

Reflections on Sufism as Applied Spirituality

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Sufism is the application of spiritual principles to achieve **full spiritual development for oneself in synergy with one's community**. Sufism is an applied science that derives from a knowledge of all the subtleties of human energy, faculties of perception, states of consciousness, and levels of reality.

Sufism is the science of wisdom made practical and explicit. An applied spirituality has existed implicitly in all the wisdom cultures of humanity. This applied spirituality was lived and taught by humanity's great teachers of wisdom, often expressed within religious and cultural formulations that disguised or veiled as much as they revealed. Our task today is to **find the appropriate language to convey the principles of applied spirituality**.

Sufism is a living tradition of applied spirituality that is integrated with everyday life and yet can lead to the highest levels of spiritual development. Full spiritual development here is understood to be a state of **communion with the Absolute**. Through this communion every aspect of life is made sacred and brought to its highest level of development.

We are **beings of two dimensions**: one dimension is our external life and relationships, and the other dimension is the invisible world of meaning, spiritual presence, and relationship with Being, itself. The human being cannot be truly understood except through and with the Divine. To try to understand the human being purely in reference to itself is like trying to understand a seed without reference to the fertile environment that would allow the seed to sprout, grow, and mature.

We achieve personal happiness, fulfillment and meaning through relationships, not as isolated individuals. We are essentially communal beings. Our nature is like **a seed which can only sprout in the fertile soil of human relationships**.

While the quality of our relationships depends on the quality of our own being, our internal coherence, our purity of heart, and our self-knowledge, the quality of our being is nevertheless fulfilled in personal relationships and a sense of purpose.

The main spiritual principles that guide us toward that state of communion are 1. Communion with the divine; 2. being free of the domination of the false self and 3. living in a vibration of love.

A human being who is dominated by the ego-self views everything from the perspective of the ego. He is little more than a walking advertisement for himself.

Among the most powerful principles of applied spirituality is cooperating with the transformative power of love and thus solving one's problems with love.

In the Noble Qur'an it is said, "Say: No reward do I ask of you except that you love those who are near." (Surah Shura, 42:23). Muhammad Asad translates this as "love your fellow men." Those who are near include all human beings with whom we come into contact. This requires that we have that love within ourselves to love impartially, to live in the vibration of love itself.

"Make room for one another in your gatherings; do make room, and God will make room for you." (Surah al-Mujadalah, 58:11)

Transformation, in this case, means transforming from a lower, coarser vibration to a higher, subtler vibration.

In order to live in the vibration of love we shine the light of our will through the spectrum of love: patience, kindness, generosity, humbleness, guilelessness, good temper, courtesy, altruism, sincerity, endurance, forgiveness, courage.

Will can be understood and defined as our capacity for conscious choice. A human being reaches his or her highest development through the attainment of a spiritual will. Will is an attribute of the Absolute applied within the sphere of human life. A human being is essentially a reflector of the attributes of the Absolute—consciousness, knowledge, love, transformation. Because the human being is the most highly evolved reflector of the Absolute, which is Infinite Conscious Love, such a human can exert will power even to the extent of transcending one's own selfish desires for the sake of an altruistic purpose.

A Community can be defined as a group of people with a common interest resulting in a shared resonance. The value of such a community is that it provides a high enough platform from which the state of each individual can be raised to an even higher level.

*And as for those who embrace faith,
and who forsake the domain of evil
and strive hard together with you—
these are of you;
and they who are closely related
have the highest claim on one another according to God's decree.*

[Sūrah al-Anfāl 8:75]

Muhammad Asad comments on this ayat: In my opinion, therefore, the above verse has no bearing on laws of inheritance, but is meant to summarize, as it were, the lesson of the preceding verses: All true believers, of all times, form one single community in the deepest sense of this word; and all who are thus closely related in spirit have the highest claim on one another in accordance with God's decree that *all believers are brethren* [49:10]. (Asad, p. 253) Or: "*The faithful are but a single brotherhood.*"

Attempting this journey of transformation alone within today's society, based as it is in individualism, consumerism, and materialism, is a nearly impossible task. Even within a community dedicated to this transformation and informed by an adequate knowledge of transformation, if an individual practices the disciplines of spirituality this transformation will be natural, spontaneous, and inevitable.

A community of people who awaken the resonance of love will also awaken this spectrum of qualities. Likewise, if any of these qualities are individually awakened, whether through reason, social encouragement, or even imitation, the original power of Love, from which these qualities emerge, will also be invoked. The effects evoke the cause, just as the cause produced the effects.

O you who have faith!
Be mindful of God with all the mindfulness that is due Him,
and do not allow death to overtake you
before you have surrendered yourselves to Him.
And hold fast, all together, to the rope of God,
and do not draw apart from one another.
And remember with gratitude the blessings
which God has bestowed on you:
how, when you were adversaries, He brought your hearts together,
so that through His blessings you became as though of one family;
and how when you were on the brink of a fiery abyss,
He saved you from it.
In this way, God makes clear His signs to you,
so that you might be guided,
and that there might grow out of you a community
that invites to all that is good, and encourages the doing of what is right
and forbids the doing of what is wrong:
and it is they who shall attain happiness!

[Sūrah Āl °Imrān 3:102-104]

The contribution of a living tradition is to supply the teachings, metaphors, stories, and inspiring exemplars to educate our reason and motivate our hearts toward attainment. A living, self-renewing tradition and its applied spirituality are a dynamic force governed by core transformational values. Such a tradition can be adaptable without losing its essential qualities. Over time the cumulative effect of this applied spirituality will be an increase in qualities of being: all the capacities to sustain presence, to remember, and to continue one's efforts through an ever increasing yearning for transformation.

The Town of Love

1509

I traveled around from town to town,
But I saw nothing like the Town of Love.

From the beginning, I did not know the value of that place,
and in ignorance, had to suffer the misery of exile.

I abandoned such a land of honey as that,
to graze on all kinds of grass like an animal.

Why, like the people of Moses, did I
prefer garlic and onions to manna and quails!?¹

Apart from love, every sound that I heard in the world,
sounded like a banging drum.

By the sound of that drum, I fell from the Court of Heaven
down to this perishable world.

I was a solitary self among so many others,
flitting around like a wingless, footless heart.

From that wine, which bestows grace and laughter,
I was drinking, as a flower does, with no lips or throat.

Then there came a call from Love, "O soul!
Leave this abode of drudgery I created for you."

Often I would say, "I don't like it down there,"
and bitterly moaned and tore my clothes.

Just as I am scared of departing now,
I was also reluctant to leave then.

He said, "O soul! Get going! Wherever you are,
I am as near to you as your jugular vein."²

He enchanted me with so many sweet words,

1. REFERRING TO THE *AYAH*, "AND REMEMBER YE SAID: "O MOSES! WE CANNOT ENDURE ONE KIND OF FOOD (ALWAYS); SO BESEECH THY LORD FOR US TO PRODUCE FOR US OF WHAT THE EARTH GROWS, -ITS POT-HERBS, AND CUCUMBERS, ITS GARLIC, LENTILS, AND ONIONS..." (QUR'AN, 2:61).

2. REFERRING TO THE *AYAH*, "WE ARE NEARER TO HIM THAN HIS JUGULAR VEIN..." (QUR'AN, 50:16).

and I took them to heart.

His enchantment causes the whole world to bounce high.
Who am I? I'm inconspicuous even to myself.

First He led me from the Way,
and then brought me back to the Way;

but had I not strayed from the Way,
how would I have known the snare of His love.

I would tell you how to get here, but
Having arrived at this point, my pen is broken.

Expanding Friendship

1926

Money and real estate occupy the body.
but all the heart wants is expanding friendship.

A rose-garden without a friend is indeed a prison;
a prison with a friend becomes a rose-garden.

If the pleasure of friendship did not exist,
neither men nor women would be here.

A thorn from a friend's garden is worth more
than a thousand cypresses and lilies.

Love sewed us securely together.
We owe nothing to the needle and thread.

If the house of the world is dark,
Love will find a way to create windows.

If the world is full of arrows and swords,
the Armorer of Love has made us coats of mail.

Love itself describes its own perfection.
Be speechless and listen.

