

4. So what is Sufism?



Searching for the right literature to explain Sufism to me clearly, I chanced on a free book on the web called *The Secret Meaning* (thesecretmeaning.com - also see books under saisansthan.com). I am writing a summary of what I learnt from the book. I encourage all readers to read it.

Firstly, as stated earlier, anyone from any religion can be a Sufi. Sufism is a philosophy, a spiritual discipline, a relationship between master and disciple, a spiritual path. Sufism is infinitely

tolerant of all people irrespective of sex, race, religion or caste. It accepts everyone as an equal.

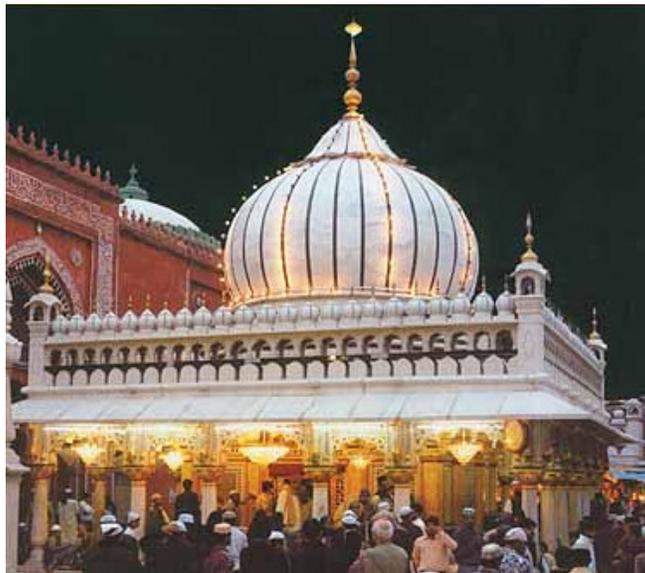
Sufism is a spiritual path where any disciple achieves self-realisation (“I am God”) through the guidance of his master. **God is found within himself.** His master creates situations (“**Leelas**”) in which the disciples spiritual weaknesses are exposed one by one. He is gradually made to shed his spiritual dirt to realise the shining diamond within. Throughout this process he must have solid unconditional love (adoration) and deep devotion for his master and must express this through faith and patience. These qualities are severely tested on the spiritual path and a disciple can easily reach the point where he denounces his master although this is at his own peril. His master will eventually save him when he has realised his error.

In Sufism, the love and devotion a disciple experiences and accompanying spiritual emotions are through the influence of **Divine Love** (an uncontrollable rapture, a Godsend grace which must be sought by ardent prayer and aspiration) **and Divine Grace** (a love and a certainty which spring from direct knowledge and experience of God) of his master. These must be earned with hard work. The disciple must be *impatient and restless* in his desire for vision of His master. The disciple should say “he is my master and I am his servant”. It is true that later on in this relationship the master treats the disciple as his equal but that right needs to be earned through solid effort. Never fail in your service to your master be it in whatever form you undertake/ he assigns to you. Give it your mental presence, sincerity, hard work and of course love and devotion.



The master will prescribe **devotional practices** to a disciple specific to his needs. This could be reading spiritual books, writing spiritual books (the best practice), prayer, meditation, singing devotional songs on the masters life,

spreading his teachings, giving in charity (especially food), practicing silence, even Yoga, etc. These practices help to enhance the disciple's devotion and purify his mind. The spiritual mind is one that is clean and uncluttered in its thought process (not convoluted and devious), relies on **intuition** to see the truth of a situation, is free from greed and anger, and is completely humble. **Control of the mind is key to Sufism.** For example, a disciple that outwardly does spiritual acts but in his spare time has lascivious thoughts that he can't get rid of, cannot achieve God.



In simple terms, the Sufi belief is that the human soul is composed of three souls - the first is the *Great soul*, the second the *Human soul*, and the third the lower level spirit or the *Animal soul* (Qalb and Nafs (ego)). The lower spirit is the Nafs or the ego which needs to be eliminated. We are separated from our divine nature (our higher spirit) through spiritual veils - The soul

is in the prison of his body, *separated by these thick curtains* from God. The Nafs is at the 'centre of the veiling' and is the evil within us. The **spiritual battle of good and evil is fought in the spiritual heart** which is a spiritual center in every human. As Rumi says:

The heart is nothing but the sea of light...
the place of the vision of God.



Sufism focuses on cleansing of the heart as the gate to Divine Love. *Self-reflection, constant remembrance, unconditional surrender, Sema and meditation* – all are critical to removing the nafs. **Divine Love** is the force which ultimately transforms a man helping him to overcome the urges of his nafs. *When the veils are lifted the Sufi 'lives in God' and does his spiritual work.*

The Sufi 'path' consists of the following seven '**stages**' – repentance, abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, trust in God, and satisfaction. There are similarly **ten psychological 'states'** corresponding with this discipline which are - meditation, nearness to God, love, fear, hope, longing, intimacy, tranquility, contemplation, and certainty. The former requires ones own effort while the latter are spiritual experiences over which man has no control:

They descend from God into his heart,
without his being able to repel them
when they come or to retain them
when they go.

In order to break the hold of the nafs, Sufis undertake fasting, silence, and solitude (although Baba never recommended fasting for the normal householder). More importantly, a moral transformation and purging of the nafs is needed to remove signs of evil - ignorance, pride, envy, uncharitableness etc. Rumi's suggests:

Cut these four birds heads to gain your immortal bread
The duck is your greed, and your ego is the crow
The cock is lust, and the peacock is your show

Total unconditional surrender of all senses to the perfect master is needed (Master is God). **Great discipline of listening** to the master's word is needed – unquestioning faith is needed. The disciple must look for the *inner meaning* of his master's words. The disciple **must be grateful** for his master's graciousness and also his wrath. The disciple should **constantly remember** his master including chanting his name in his mind.

This is the best purification of the mind. Before the disciple undertakes any sensory experience he should always remember his master – if it is unworthy he will automatically give it up weaning him away gradually from his nafs. **Meditation** on the master is essential. Praying at a Perfect Master's tomb is important to express and enhance devotion – *beg for grace*. A Perfect Master can offer **guidance in visions** while awake and when asleep in dreams. *A master's grace increases as the disciple's devotion, reverence, desire for the Truth, obedience and prompt compliance increases. His grace also increases devotion.*



The disciple achieves God through his master by merging with his master. If his master is a Perfect Master then he has in essence merged with God. If not, the master is controlled by other masters who help him and his devotees to achieve God. Sufism requires a lot of inner strength. Realisation that the materialism we live in is a Maya or an illusion is a fundamental

realisation. This is very difficult to realise in practice. People tend to cling to money, fame, power, family, and sex. They are bound by their hatred and anger. **When we dwell upon pleasure or we dwell upon pain – both are spiritual obstacles.** All these are in Sufi terms nothing but spiritual illusions. Of all the temptations that Satan presents, sex is the toughest one to overcome.

KEY SUFI PRINCIPLES

1. Attain God through your master – master is God.
2. Devotion to your master – constant remembrance is the path.
3. You may use devotional music to help strengthen your devotion.
4. God lies within you - you must kill your animal spirit (“Nafs” or ego).
5. Knowledge is not as important as direct spiritual experience.
6. Control your anger, lust and materialistic greed - control your mind.
7. Devotion and faith are the corner-stones.
8. As you start evolving your suffering initially increases to cleanse you.
9. Good and Bad mean different things as you evolve – the same rules don’t apply.
10. An evolved man will experience the results of his actions much faster (he who rises higher falls harder).
11. Your powers are not your own, they are as a result of the Grace of your master.
12. Tremendous courage is needed to be a Sufi.
13. Ultimately, you must conquer lust if you want to achieve God.

The advanced disciple relies on his master for everything including food and water. *The Sufi will now eat little, sleep little, and speak little.* Ultimately the Sufi becomes one with his master and has the exact same personality. As Rumi says:

Why should I seek? I am the same as He.
His essence speaks through me.
I have been looking for myself!

Without the help of a Perfect Master God cannot be attained. Baba is such a Perfect Master. *Serve him with awe and veneration and have faith and patience.*