

Sufism (Part 2 of 2)

Principles of Sufism

'Willful and total submission to the Sheikh', is probably the motto of Sufism. From a glance, it is clear that a special and complete bond is formed between the head of the Sufi order (the 'Sheikh') and the *Mureed* (follower); understanding the principles of Sufism lies in understanding its basic structure. So what is it all about?

Basically, the follower gives a pledge of allegiance, whereby he pledges to obey the Sheikh, and in turn the Sheikh promises to deliver the follower from every problem or calamity that may befall him. The Sheikh also offers the sincere follower lucrative fringe benefits. Once a follower agrees, he is blessed and assigned a set of *Dhikr* (chants). The follower is also to carry on with his life in a manner that is laid out by the Sufi order. If a conflict arises between his duties within the order and outside duties, the follower is to act upon the instructions of the Sheikh. In this manner the Sheikh's hold over the follower becomes absolute.

All in all, the follower is separated from the outside world and is exploited in many ways. As Muslims we believe that no human has a special power or ability to deliver us from the calamities of the grave or the Hereafter. Each of us will stand before God and will be judged individually.

God tells us:

"And every soul earns not [blame] except against itself, and no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another." (Quran 7:164)

We also believe that as Muslims we are not to submit and surrender ourselves to anyone but God, Almighty. Besides the Creator, all else is apt to make error. The Prophet, may the blessing and mercy of God be upon him, said:

“Every son of Adam makes mistakes and the best of them are those who repent.” (Tirmidhi)

The Sheikh

He is the ‘supreme authority’, the head of ‘job’ distribution within the Order and gives each of the followers their necessary *Dhikr*. It is to this individual whom the follower pledges full and total obedience; thereafter, the two universal laws of the Sheikh-follower bondage will come into effect:

A. The follower must never argue with the Sheikh, nor ask him for a proof in relation to the actions he does.

B. Whoever opposes the Sheikh, will have broken the ‘covenant’ and is thus debarred from all fringe benefits offered by the Sheikh, even if he stays a close friend to him.

As Muslims we believe that all acts of worship are ‘*Tawqeefiyah*’, i.e. not subject to opinion; thus must be substantiated with textual evidences that are both authentic and decisive. God, Almighty, tells us:

“Say (to them), ‘produce your proof if you are truthful.’ (Quran 2:111)

We believe that there is no middle-man between God and His slaves. We are to call unto Him directly. God tells us:

“And your Lord says, ‘Call upon Me; I will respond to you.’ Indeed, those who disdain My worship will enter Hell [rendered] contemptible.” (Quran 40:60)

In Sufism, the Sheikh is thought to be 'the inspired man to whose eyes the mysteries of the hidden are unveiled, for the Sheikhs see with the light of God and know what thoughts and confusions are in man's hearts. Nothing can be concealed from them.' Ibn Arabi, claimed that he used to receive direct revelation from God, similar to the way that Prophet Muhammad did, and was quoted as saying:

"Some works I wrote at the command of God sent to me in sleep, or through mystical revelations."

M. Ibn Arabi, "The Bezels of Wisdom," pp.3

We believe that the knowledge of the unseen is restricted to God alone. Anyone who claims the knowledge of the unseen has indeed told a lie. God tells us:

"And who is more disbelieving than he who forges a lie against God, or says, 'It has been revealed to me,' when nothing has been revealed to him?" (Quran 6.93)

The Prophet, may the blessing and mercy of God be upon him, said:

"Do not forge lies against me, because he who does so enters the Fire." (Saheeh Muslim)

The Covenant

This is an interesting ceremony, which by far, is the most important principle of Sufism as it is common among all Sufi Orders. Here the Sheikh and the follower hold hands and close their eyes in solemn meditation. The follower willfully and wholeheartedly pledges to respect the Sheikh as his leader and guide to the path of God. He also pledges to adhere to the rites of the Order throughout his life and promises never to walk away, along with this the follower pledges complete and unconditional allegiance, obedience and loyalty to the Sheikh. After this the Sheikh recites:

"Verily, those who take the allegiance to you take it to Allah." (Quran 48:10)

The follower is then given his specific Dhikr. The Sheikh asks the follower: "Have you accepted me as your Sheikh and spiritual guide before God, Almighty?"

In reply, the follower is to say:

"I have accepted,"

and the Sheikh responds saying:

"And we have accepted."

Both of them recite the Testimony of Faith and the ceremony is ended by the follower kissing the Sheikh's hand.

This entire ceremony was unknown during the Prophet's life and the best three generations that preceded him. The Prophet, may the blessing and mercy of God be upon him, said:

"Whoever lives after me shall see many differences (i.e. religious innovations); so adhere to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of my Rightly Guided Caliphs." (Abu Dawood)

The Prophet, may the blessing and mercy of God be upon him, also said:

"Verily, the best of speech is the Book of God, and the best of guidance is the guidance of (Prophet) Muhammad and the evil of all religious matters are the innovations. Every innovation (in religion) is a bid'ah and every bid'ah is misguidance, and every misguidance will lead to the Fire." (Saheeh Muslim)

Imam Malik, may Allah grant him His Mercy, said: "He who introduces an innovation in the religion of Islam and deems it a good thing in effect claims by that Muhammad betrayed (the trust of conveying) the Divine Message."

The Dhikr

It is also known as the 'Wird' and in Sufism it is the practice of repeating the name of God, and the repetition of a set number of invocations.

These invocations may include beseeching the dead or seeking help from other than God for needs that only God Almighty can grant.

Ahmad at-Tijani, a Sufi Elder, claimed that the wird was withheld by Prophet Muhammad; he did not teach it to any of his Companions. At-Tijani claimed that the Prophet knew that a time would come when the wird would be made public but the person who would do that was not yet in existence.

As a result, Sufis believe that there is an ongoing chain of transmission between Prophet Muhammad and their current Sheikh.

Dhikr is categorized by the Sufi elders into three categories:

A. Dhikr of the commoners, in which they are to repeat 'La ilaaha ill-Allah Muhammad-ur-Rasoolullah' (i.e. there is no God worthy of being worshipped but Allah and Muhammad is the slave of God.)

B. Dhikr of the high class, which is to repeat the name of God, 'Allah'.

C. Dhikr of the elite, which is to repeat the Divine pronoun 'Hu', (i.e. He).

At times, the Dhikr is chanted in melodic hymns with eyes closed, rich music may be played (to some this is essential); moreover, some will dance before the Sheikh while saying the Dhikr. Many a time the Dhikr includes open polytheism (the greatest sin in Islam). God tells us:

"And it has been revealed to you and to those before you: If you attribute partners to God, your deed shall surely be in vain and you shall certainly be among the losers." (Quran 39:65)

Interpretation of the Quran

In Sufism, studying the exegesis of the Quran or pondering the meanings of its verses is discouraged, and at times, even forbidden. Sufis claim that every verse of the Quran has an outward meaning and an inward meaning. The inward meaning is understood solely by the Sufi elders. On account of this, Sufis have introduced concepts and words that are totally foreign to the teachings of Islam.

In the Quran God, Almighty encourages us to properly understand His words. God tells us:

“(This is) a Scripture that We have revealed unto you, full of blessing, that they may ponder its revelations, and that men of understanding may reflect.” (Quran 38:29)

The exegesis of the Quran is accomplished by studying the Quran along with the Sunnah; these two sources of Islamic law must be taken hand in hand as one integral unit. We are to understand and interpret the Quran and the Sunnah the way they were understood by the first generations.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above, Sufism varies quite drastically from the true spirit of Islam. Sufism inculcates in the follower the will to stop using the basic faculties given to him by God, the Creator of the world and to submit himself to a form of slavery.

Islam, on the other hand, is very simple; there is no need for intermediaries or any saints between man and God, and one is only to submit and surrender themselves to God, Almighty.

Saif an-Nasr, Seera of Hamidiyyeh, 1956

