learns to read by mastering the alphabet. When he can read words he retains the knowledge of the letters, but reads whole words. If he were to concentrate upon letters, he would be severely handicapped by what was useful only at an earlier stage. Both words and letters should now have a more settled perspective. Thus the Sufic method.

The process is easier than it sounds, even if only because doing a thing may often be easier than describing it.

I report a glimpse of Sufis in a circle (*halka*), the basic unit and very heart of active Sufism. A group of seekers is attracted to a teaching master, and attends his Thursday evening assembly. The first part of the proceedings is the less formal time, when questions are asked, and students received.

On this occasion, a newcomer had just asked our teacher, the Agha, whether there was a basic urge toward mystical experience, shared by all humanity.

"We have a word," replied the Agha, "which sums all this up. It describes what we are doing, and it summarizes our way of thinking. Through it you will understand the very reason for our existence, and the reason why mankind is generally speaking at odds. The word is *Anguruzuminabstafil.*" And he explained it in a traditional Sufi story.

Four men—a Persian, a Turk, an Arab, and a Greek—were standing in a village street. They were traveling com-

panions, making for some distant place; but at this moment they were arguing over the spending of a single piece of money which was all that they had among them.

"I want to buy *angur*," said the Persian.

"I want *uzum*," said the Turk.

"I want *inab*," said the Arab.

"No!" said the Greek, "we should buy *stafil*."

Another traveler passing, a linguist, said, "Give the coin to me. I undertake to satisfy the desires of all of you."

At first they would not trust him. Ultimately they let him have the coin. He went to the shop of a fruit seller and bought four small bunches of grapes.

"This is my *angur*," said the Persian.

"But this is what I call *uzum*," said the Turk.

"You have brought me *inab*," said the Arab.

"No!" said the Greek, "this in my language is *stafil*."

The grapes were shared out among them, and each realized that the disharmony had been due to his faulty understanding of the language of the others.

"The travelers," said the Agha, "are the ordinary people of the world. The linguist is the Sufi. People know that they want something, because there is an inner need existing in them. They may give it different names, but it is the same thing. Those who call it religion have different names for it, and even different ideas as to what it might be. Those who call it ambition try to find its scope in different ways. But it is only when a linguist appears, someone who knows what they really mean, that they can stop the struggling and get on with the eating of the grapes."

The group of travelers which he had been describing, he continued, were more advanced than most, in that they actually had a positive idea of what they wanted, even though they could not communicate it. It is far more common for the individual to be at an earlier stage of aspiration than he thinks. He wants something but does not know what it is—though he may think that he knows.

The Sufic way of thinking is particularly appropriate in

a world of mass communication, when every effort is directed toward making people believe that they want or need certain things; that they should believe certain things; that they should as a consequence do certain things that their manipulators want them to do.

The Sufi speaks of wine, the product of the grape, and its secret potential, as his means of attaining "inebriation." The grape is seen as the raw form of the wine. Grapes, then, mean ordinary religion; while wine is the real essence of the fruit. The travelers are therefore seen to be four ordinary people, differing in religion. The Sufi shows them that the basis of their religions is in fact the same. He does not, however, offer them wine, the essence, which is the inner doctrine waiting to be produced and used in mysticism, a field far more developed than mere organized religion. That is a further stage. But the Sufi's role as a servant of humanity is brought out by the fact that, although he is operating on a higher level, he helps the formal religionist as far as he can, by showing him the fundamental identity of religious faith. He might, of course, have gone on to a discussion of the merits of wine; but what the travelers wanted was grapes, and grapes they were given. When the wrangling over smaller issues subsides, according to the Sufi, the greater teaching may be imparted. Meanwhile, some sort of primary lesson has been given.

The basic urge toward mysticism is never, in the unaltered man, clear enough to be recognized for what it is.

Rumi, in his version of this story (*Mathnawi*, Bk. II) alludes to the Sufi training system when he says that the grapes, pressed together, produce one juice—the wine of Sufism.

The Sufis often start from a nonreligious viewpoint.[6] The answer, they say, is within the mind of mankind. It has to be liberated, so that by self-knowledge the intuition becomes the guide to human fulfillment. The other way, the way of

[6] "Words cannot be used in referring to religious truth, except as analogy." (Hakim Sanai, *The Walled Garden of Truth.*)

training, suppresses and stills the intuition. Humanity is turned into a conditioned animal by non-Sufi systems, while being told that it is free and creative, has a choice of thought and action.

The Sufi is an individual who believes that by practicing alternate detachment and identification with life, he becomes free. He is a mystic because he believes that he can become attuned to the purpose of all life. He is a practical man because he believes that this process must take place within normal society. And he must serve humanity because he is a part of it. The great El-Tughrai, contemporary of Omar Khayyam, wrote this warning in 1111 A.D.: "O Man, that art so full of information penetrating into secrets; listen, for in silence is safety from slips—'They have fostered thee for a purpose, did thou but understand it. Have a care to thyself, lest thou feed with lost sheep.'" This was translated by Edward Pococke in 1661.

In order to succeed in this endeavor, he must follow the methods which have been devised by earlier masters, methods for slipping through the complex of training which makes most people prisoners of their environment and of the effect of their experiences. The exercises of the Sufis have been developed through the interaction of two things—intuition and the changing aspects of human life. Different methods will suggest themselves intuitively in different societies and at various times. This is not inconsistent, because real intuition is itself always consistent.

The Sufi life can be lived at any time, in any place. It does not require withdrawal from the world, or organized movements, or dogma. It is coterminous with the existence of humanity. It cannot, therefore, accurately be termed an Eastern system. It has profoundly influenced both the East and the very bases of the Western civilization in which many of us live—the mixture of Christian, Jewish, Moslem and Near Eastern or Mediterranean heritage commonly called "Western."

Mankind, according to the Sufis, is infinitely perfectable.

The perfection comes about through attunement with the whole of existence. Physical and spiritual life meet, but only when there is a complete balance between them. Systems which teach withdrawal from the world are regarded as unbalanced.

Physical exercises are linked with theoretical patterns. In Sufi psychology there is an important relationship between, for instance, the doctrine of the "Seven Stages of Man"[7] and the integration of personality; and between movement, experience and the progressive attainment of a higher personality.

When, and where, did the Sufi way of thinking start? This is, to most Sufis, slightly irrelevant to the work at hand. The "place" of Sufism is within humanity. The "place" of your sitting-room carpet is on the floor of your house—not in Mongolia, where its design may have originated.

"The practice of the Sufis is too sublime to have a formal beginning," says the *Asrar el Qadim wa'l Qadim* (Secrets of the Past and Future). But as long as one remembers that history is less important than the present and the future, there is a great deal to be learned from a review of the spread of the modern Sufi trend since it branched out from the areas which were Arabized nearly fourteen hundred years ago. By a glance at this period of development, the Sufis show how and why the message of self-perfection may be carried into every conceivable kind of society, irrespective of its nominal religious or social commitment.

Sufism is believed by its followers to be the inner, "secret" teaching that is concealed within every religion; and because its bases are in every human mind already, Sufic development must inevitably find its expression everywhere. The historical period of the teaching starts with the explosion of Islam from the desert into the static societies of the Near East.

[7] The "stages" in Sufi literature correspond with the transmutation of seven "selves," the technical term for which is *Nafs*. See annotation "Seven Men."

Toward the middle of the seventh century, the expansion of Islam beyond the borders of Arabia was challenging, and was soon to overthrow, the empires of the Middle East. Each one had a venerable tradition in the political, military and religious spheres. The armies of Islam, originally composed mainly of Bedouins, but then swollen by recruits of other origins, struck northward, eastward and to the west. The Caliphs fell heir to the lands of the Hebrews, the Byzantines, the Persians and the Graeco-Buddhists; the conquerors reached the south of France in the West, and the valley of the Indus in the East. Those political, military and religious conquests form the nucleus of the Moslem countries and communities of today, which extend from Indonesia in the Pacific to Morocco on the Atlantic.

It is from this background that the Sufi mystics became known in the West, and they maintained a current of teaching which links people of intuition from the Far East to the farthest West.

The early Caliphs had possessed themselves of more than millions of square miles, uncounted riches and the political supremacy of the known world of the middle ages. The centers of learning of the ancients, and particularly the traditional schools of mystical teaching, had almost all fallen into their hands. In Africa, the ancient communities of Egypt, including Alexandria; and farther west, Carthage, where St. Augustine had studied and preached esoteric, pre-Christian doctrines.[8] Palestine and Syria, the homes of secret traditions; Central Asia, where the Buddhists were most firmly entrenched; and northwest India with its venerable background of mysticism and experiential religion—all were within the empire of Islam.

To these centers traveled the Arab mystics, anciently known as the Near Ones (*muqarribun*), who believed that essentially there was a unity among the inner teachings of all faiths. Like John the Baptist, they wore camels' wool,

[8] See annotation "St. Augustine."

and may have been known as Sufis (People of Wool), though not for this reason alone. As a result of these contacts with the Hanifs[9] each one of the ancient centers of secret teaching became a Sufi stronghold. The gap between the secret lore and practice of Christians, Zoroastrians, Hebrews, Hindus, Buddhists and the rest had been bridged. This process, the confluence of essences, has never been grasped by non-Sufis as a reality, because such observers find it impossible to realize that the Sufi sees and contacts the Sufic stream in every culture, as a bee will suck from many flowers without becoming a flower. Even the Sufic usage of "confluence" terminology to denote this function has not penetrated far.[10]

Sufi mysticism differs tremendously from other cults claiming to be mystical. Formal religion is for the Sufi merely a shell, though a genuine one, which fulfills a function. When the human consciousness has penetrated beyond this social framework, the Sufi understands the real meaning of religion. The mystics of other persuasions do not think in this manner at all. They may transcend outer religious forms, but they do not emphasize the fact that outer religion is only a prelude to special experience. Most ecstatics remain attached to a rapturous symbolization of some concept derived from their religion. The Sufi uses religion and psychology to pass beyond all this. Having done so, he "returns to the world," to guide others on the way.

Professor Nicholson emphasizes this vision of religion from an objective viewpoint, in translating Rumi thus:[11]

If there be any lover in the world, O Moslems, 'tis I.
If there be any believer, or Christian hermit, 'tis I.
The wine dregs, the cupbearer, the minstrel, the harp, and the music,

[9] See annotation "Hanifs."
[10] See annotation "Confluence."
[11] R. A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, London, 1914, pp. 161 et seq.

The beloved, the candle, the drink and the joy of the drunken—'tis I.
The two-and-seventy creeds and sects in the world
Do not really exist: I swear by God that every creed and sect—'tis I.
Earth and air and water and fire, nay, body and soul too—'tis I.
Truth and falsehood, good and evil, ease and difficulty from first to last,
Knowledge and learning and asceticism and piety and faith —'tis I.
The fire of Hell, be assured, with its flaming limbos,
Yes, and Paradise and Eden and the Houris—'tis I.
This earth and heaven with all they hold,
Angels, Peris, Genies and Mankind—'tis I.

Rumi has broken through the limitations of the ordinary consciousness. Now he is able to see things as they really are, to understand the affinity and unity of seemingly different things, to perceive the role of man, and especially of the Sufi. This is something far more advanced than what is ordinarily called mysticism.

It was not always safe, in the face of vast numbers of enthusiastic and victorious Moslem zealots, to claim, as the Sufis did, that human realization came only from within and not through just doing certain things and not doing certain other things. At the same time, the Sufic attitude was that mysticism must be taken out of its utterly secret character if it were to become a force which would penetrate all humanity.

In their own tradition, the Sufis saw themselves as inheritors of one single teaching—elsewhere split into so many facets—which could be made to serve as the instrument of human development. "Before garden, vine or grape was in the world," writes one, "our soul was drunken with immortal wine."

The groundwork for the wide diffusion of Sufic thought

and action was laid by the masters of the classical period—which may be taken as the first eight hundred years after the appearance of Islam—between about 700 A.D. and 1500 A.D. Sufism was based upon love, operated through a dynamic of love, had its manifestation through ordinary human life, poetry and work.

Because the Sufis recognized Islam as a manifestation of the essential upsurge of transcendental teaching, there could be no interior conflict between Islam and Sufism. Sufism was taken to correspond to the inner reality of Islam, as with the equivalent aspect of every other religion and genuine tradition.

The great Sufi Khayyam, in his *Rubaiyat*, stresses this interior experience, which has no real connection with the theological version of what people consider, by default, to be real religion:

> In cell and cloister, monastery and synagogue, one lies
> In dread of hell: one dreams of paradise.
> But none that know the divine secrets
> Has sown his heart with suchlike fantasies.

The phase into which what we call Sufism now entered was different in respect of climate and environment, but identical in respect of continuity of teaching. Rigid ecclesiastics—formalists—might not have recognized this, but they were relatively unimportant—"He who can see all the picture can both understand it and cater for it." Professor E. G. Browne comments: "But even the genuine Sufis differed considerably one from another for their system was essentially individualistic and little disposed towards propagandism. The fully developed *arif*, gnostic, or Adept, had passed through many grades and a long course of discipline under various *pirs, murshids,* or spiritual directors, ere he attained to the gnosis (*irfan*) which viewed all existing religions as more or less faint utterances of that great underlying Truth with which he had finally entered into communion; and he neither conceived it as possible nor desir-

able to impart his conceptions of this Truth to any save those few who, by a similar training, were prepared to receive it."[12]

It is sometimes difficult for a conventionally minded person to grasp how far-reaching the rule of essential Sufic action really is. Since Sufism was bound to exist in Islam as elsewhere, it could easily be taught through Islam. It is instructive to note that two legalistic and theological compendia, obviously straining to present Sufism publicly as religiously orthodox, were written by Sufi giants—the *Taaruf* of Kalabadhi of Bokhara (died 995) and the first public Persian treatise, the *Kashf* of Hujwiri (died 1063). Both authors are of the highest Sufi rank, yet each often speaks as if he were an observer, not an initiate, as Omar Khayyam also frequently does, to the mystification of some of his trustingly literalist commentators. These authors are full of hidden meanings, never reproduced in translation, and it was precisely in this way that many of the Orders of medieval Sufism proceeded. They continued their work, which was entirely valid within the Islamic world. Yet, as some Sufis note, "Sufism was even taught at one time exclusively by signs." The end product, the Completed Man, is the same in both cases. The symbolism and chain of experience whereby Islam and other systems are reconciled through Sufi practice is another matter, vouchsafed only to practitioners and concealed in the dictum: "He who tastes, knows."

Although many explanations are given—for various reasons—for the adoption of the word "Sufi," there is one significant one which is taught to those who join these mystics—the word contains, in enciphered form, the concept of Love. Also encoded, this time by means of a conventional numerical cipher, are the following words, which convey an abbreviated message—above; transcending; correcting; a bequest; sufficiency in or at a reasonable time. Sufism, then, is a transcendental philosophy, which corrects, is handed

12 E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia,* 1909, p. 424.

down from the past, and is suitable to the contemporary community.

All religion is subject to development. To the Sufi, the evolution of the Sufi is within himself and also in his relationship with society. The development of the community, and the destiny of all creation—including even nominally inanimate creation—is interwoven with the destiny of the Sufi. He may have to detach himself for a period from society —for a moment, a month, or even more—but ultimately he is interlinked with the eternal whole. The Sufi's importance, therefore, is immense, and his actions and appearance to others will seem to vary in accordance with human and extrahuman needs. Jalaluddin Rumi emphasizes the evolutionary nature of human effort, which is true both in the individual and the group: "I died as inert matter and became a plant. And as a plant I died and became an animal. I died as an animal, and became a man. So why should I fear losing my 'human' character? I shall die as a man, to rise in 'angelic' form. . . ." (*Mathnawi*, III, Story XVII)

This attitude explains in a Sufic manner something of the seeming differences in conduct and attitude of the Sufis. Keeping pace with the realities of the community, the Sufis of the early Islamic period stressed the need for renunciation and discipline—factors which were very much lacking in the expanding and prosperous society which was forming on the basis of military success in the Near East. The ordinary historians fail to note this fact, and consequently look at the Sufis historically, believing that they can descry an independent development within the ranks of the devotees. Rabia, the woman Sufi saint, for instance (died 802), is said to have emphasized love; Nuri (died 907), shunning the world. Then, we are told, came a further departure, with a more involved view of life—speculative and philosophical. And much more, a following of supposed trends from without the cult.

This development is undoubtedly a fact, but its explanation is, according to the Sufi, very much unlike its superficial

appearance. In the first place, the elements of Sufism were always there in their entirety, within the human mind. Various forms of the teaching were stressed at different times—"No man spends all his time enraged."

Individuals like Rabia were chosen as exemplars of certain aspects of the teaching. Uninitiated readers of the records, deprived of the necessary contextual framework, have quite naturally assumed that such and such a Sufi spent all his time in self-mortification; that before, say, Bayazid (died 875) there was no similarity to Vedantism and Buddhism, and so on. Perhaps these conclusions were inevitable, given the poverty of materials available to the ordinary student. On the other hand, there must always have been many Sufis who were willing to explain this point; to them, naturally, a generally known one. But it is inherent in scholastic thinking that something written down has a greater validity than something said or experienced; and it is thus more than likely that the living representatives of Sufism have been but rarely consulted on these points by academicians.

The recognition of the climate established by Islam as a suitable one for projecting Sufi wisdom is easy to trace. In spite of the development of an unauthorized clergy in Islam, those narrow-minded scripturists who stuck to a dogmatic interpretation of the religion, Islam provided better conditions for propagating an inner doctrine than any of its precursors in the same area. Religious minorities were guaranteed freedom from persecution—an immunity which was rigidly adhered to during the period when the Sufis were becoming visibly active. Islam itself was a matter of legal definition. What was a believer? At the minimum, a person who would repeat the phrase *La-illaha-illa-Allah, Mohammed ar-Rasul-Allah*—"Nothing worshiped but the divinity, the Praised one the messenger of the worshipful" —which is generally understood as, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet." The unbeliever was a person who actively denied the words of this creed.

Nobody could see into the heart; so belief could not be defined, only inferred.

Provided that a person could assert that he subscribed to this formula, he could not be proceeded against for heresy. No dogma as to the nature of this divinity and the relationship with the Prophet was fixed; and there was nothing in the phrase of affirmation which could not be subscribed to by a Sufi. His interpretation might be more mystical than that of the scholastics, but no power existed, no ordained priesthood, for instance, which could finally establish the ascendancy of the clerics. Ultimately, Islam as a community was regulated by the interpretations of the doctors of law. They could not define Allah, who was beyond human definition, nor could they precisely interpret Messengership, a unique relationship of deity and man. Before very long, Sufis were able freely to say such things as: "I am an idol worshiper; for I understand what idol worship means, and the idolator does not."

The breakup of the old order in the Near East, according to Sufi tradition, reunited the "beads of mercury" which were the esoteric schools operating in the Egyptian, Persian and Byzantine empires into the "stream of quicksilver" which was intrinsic, evolutionary Sufism.

The Sufis even established the principle, often to be accepted by Islamic courts of law, that seemingly irreverent statements made in a state of mystical ecstasy could not be taken at their face value for penal purposes. "If a bush can say, 'I am Truth,'" said a famous Sufi, "so can a man."

There was, too, a well-established belief among the general public that Mohammed had had a special relationship with other mystics, and that the devout and highly respected "Seekers of Truth"[13] who surrounded him during his lifetime might have been the recipients of an inner doctrine which he imparted in private. Mohammed, it will be remembered, did not claim to bring any new religion. He was

[13] *Tulab el Haqq.*

continuing the monotheistic tradition which he stated was working long before his time. He inculcated respect for members of other faiths, and spoke of the importance of spiritual teachers of many kinds. The Koran itself was revealed by mystical methods, and provided many indications of mystical thinking.

In the religious sphere, the Koran maintains the unity of religions and the identical origin of each—"Every nation had a Warner." Islam accepted Moses, Jesus and others as inspired prophets. Further, the recognition of Mohammed's mission by numerous former Jews, Christians and Magians (including priests), some of whom had traveled to Arabia during his lifetime seeking a teacher, provided a further basis for the belief in a continuity of ancient, not localized, teaching, of which previous highly organized religions might be merely elaborations or popularizations.

This is why, in Sufi tradition, the "Chain of Transmission" of Sufi schools may reach back to the Prophet by one line, and to Elias by another. One of the most respected seventh-century Sufi masters—Uways, who died in 657—never met Mohammed, though he was living in Arabia at the same time and outlived him. Again, it is authoritatively on record that the name "Sufi" was in use before the declaration of his prophetic mission by Mohammed.[14] It is essential to grasp this sense of continuity of inner teaching, and also the belief in the evolution of society, if the Sufis are to be understood to any real extent.

But perhaps the greatest contribution of Islam to the spread of Sufic thinking was its lack of exclusivism and its acceptance of the theory that civilization was evolutionary, even organic. Islam, unlike any of its predecessors, insisted that truth became available to all peoples at specific times in their development; and that Islam, far from being a new religion, was no more and no less than the last in the chain of great religions addressed to the peoples of the world. In

[14] *Kitab el-Luma.*

stating that there would be no prophet after Mohammed, Islam in its sociological sense reflected the human consciousness that the age of the rise of new theocratic systems was at an end. The events of the succeeding fifteen hundred years have shown this to be only too true. It is, for reasons of the development of society as we have it today, inconceivable that new religious teachers of the caliber of the founders of world religions should attain any prominence comparable to that achieved by Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed.

After the full development of the Islamic civilization in the middle ages, the contact between the indwelling otherworldliness streams of all peoples was to attain a far greater closeness than during the legendary days when practical mysticism was confined to relatively small, very secretive groups. Now Sufism began to spread in a number of different ways. The teachers who specialized in concentration and contemplation counteracted the greater trend toward materiality by balancing materialism with asceticism. Asceticism, warned the great Sufi Hasan of Basra (died 728), can be masochistic, in which case its use is due to a lack of fortitude. Every Sufi had to go through a period of training—long or short according to his capacity—before he could be considered sufficiently balanced to be "in the world but yet not of it." Adapting their teachings to the needs of society, Sufi poets and singers created masterpieces which were to become a part of the classical heritage of the East. In circles where entertainment and frivolity prevailed, the Sufi techniques adjusted themselves in music and dance, in teaching through romantic and wonderful tales, and especially in humor. The concentration on the theme of love, and the separation of the human being from his goal, was early introduced into military spheres, where chivalry and the theme of the quest of the beloved and of an ultimate fulfillment produced further literature and the formation of chivalric orders, subsequently significant in East and West.

The Background
II. The Elephant in the Dark

A man, never having seen water, is thrown
blindfolded into it, and feels it. When
the bandage is removed, he knows what it is.
Until then he only knew it by its effect.
(Rumi, *Fihi Ma Fihi*)

With the expansion of science and the arts in medieval Saracendom, the Sufi genius asserted itself when Sufis became physicians and scientists, and left symbols in their buildings and decorative art (some of them are nowadays called arabesques) which were designed to maintain in visible form certain eternal truths believed by the Sufis to summarize the human soul in search of, and in progress toward, final harmony and integration with all creation.[1]

The results of the intensely practical system of the Sufis, though often obscure to outsiders through ignorance of the system's real meaning, are to be found throughout the thinking, the art and the magico-occult phenomena of the East and West alike. Approaching closer to the Sufic experience, we must glimpse the methods of thinking and the basic ideas

[1] It baffles some twentieth-century scientists to know that, almost one thousand years before Einstein, the dervish Hujwiri was in technical literature discussing the identity of time and space in applied Sufi experience. (*Revelation of the Veiled,* "Recapitulation of Their Miracles")

of these mystics. We could start with a poem, a joke, a symbol.

The pathways into Sufic thinking are, it is traditionally said, almost as varied as the number of Sufis in existence. Religion, for instance, cannot be accepted or rejected out of hand, until the student knows exactly what religion means. The essential unity of all religious faith is not agreed on throughout the world, say the Sufis, because most of the believers are not at all aware as to what *religion* itself essentially *is*. It does not have to be what it is generally assumed to be.

To the Sufi, the religionist and scoffer are like a believer in the flatness of the earth arguing with one who holds that it is cylindrical in shape—neither has any real experience of it.

This brings out a fundamental difference between the method of the Sufis and that of other metaphysical systems. It is too often taken for granted that a person must either be a believer or an unbeliever, or perhaps an agnostic. If a believer, he will expect to be offered a faith or a system which seems to him to fulfill what he thinks are his needs. Few people tell him that he may not understand what his needs are.

The Sufi's world has extra dimensions; to him things are meaningful in a sense which they are not to people who follow only the training which is imposed upon them by ordinary society.

Such people "squint." "A hungry man, asked to total two and two, will answer, 'Four (or even eight) *loaves of bread.*'"

The totality of life cannot be understood, so runs Sufi teaching, if it is studied only through the methods which we use in everyday living. This is partly because, although the question, "What is it all about?" can of course be posed in a nominally reasonable sequence of words, the answer is not to be expressed in a similar way. It comes through experience, and enlightenment. An instrument which can as-

sess a small thing cannot necessarily assess a large thing. "Practice your knowledge, for knowledge without practice is a body without life."—Abu Hanifa.[2] A scientist may tell you that space and time are the same thing, or that matter is not solid at all. He may be able to prove it by his own methods. This, however, will make little difference to your understanding, and none at all to your experience, of what all this involves. All matter is infinitely divisible, shall we say. But for most practical purposes there is a limit to the number of divisions which you can make of a piece of chocolate if it is still to function as you expect a piece of chocolate to function. So on the one hand you may be looking at a piece of chocolate, on the other an object which you want to divide into as many pieces as possible. The human mind tends to generalize from partial evidence. The Sufis believe that they can experience something more complete.

A traditional Sufi story illuminates this question in one of its aspects, and shows the difficulties which beset even scholars when they approach the Sufis with a view to understanding them by applying limited methods of study:

An elephant belonging to a traveling exhibition had been stabled near a town where no elephant had been seen before. Four curious citizens, hearing of the hidden wonder, went to see if they could get a preview of it. When they arrived at the stable they found that there was no light. The investigation therefore had to be carried out in the dark.

One, touching its trunk, thought that the creature must resemble a hosepipe; the second felt an ear and concluded that it was a fan. The third, feeling a leg, could liken it only to a living pillar; and when the fourth put his hand on its back he was convinced that it was some kind of throne. None could form the complete picture; and of the part

[2] Abu Hanifa is the founder of one of the four great Islamic schools of law, the Fourth School. He was the Sufi teacher of Daud of Tai (died 781). Daud passed on his teachings to his disciple Maaruf Karkhi ("Solomon the King") the founder of the Sufi fraternity called "The Builders."

which each felt, he could only refer to it in terms of things which he already knew. The result of the expedition was confusion. Each was sure that he was right; none of the other townspeople could understand what had happened, what the investigators had actually experienced.

The average person, wanting to inform himself as to what the Sufis' thinking is, will normally address himself to reference books. He may look up the word "Sufi" in an encyclopaedia, or have recourse to books by scholars of various kinds, experts in religion and mysticism.

If he does so, he will find a most admirable example of the "elephant in the dark" mentality.

According to one Persian scholar, Sufism is a Christian aberration. A professor at Oxford thinks that it is influenced by the Hindu Vedanta. An Arab-American professor speaks of it as a reaction against intellectualism in Islam. A professor of Semitic literature claims traces of Central Asian Shamanism. A German will have us find in it Christianity plus Buddhism. Two very great English Orientalists put their money on a strong Neoplatonic influence; yet, one of them will concede that it was perhaps independently generated. An Arab, publishing his opinions through an American university, assures his readers that Neoplatonism (which he invokes as a Sufic ingredient) is itself Greek plus Persian. One of the greatest Spanish Arabists, while claiming an initiation of Christian monasticism, plumps for Manichaeism as a Sufi source. Another academician of no less repute finds Gnosticism among the Sufis; while the English professor who is the translator of a Sufistic book prefers to think of it as "a little Persian sect." But another translator finds the mystical tradition of the Sufis "in the Koran itself." "Although the numerous definitions of Sufism which occur in Arabic and Persian books on the subject are historically interesting, their chief importance lies in showing that Sufism is undefinable."[3]

[3] Prof. R. A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, London, 1914, p. 25.

A Pakistani view of Rumi (1207–1273) considers him the heir of virtually all the great currents of ancient thought as represented in the Near East. To those who have been in real contact with Sufis and who have attended their meetings, no mental adjustment or effort of will is needed to consider Sufism as containing within itself the myriad threads which appear in such non-Sufi systems as Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, and so on. "Numberless waves, lapping and momentarily reflecting the sun—all from the same sea," says the master Halki. The mind which has on the other hand been coached to believe in the distinctiveness or monopoly of ideas of certain schools will not easily be able to bring this synthesizing understanding into the contemplation of Sufism.

Dr. Khalifa Abdu-Hakim shows that he is able to refer to all the philosophical schools whose ideas are shared with Rumi, without being compelled to consider one as derived from the other. He says: "His *Mathnawi* is a crystal of many facets. In it we see reflected the broken lights of Semitic monotheism, Greek intellectualism, Plato's theory of ideas and Aristotle's theory of causation and development, the One of Plotinus and the ecstasy that unites with the One, the controversial questions of the *mutakallimun* (Schoolmen), the *Erkenntnistheoretisch* problems of Ibn Sina and al-Farabi, Ghazali's theory of Prophetic Consciousness and Ibn El-Arabi's monism."

Which does not mean to imply, if my position is not yet clear, that Rumi has concocted a system of mysticism out of the above ingredients. "Pears are not found only in Samarkand."

The world literature on Sufism is large—a great number of Sufi texts have been translated by Western scholars. Few, if any, have had the advantage of experiencing Sufism, or knowing its oral lore or even the order in which its formal material is studied. This is not to say that their labors have not been very much worthwhile. They have been most useful to the Orientalist, but may tend to be incoherent. Like

the legendary scribe who had to accompany his letter and read it himself because of its illegibility, many of these works need a Sufi's commentary.

The effect of the translations and discursive books on Sufism upon the uninitiated student must be remarkable, and certainly will not be easily forgotten. The method of approaching the question of translations has its quaintnesses. Setting aside the matter of differences between translators in matters of accuracy and meaning (which have caused much feline though really irrelevant activity among them), we find that the literary material offered the captive reader in translated form may undergo strange adventures.

Sometimes attempts are made to reproduce in English the cadence or the original rhymes of Eastern poetry, because the translator feels that this device helps to convey the sense of the original. But other translators hold the opposite view, and eschew any attempt to reproduce meter, because they claim that it is impossible of attainment or otherwise undesirable. Some texts, again, are translated with the aid of non-Sufi (generally Moslem, even formal Christian theological) commentaries. Then there are the partial translations, selectively presented, having suffered excisions which the translator somehow considers himself entitled to make. The less he knows about the practices of the Sufi, the braver these mutilations seem to be. Yet Sufi writings are never solely literary, philosophical or technical material.

There is a translation of a Persian book into English, not from Persian, but from a French translation of an Urdu rendering of a classical Persian abridgment of an Arabic original. There are modern versions of Persian classics, sometimes edited to remove references offensive to current Iranian religious beliefs. Add to these the works of Christian (missionary), Hindu and Western neo-Hindu—and Western neo-Sufi—nonacademic writers and popularizers. The presentation of Sufism to the average literate man in a

Western language reveals a condition of literature which is perhaps unmatched in any other field.

This kaleidoscopic process has its own special incidental delights. The warping tendency, to find a term for which seems impossible, unless it be "polychotomy" (on the pattern of dichotomy) had in fact reached an amusing point nearly a thousand years ago. This was when the Jewish thinker Avicebron of Málaga (c. 1020–c. 1050 or 70) wrote the *Fount of Life,* a book based upon Sufi illuministic philosophy. Because he wrote in Arabic, many authoritative Christians of the northern European school, then imbibing "Arab" learning, thought that he was an Arab. Some at least considered that he was a Christian, "sound in doctrine," and they said so. The Franciscans accepted his teachings, which they eagerly transmitted into the Christian stream of thought, having culled them from a Latin translation made about a century after Avicebron's death.

A lady of academic distinction who has written authoritatively on Middle Eastern mysticism has felt more than one part of the elephant; for in one and the same book she says Sufism "might have been directly effected (sic) by Buddhistic ideas;" and that the earliest Sufis "can have had little contacts with Hellenistic literature of any kind"—yet their ideas were derived from Hellenistic sources. Then she ends her study of the Sufic way with the decision that "Its real origin and source are to be found in the agelong desire of the human soul for God."

Sufi activity has had a considerable influence upon the Christian West, so much so that a better than average case could be made out for the Sufi assertion that objective truth contains within it a dynamic which can hardly be gainsaid. This vitalistic force, however, depends for its correct expression upon correct alignment of the human receptor. If this preparation is absent, the Sufic current is liable to take a peculiar turn. Especially susceptible to this warping is the elective or fragmentary handling of the Sufi stream. An ex-

cellent illustration might be made from the fate of Ghazali's work in Europe.

Ghazali of Central Asia (1058–1111) wrote a book called *Destruction of the Philosophers,* which was soon translated in part and used by Catholic apologists against Moslem and Christian schools alike. The portion which came into the hands of the West, however, was only that part which was devoted to a preparatory exposition of philosophy. Ghazali's Sufi works have to be read as a whole, and his opinions about the value of Sufic exercises must also be followed if he is to be understood aright. This book, however, was answered by another Arab, Ibn Rushd of Córdoba (1126–1198). Under the name Averroës, he, too, was translated. He did not succeed in refuting Ghazali at all by his scholastic methods, but thought that he had done so. Yet Averroism dominated Western and Christian scholastic thought for no less than four hundred years—from the twelfth to the end of the sixteenth century. Taken together, Ghazali's fragments and Averroës' Aristotelianism constituted a double Sufic current (action and reaction) which nurtured a Christendom wholly ignorant (as far as scholastics were concerned) of the initiating cause of both Ghazalism and Averroism.

"It is necessary to note," says Rumi, "that opposite things work together, even though nominally opposed." (*Fihi Ma Fihi*)

The fundamental Sufi awareness that Sufism is both a teaching and a part of an organic evolution is seldom shared by those who make it their concern to attempt a study of the system. There is consequently almost no possibility that the outsider will be able to form accurate conclusions. Relying upon his discursive faculty alone, he is incapacitated before he begins. It is the externalist of today, as much as of yesterday, whom Rumi addresses in his *Mathnawi:*

Danad o ki nekbakht wa muharam ast:
Ziraki az Iblis wa ishq Adam ast.

Which is to the effect that:

He who is fortunately enlightened [the Sufi]
Knows that sophistry is from the devil and love from Adam.

If the Sufis confuse the scholar by their seeming inconsistencies and sometimes cause him to hedge his conclusions with too many qualifications to be of great value, they can rouse the theologian to holy wrath. Love, an active principle of Sufic development and experience, the mechanism and the goal alike, cannot be admitted as genuine. The Reverend Professor W. R. Inge, in *Christian Mysticism*, hastens to hurl himself at what he takes to be the target: "The Sufis, or Mohammedan mystics, use erotic language very freely, and appear, like true Asiatics, to have attempted to give a sacramental or symbolic character to the indulgence of their passions."

This classic sample conjures up visions of certain Western scholars who have embraced Sufism, revealing them to be imitation Asiatics addicted to erotic language (in secret, for they do not publish it) which itself covers up the indulgence of their passions. They, in turn, might be able to comfort themselves with the opinion of a Cambridge professor who sees Sufism, more respectably, as "the development of the primordial religion of the Aryan race." And if Sufi symbolism is not in fact such, but rather represents experiences actually lived, then we might well find that the Sufis are even more versatile than their staunchest supporters know. The Sufi literalist would be able to swallow a hundred oceans, worship idols while not worshiping them, travel to China in a state of drunkenness—being in the world and yet not of it the while—not to mention his hundred moons and suns.

Advocates of a literal interpretation of mystical expressions are, of course, already adequately answered by such specialists as Evelyn Underhill:

"Symbol—the clothing which the spiritual borrows from the material plane—is a form of artistic expression. That is

to say, it is not literal but suggestive; though the artist who used it may sometimes lose sight of this distinction. Hence the persons who imagine that the 'spiritual marriage' of St. Catherine or St. Teresa veils a perverted sexuality, that the vision of the Sacred Heart involved an incredible anatomical experience or that the divine inebriation of the Sufis is the apotheosis of drunkenness, do but advertise their ignorance of the mechanism of the arts: like the lady who thought that Blake *must* be mad because he said that he had touched the sky with his finger."[4]

It must be admitted that it is easier for the scholar to approach and describe one aspect of the Elephant in the Dark than it is for him to form a coherent outside view of Sufism. Many scholars suffer from a psychological incapacity to handle this theme. "Apart from incapacity itself," says Ghazali, "other shortcomings prevent the reaching of inner truth. One such is knowledge acquired by external means." (*Alchemy of Happiness*)

In addition to the unscalable wall of Sufi experience, there is the problem of the Sufi personality. Any ordinary survey of Sufic writings and careers would be enough to bewilder the least doctrinaire investigator. Among the Sufis have been former Zoroastrian, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and other priests; Persians, Greeks and Arabs, Egyptians, Spaniards and Englishmen. There are in the ranks of the Sufi masters theologians, a reformed captain of *banditti*, slaves, soldiers, merchants, viziers, kings and artists. Only two are well known to many contemporary Western readers. They are the poet and mathematician Omar Khayyam of Persia, and the prince Abu ben-Adam of Afghanistan—the subject of a poem by Leigh Hunt: "Abu ben-Adam, may his tribe increase. . . ."

Among those directly influenced by Sufism we can name at random Raymond Lully, Goethe, President de Gaulle, and Dag Hammerskjold of the United Nations.

[4] *Mysticism*, London, 1911; New York, 1960.

Writing often under threat of inquisitorial persecution, Sufis have prepared books reconciling their practices with orthodoxy and defending the use of fanciful imagery. In order to obscure the meanings of ritualistic factors, or for the necessary purpose of appearing mere compilers of Sufi compendiums, they have handed down manuscripts from which the Sufic essence is to be distilled only by those who have the necessary equipment. Adapting their workings to different places, epochs and temperaments, they have in turn stressed the roles of asceticism, piety, music and movement, solitude and gregariousness. Only the respectably religious of the Sufi manuals are available outside Sufi circles.

That a person may be completely ignorant of the coherence behind Sufi teaching and yet appreciate the work of its great poets has been demonstrated again and again by translators. Gertrude Bell, an indefatigable student and translator into English of the great Hafiz, was hailed by the Orientalist Sir Denison Ross for her scholarship and judgment. Yet she is the first to admit that "Exactly on what grounds he [Hafiz] is appreciated in the East it is difficult to determine, and what his compatriots make of his teaching it is perhaps impossible to understand."[5]

This makes all the more interesting her shot in the dark, when she tries to form some opinion as to what Hafiz really is getting at: "From our point of view, then, the sun of his philosophy seems to be that there is little of which we can be certain, that little must always be the object of all men's desire; each of us will set out upon the search for it along a different road, and none will find his road easy to follow, each may, if he be wise, discover compensations for his toil by the wayside."[6] She does not see the Sufi activity as a process—as the Sufis see it—but could not fail to glimpse the strange and wholly Sufic character of Hafiz in speaking of, and seeing, a panorama of human thought in what

[5] See annotation "Hafiz."

[6] G. L. Bell, *Poems from the Divan of Hafiz*, London, new ed. 1928, p. 81.

is to us the present, and was of course to him the distant future:

> It is as if his mental eye, endowed with wonderful acuteness of vision, had penetrated into those provinces of thought which we of a later age were destined to inhabit.[7]

Hafiz' prescience was too evident to be missed; but it was also startling. She can come to no conclusion about it.

To return to our elephant, the scholars are happily much less doctrinaire than the ecclesiastics. For the Sufis, both resemble the visitors to the elephant's house. Is it possible that they have, indeed, all seen a part of the parts? The Sufis say, "This is not a religion; it *is* religion;" and, "Sufism is the essence of all religions." Is there, then, among the Sufis and elsewhere, a tradition that there is a secret doctrine passed down by initiation and preserved by a chain of succession; which might account for the outside observer according to his prejudice seeing almost every form of religion among the writings of the Sufis?

In order to determine this, we shall have to refer to the opinions of the Sufis on this point, which has generally been disregarded by non-Sufi students; and also follow the traditions of other schools, as well as the transmission in the middle ages and other times of a belief in an inner teaching beyond formalized religion. The search is by no means an uninteresting one.

"Formerly," according to the Sheikh Abu el-Hasan Fushanji, "being a Sufi was a reality without a name. Today it is a name without a reality." This statement, taken at face value, is generally considered to mean that people calling themselves Sufis abounded, while the real pursuit of the Sufis was not understood. And, although this, too, might be an interpretation of the saying, it is here intended to clarify a completely different point.

[7] *Ibid.*

The urge to trace a historical phenomenon to definite beginnings, so well marked in the present phase of learning, is undoubtedly bound up with the need of the ordinary mind to have a beginning and, if possible, an end for everything. Almost everything known to man through his ordinary senses has for him a beginning and an end. To know what something is gives a sensation of stability, a feeling of security. The label has been stuck on the book, now it can be placed on the shelf—the A to Z of something or other. There are various more or less accepted methods of establishing beginnings and endings, or creating substitutes for them. They may be created by concocted myths and legends, which often deal with how things started and how they will finish. Another way is that of the Chinese emperor who decreed that history would start with him, and that all earlier books should be destroyed. A third technique is to assume that a certain event, located in time and perhaps in space, represents a beginning. This was generally the religious way, and it is very strongly marked in familiar Christianity, whose official dogma depends upon it, St. Augustine notwithstanding.

The belief that a certain unique religious event brought about a complete change in human destiny released within Christendom a great force of energy, but at least two factors seriously limited its effect. The first was time, which in the event showed that there was a limit to the natural and even artificial expansion of Church Christianity, and a limit to its dynamic within its own domain. The other was a scholastic problem. Because the teaching of Jesus was held to be unique (although perhaps "foreshadowed and foretold in prophecy"), it was difficult to attain a spiritual perspective which was not conditioned by this belief. Religion, mysticism, spirituality could not now easily be looked upon as a natural development or a common possession of mankind. According to the Sufis, the main counterbalance to the power of formalized Christianity was the continued experience of the real tradition of which it is a distortion.

Before even the tenth century, when Islam possessed the most powerful culture and expanding civilization of the known world, the theory of a secret doctrine, a teaching which had been cherished from the earliest times, had made its way from this center of gravity to the West. The first, and most powerful, classical Sufi school in Europe was founded in Spain well over a thousand years ago.[8] The tradition was not, as might be thought, invented in the West to account for the ascendancy of the Arabized countries. It fitted in well enough with, and was even incidentally encouraged by, Islam, which view of religion we have noted as also that of a continuous process represented in every community. It existed in the Far East, and it would awaken a response in the hearts of those who still retained memories of earlier spiritual teachings. It was, in part, the theory of theosophy which accounted for different religious manifestations among communities which, according to doctrinaire religion of another brand, should not exist at all.

This sense of the unity of inner, experiential or symbolic religion was undoubtedly at work in the days when the peoples of the ancient world equated each others' gods one with the other—Mercury with Hermes, Hermes with Thoth are examples. And it is this theosophical theory which the Sufis considered to be their own tradition, though not limited to the religious domain. Hence, as the Sufi has it:

> I am in the pagan; I worship at the altar of the Jew; I am the idol of the Yemenite, the actual temple of the fire worshiper; the priest of the Magian; the inner reality of the cross-legged Brahmin meditating; the brush and the color of the artist; the suppressed, powerful personality of the scoffer. One does not supersede the other—when a flame is thrown into another flame they join at the point of "flameness." You throw

[8] Sufis accompanied the Arab armies which conquered Spain in 711 A.D.

a torch at a candle, and then you say, "See! I have annihilated the candle's flame!" (Ishan Kaiser in *Speech of the Sages*)

The Sufis use a new point of view in order to overcome the conditioning which materialistic, one-sided society has imposed. All philosophy has been cheapened because the teaching of "wisdom" has become capsulated. People endlessly repeat truisms to one another, without really *experiencing* what they mean. If a Sufi says, "What is needed is a new approach," it is by no means unlikely that everyone who hears him will at once agree (because the statement sounds significant) and will immediately forget all about it. The meaning of the words has not sunk in. "Take the wheat, not the measure in which it is contained." (Rumi, *Mathnawi,* Bk. II)

So important is it to free the thinking from the adhesions of rigid thinking that the great Rumi has started both of his major works with exercises in this process. In this sense he keeps pace with the procedure which is normally followed in Sufi teaching schools; and, though the externalist translators probably do not know it, two of his books are in fact commentaries upon the stages and states of the Sufic development as manifested in the flesh in a Sufi school.

In *Fihi Ma Fihi,* at the very beginning, Rumi takes a saying of Mohammed which had passed into common speech and become a proverb, sagely passed from lip to lip. Mohammed is reported as having said, "The worst of sages is a visitor of princes; the best of princes is a visitor of sages."

Rumi points out that the inner meaning of this teaching is that the meaning of "visiting" depends upon the quality of the visitor and the visited. If a great sage visits a prince, it is the prince who benefits; and hence he is to be considered as having himself "visited" the sage. This is very far from being a mere juggling with words, as some less reflective people have supposed.

With what amounts to shock tactics, the *Mathnawi* opens

its teaching, after the celebrated "Song of the Reed," with what looks like a fairy tale about a prince out hunting and a beautiful girl. As the audience settles down to enjoy the conventional story, Rumi starts to manipulate it to create thought in the mind and to combat the tendency to "sleep," which is Sufistically taken to be the usual reaction to folk-tales.

A prince, out hunting, saw on the road a beautiful hand-maiden. He fell in love with her, and bought her. Soon afterward she became ill. In desperation, the potentate offered his doctors anything they might desire of worldly goods to cure her. They were unable to do so, and the girl's condition became worse. The prince, utterly distraught with love and fear, ran to a mosque and implored divine aid.

He saw a vision in which an ancient assured him that a physician would soon appear. The following day, as predicted, this personage arrived. The doctor looked at the girl and realized that every remedy tried by the leeches had been useless and worse. He understood that her illness was concerned with her inward condition. Adopting a psychological method, he asked her questions and made her talk, until he discovered that she was in love with a certain goldsmith of Samarkand.

He told the prince that a cure would be effected by bringing the goldsmith to the girl's bedside, and he agreed. The goldsmith, for his own part, saw in the prince's summons only a recognition of his own importance in goldsmithing. He did not realize what his fate was to be.

When he arrived, they were married, and the girl recovered completely. Thus far the anodyne of the story may well have taken effect upon the audience, who surrender themselves to the delights of all being well that ends well.

But the physician now prepared medicine for the goldsmith; a medicine which made his inner faults so evident that the maiden saw him as he was and started to hate him. He died, and the girl was able to love the prince, who was always intended for her.

Apart from the complicated imagery of the tale in the original, the teaching contains an impact at many levels. It is not just a matter of telling a tale with one crude moral; it is a commentary upon some of the processes of life.

Hadrat-i-Paghman says of this story: "Ponder it, for unless you feel it through, you will be like the little child who wants everything right and cries when things do not seem to be right. You will make a prison for yourself, a prison of emotion. When you are in this prison, you will hurt yourself on the sharpness of the bars which you have yourself arranged."

Formerly, Sufi ideas and teachings were actually lived—and there could be a Sufi without a name for his cult. Then came the modern period, in which the name exists, but the living of it is difficult, and has had to be adapted to the "veiling"—conditioning—which starts in the cradle and ends almost in the grave.

Exactly how old is the word "Sufism?" There were Sufis at all times and in all countries, says the tradition. Sufis existed as such and under this name before Islam. But, if there was a name for the practitioner, there was no name for the practice. The English word "Sufism" is anglicized from the Latin, *Sufismus;* it was a Teutonic scholar who, as recently as 1821, coined the Latinization which is now almost naturalized into English. Before him there was the word *tasawwuf*—the state, practice or condition of being a Sufi. This may not seem an important point, but to the Sufis it is. It is one reason why there is no static term in use among Sufis for their cult. They call it a science, an art, a knowledge, a Way, a tribe—even by a tenth-century portmanteau term, perhaps translatable as psychoanthropology (*nafsaniyyatalinsaniyyat*)—but they do not call it Sufism.

Tarika-sufiyya stands for the Sufi Way; and makes a very good English parallel because *tarika* stands for Path, as well as a way of doing something, and also conveys the notion of following a path, a line or streak—the Path of the Sufi. Sufism is referred to by different names in accordance with

the sense in which it is being discussed. Thus, *ilm-al-maarifat* (the science of Knowing) may be found; or *el-irfan* (the gnosis); and the organized Orders or groups tend to be called the *tarika.* Similarly, the Sufi is known as the Seeker, the Drunken man, the enlightened one, the good, the Friend, the Near One, the dervish, a Fakir (humble, poor in spirit), or *Kalandar,* knower (gnostic), wise, lover, esoterist. Because there would be no Sufism without the Sufis, the word always applies to people, and cannot be considered as an abstract form, as, say, "philology" or "communism" could mean respectively the study of words or a theory of communalist action. Sufism, then, involves the body of the Sufis as well as the actual practice of their cult. It cannot really mean any theoretical presentation of the Way of the Sufis. There is no theoretical or intellectual Sufism; any more than there can be a Sufi movement, which latter is a redundancy, because all Sufic being is movement and a movement embracing all phenomena of a similar kind. There are, for instance, "Christian Sufis," a phrase which could be used, and has been used, by Sufis in general. The Sufi is even called *masihi-i-batini* (esoteric Christian) in some connections.

If a Sufi were to present to a conventionally cataloging mind certain facts about the Sufis, a mental or electrical computer might well wreck itself in the attempt to work them into some kind of system. Fortunately, however, there are still numbers of people who can accept information on various levels, and who will be able to form a pattern out of them. Here is a series of facts about the Sufis:

The Sufis appear in historical times mainly within the pale of Islam. They have produced great theologians, poets, scientists. They accepted atomic theory and formulated a science of evolution over six hundred years before Darwin. They have been hailed as saints, executed and persecuted as heretics. They teach that there is only one underlying truth within everything that is called religion.

Some have said, "I believe in nothing;" others, "I believe

in everything." Some say, "Let there be no levity among Sufis;" others, "There is no Sufi without humor." Scholasticism and mysticism are opposed to one another. But the Sufis gave rise to, among others, a school of each. Were these Moslem schools? No, they were Christian, associated with the Augustinians and St. John of the Cross, as Professor Palacios and others have established. From being an Oriental mystic, the Sufi now appears as the antecessor of Catholic mystics and philosophers. Let us add a few more facts. The coffee which we drink was traditionally first used by Sufis, to heighten awareness. We wear their clothes (shirt, belt, trousers); we listen to their music (Andalusian, measured music, love songs); dance their dances (waltz, Morris dancing); read their stories (Dante, Robinson Crusoe, Chaucer, William Tell); employ their esoteric phrases ("moment of truth," "human spirit," "ideal man"); and play their games (cards).[9] We even belong to derivations of their societies, such as Freemasonry, and certain chivalric orders. Such Sufic elements are examined at a later stage in this book.

The monk in his cell, the Fakir on the mountaintop, the merchant in his shop, the king on his throne—these can be Sufis, but this is not Sufism. The Sufi tradition has it that Sufism is a leaven ("Sufism is yeast") within all human society. If it has never been removed from the field of academic study this is because it was never made available to scholasticism as a subject of investigation. Its very diversity prevents it from being systematized in the semipermanent manner which would make it static enough to investigate. "Sufism," according to the Sufi, "is an adventure in living, necessary adventure."

If Sufism is an adventure, a goal of human perfection attained by reviewing and awakening within humanity a higher organ of fulfillment, completion, destiny, why is it so difficult to assess, to locate in time, to pin down? It is precisely because Sufism is carried out in every community

[9] See annotation "Tarot."

and at every time that it has such diversity—and this is one of its secrets. The Sufi does not need the mosque, the Arabic language, litanies, books of philosophy, even social stability. The relationship with humanity is evolutionary and adaptive. The Sufi does not depend upon his repute of being able to perform magic or miracles—this is less than incidental, though he may have that reputation. The magico-religious practitioner of other systems starts from the other end of the scale; his reputation is built upon his miracles, and probably sustained by them. The Sufi has a reputation, but this is secondary to his work, his being as a part of the Sufi organism.

The moral ascendancy, or the magnetic personality, which the Sufi attains is not his goal but the by-product of his inner attainment, the reflection of his development.

A Sufi says: "The moth, if it could think, might well believe that the candle flame is desirable because it seems to represent perfection. The flame is the product of the wax, the wick and the spark which kindles. Is the human moth seeking the flame or the spark itself? Observe the moth. His destiny, to be destroyed by the flame, is visible to you and hidden to him." (*Tongue of the Dumb*, quoting Paiseem)

He is, of course, judged by the world at large only in the light of what he says and does. Supposing that he has become a millionaire. The outside observer, realizing that this man has become a millionaire since he embarked upon a way of life called Sufism, may look upon the phenomenon as a millionaire-producing process. To the Sufi in question, however, it is the inner realization and evolution which has given him his inner attainment. The money may be an outward reflection of it, but this is of far less account than the Sufic experiences. This does not mean, as many people would assume, that he has become a millionaire obsessed by mysticism, and that money has no meaning for him. Such a development would not be possible for a Sufi, because the material and the metaphysical are linked in a form best regarded as a continuum. He would be the kind of mil-

lionaire who is not only rich, but also completely psychologically integrated. It is difficult for many people to absorb this fundamental fact sufficiently well for it to be of any use to them.

In the popular practice, current from Calcutta to California, the ordinary person will rise to the philosophical heights of repeating sagely to himself or anyone who will listen that "money is not everything;" or that "money does not bring happiness." The very fact that such an idea can be voiced shows that it is rooted in a previous assumption that money can be considered to be in some way of transcendental importance. Practice shows that it is not. But the homespun philosopher cannot grasp why this might be. The penniless man's most pressing problems seem soluble by money. The priest tells him that money is not a good thing. When he gets money he may not as a result feel fulfilled. And these three factors he is incapable of integrating.

Modern psychology has done some good, where, for instance, it has pointed out that the urge to make money may be a symptom of insecurity. But it has not yet integrated itself; historically it is still struggling sometimes against the tide. The Sufi attitude starts to operate on a different basis. All life is struggle, says the Sufi, but the struggle must be a coherent one. The average man is struggling against too many things all at once. If a confused and incomplete person makes money, or becomes a professional success, he still remains a confused and incomplete person.

Psychology learns as it goes along, Sufism has already learned; it transforms the mind from its natural and acquired incoherence into an instrument whereby human dignity and destiny may be carried a stage further.

Freudian and Jungian psychology have not the freshness to the Sufi mind which they have conveyed to the West. Freud's sexual arguments are noted by the Sufi Sheikh Ghazali in his *Alchemy of Happiness* (written over nine hundred years ago) as being standard among Moslem theologians. The Jungian archetypal theory did not origi-

nate with Professor Jung, but was stated by the Sufi master, Ibn El-Arabi—as Professor Rom Landau notes in *The Philosophy of Ibn Arabi.* (New York, Macmillan, 1959, p. 40 et seq.)

Sufis of all orders are steeped in Ghazali's *Alchemy of Happiness* and Ibn El-Arabi's works, and hence they are familiar with these supposedly modern modes of thinking and their limitations.

Sufism is not susceptible to study through psychology for several reasons. The most interesting of these to the Westerner will probably be that Sufism is itself a far more advanced psychological system than any which has yet developed in the West. Neither is this psychology Eastern in essence, but human. It is unnecessary to affirm this fact without support. We may mention Jung's admission that Western psychoanalysis is only that of a beginner compared to that of the East:

"Psychoanalysis itself and the lines of thought to which it gives rise—surely a distinctly Western development—are only a beginner's attempt compared to what is an immemorial art in the East."[10]

And yet Jung has referred only to certain parts of Eastern thought. The whole cannot be studied by means of the parts, and the beginner cannot judge the work of the adept, in any field, Sufism included.

The so-called scientific approach to the human phenomenon and man's relationship with the rest of being is every bit as limited as ordinary philosophy. Like discursive reason, science operates only within the convenient circle of what fits in with its preconceptions, as Professor Graves reminds us:

". . . scientists are careful to express their suppositions in mathematical formulas which, applied artistically to such problems as the structure of the atom or the inner temperature of stars, give 'beautiful' results. They are applied only

[10] C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul,* London, 1959, pp. 250–51; and see annotation "Consciousness."

to safe, prepared cases—though remaining unworkable in unstereotyped ones: there must be a sympathetic equivalence between formula and case. . . . A beautiful result is as good as a demonstrable proof and can be superseded only by a still more beautiful result."[11]

Again the doctrine that the whole cannot be studied by means of the parts, plus the fact that a thing cannot study all of itself simultaneously. The Sufi master Pir-i-Do-Sara says:

"Can you imagine a mind observing the whole of itself—if it were all engaged in observation, what would it be observing? If it were all engaged in being mind, what would do the observing? Observation of self is necessary while there is a self as distinct from the nonself part. . . ."[12]

The Sufis affirm that the organism known generally as Sufism has been the one stream of direct, evolutionary experience which has been the determining factor in all the great schools of mysticism. In order to verify this as far as possible, there is some interest in following the movement of Sufic ideas. If they prove to have a penetrative power, an ability to influence thought and action in divers communities, the inner dynamism of the system can very well be inferred. Is there, in other words, reason to suppose that the Sufic stream has the power to influence human thinking in, say, western Europe? During the fairly well documented classical period of Sufism, has it penetrated through the screen of the dark ages, providing power and development for communities which have a different background? Is Sufism organic in this respect?

This suggestion implies that, from remote times, Sufi masters have transmitted their lore into almost every society. Sufi tradition claims that this has been the fact. In more modern times this claim can only be tested by the visible appearance of Sufi practices in communities far removed

[11] Robert Graves, *The Crowning Privilege*, London, 1959, pp. 306–7.

[12] *Mountain of Illumination*, XVI, verses 9951–57, MS.

from the Sufi centers of Asia. The essence of Sufi activity would not be so visible. All that one could hope to find would be traces here and there, like the radioactive tracers sometimes injected into the human bloodstream, of characteristic Sufi lore and practice which still maintained its local color.

Take an example. If Alfonso the Sage wrote in Arabic, this might be evidence of Arabian influence. If, however, the symbol of a Sufi initiatory society were found among the Irish of the ninth century (it was), this might, with other evidence, point to a drift of Sufic lore to the West.

We have looked at certain outstanding characteristics of Sufism, but have not noted in starker relief the need for the superficially plausible facts of Sufi expression. Here, then, as near as they may be transmitted by ordinary words, are the rest of Sufi convictions:

Sufis believe that, expressed in one way, humanity is evolving to a certain destiny. We are all taking part in that evolution. Organs come into being as a result of the need for specific organs (Rumi). The human being's organism is producing a new complex of organs in response to such a need. In this age of the transcending of time and space, the complex of organs is concerned with the transcending of time and space. What ordinary people regard as sporadic and occasional bursts of telepathic or prophetic power are seen by the Sufi as nothing less than the first stirrings of these same organs. The difference between all evolution up to date and the present need for evolution is that for the past ten thousand years or so we have been given the possibility of a conscious evolution. So essential is this more rarefied evolution that our future depends upon it. It can be called "learning how to swim," in the words of our fable.

How are these organs developed? By the Sufi method. How do we know that we are developing them? Only through experience. In the Sufi system there are a number of "stages." The attainment of these stages is marked by an unmistakable if ineffable experience. This experience, when

it comes, activates the organ in question, gives us a relief from our climb upward, and grants us sufficient strength to continue the climb. The attainment of stages is permanent. Until one of these stages has been reached, the photographic plate, as it were, may have been exposed and developed, but has not been fixed; and actual experiences are the fixative substance.

This is the meaning of mystical experience, which, however, when indulged in without proper harmony with evolution seems merely to be something sublime—a sensation of omnipotence or of grace, but no assurance of where the happy or unhappy mortal is going next.

Sufis believe that Sufic activity produces and concentrates what might be termed a centrifugal or magnetic force. This force calls to similar force elsewhere. With the coming together of such forces, work continues. This is an explanation of the mysterious "messages" which Sufi teachers get, telling them to repair to such and such a place, in order to respond to the call of the force there which has become derelict (in the sense of abandoned) or needs their reinforcing.

This is as far as anything in Sufism can be explained in formal terms. As for the rest, the only valid thing is the Sufic watchword: "He who tastes not, knows not." (Rumi)