



*Sufism: In the Spirit of  
Eastern Spiritual Traditions*

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## Introduction

Sufi Islam is a mystical form of Islamic spirituality. The emphasis of Sufism is less on external rituals and more on the inward journey. The seeker searches within to make oneself *Insaan-e-Kamil*, or a perfect human being on God's path. The origin of the word Sufism is in *tasawwuf*, the path followed by Sufis to reach God. Some believe it comes from the word *suf* (wool), referring to the coarse woollen fabric worn by early Sufis. *Sufiya* also means purified or chosen as a friend of God. Most Sufis favour the origin of the word from *safa* or purity; therefore, a Sufi is one who is purified from worldly defilements. The essence of Sufism, as of most religions, is to reach God, or truth or absolute reality.

## Characteristics of Sufism

The path of Sufism is a path of self-annihilation in God, also called a *fanaa*, which means to seek permanence in God. A *Sufi* strives to relinquish worldly and even other worldly aims. The objective of Sufism is to acquire knowledge of God and achieve wisdom. Sufis avail every act of God as an opportunity to "see" God. The *Sufi* "lives his life as a continuous effort to view or "see" Him with a profound, spiritual "seeing" . . . and with a profound awareness of being continuously overseen by Him" (Gulen, 2006, p. xi-xii).

While preparing for *fanaa*, the *sufis* reorient their existence on to the path of God and practically strive to merge their existence into the reality of God. Sufism is the path of annihilation of an individual's ego, will, and self-centeredness and the subsequent spiritual revival with the light of God's essence. They constantly remind themselves of the reality which God is, and orient their will to the will of God. They continuously strive to cleanse themselves of all that is evil to acquire virtue. They seek permanence in God and are intensely God conscious. The aspect of cleansing is important to understand when working with someone who belongs to this faith or tradition.

Sufis in fact, celebrate their death, which is referred to as *visal*, as that means being nearer to God. Their life on earth is merely a journey to prepare themselves for being one with God. The journey to reorient one's life along God's path is then guided by the Qur'an and inspired by the life of the Prophet of Islam, which is indeed a tough path. Sufis try to overcome desires, which lead them astray from the path of God. They try to master emotions and feelings like jealousy, fear, anger, greed, and so on. They resist temptations of carnality, wishes, or appetite (*nafs al-ammara*), which command the individual to sin. *Nafs al-ammara* (the commanding soul that is full of evil desires) becomes sovereign over the human body; it subjugates individuals and demands insatiable indulgence in pleasures. Sufis, overcoming *nafs al-ammara*, acquire laudable moral qualities. They follow the Qur'an: "To the righteous it will be said "oh reassured soul, return to your Lord well pleased, and pleasing to Him" (89:27–28). They are content with the command of Allah Almighty; there is nothing else that can make them happy (*nafs al-Mutmainnah*).

Sarmad Shahid, a Sufi saint who was executed by Aurangzeb, would only pronounce half kalima, which is the proclamation of faith, *La ilaha* ("There is no God"), and would not pronounce *illa'llah* ("Except Allah"). When asked to explain, he answered "Presently I am drowned in negation; I have not yet attained the station of affirmation; if I said the whole phrase in this state, I would be telling a lie" (Sofia, 2017). According to Sarmad, he had

not yet completely negated his desires, lusts, passions, fears, greed, and so on. Unless he negated these, he would not be able to proclaim that there was only one God who he affirmed and bowed down to. Aurangzeb's judges considered a refusal to recite full *kalima* as blasphemy, and he was ordered to be executed. The day he was to be executed near Jama Masjid, on seeing the executioner's gleaming sword, Sarmad smiled, looked towards heaven and said, "*May I be sacrificed for You; come, come, in whatever guise, You come, I recognize You.*" (Graham, 2011). This appears to be the ultimate desire of most sufi practitioners, full renunciation, which leads to union with God.

In order to master one's desires, greed, fear, anger, and jealousy and constantly be God conscious, Sufis chant the *kalima*, or invoke God, or have sama: ecstatic singing or dancing sessions. However, more important is to live a very tough life and sacrifice consumption of all that was considered unnecessary for their existence. The *murshids* (guide or teacher), of Gudri thus wear a very simple patched frock. When a *murid* (disciple) obtains the worn robe of the *shaykh* (master) he is expected to wear it without washing and should not give it to others. Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya said something very important regarding the dervish robe: "*Tariqat ba-joz o khedmat-e-khalq nist; Ba tasbih o sajaada o dalaq nist*" ("The Sufi path is nothing but service to humanity. It is not found in the rosary, the prayer carpet and the dervish robe") (Chishti, 2018.) Sarmad wore none. Guides or murshids play an important role in sufism. The role of the guide is to help the student or *murid* achieve union with God.

Sufi orders had considerable influence in the medieval period and were more popular among the lower classes. The *Chistiya silsila* (order) of the Sufis believed in keeping their distance from the state. Despite its ideals, we witness Sufi orders being influenced by the material world and its pomp, pleasure, and power rather than the other way around. We do not hear of any great *Sufi* saint in the modern

period when the world is full of conflicts and wars. The spiritual glories of not only Sufi saints, but of other faiths too, remain mute spectators to the conflicts.

While the Chishti order of Sufis kept principled distance from the state, the other orders were less inclined to keep that distance. The Sufis lived in poverty and did not want to get used to comforts and pleasures. Shaikh Farid Ganj-i-Shakar stated the attitude of Chishti Silsila firmly in these words: "If you aim at achieving the spiritual position attained by elders, keep away from the princes of the blood" (Nizami, 1991, p. 102). They eschewed politics and refused stipends and grants. Service of state would distract from attainment of Gnosis (*ma'rifat*). Acceptance of state service was tantamount to signing one's spiritual death warrant. They also questioned the source of income of the state and considered it to be from prohibited sources.

## **Sufism and Its Inclusive Approach**

The doctrine of *sulhi-i-kul* believes in overflowing Divine love and getting along with all other beings. To the *Sufis*, the world is a cradle of brotherhood and sisterhood. A Sufi must seek happiness and not pleasures. Happiness is derived from serving others and seeking salvation through conviction of truth, righteous conduct, sincerity, and purity of intention. This could be understood as a very good intervention strategy in working with someone who professes to this faith tradition. It is always important to give precedence to the well-being and happiness of others. Sufism and Sufi *Silsilas* (orders) at best are centers where helpless, powerless, and needy people visit for solace and spiritual guidance. There are also centers where *samaa* sessions are held and followers attain ecstasy. Through the experience of ecstasy, the followers experience God and turn to spirituality. Through spiritual experiences, Sufism also provides resources to overcome and transcend sectarianism and build bridges with other faiths and communities. Sufism facilitates dialogues between different communities and faiths to build a peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive world. The world in which the *Sufi* lives, its culture, customs and traditions are important contexts for designing

intervention strategies for practitioners of Sufism. This world is inclusive of persons of all faiths.

The emphasis of Sufism is less on outward manifestations of faith and more on the inward journey and seeking God within. That leads to dedicating one's entire life and one's whole self on to God's path. The journey of life is to seek union with God. To achieve this, Sufis continuously and relentlessly strive to conquer their ego and submit it to God's will and path. It would therefore appear that, in all persons who are of the *Sufi* faith, the conquering of the ego would have to be part of the therapeutic process. In the process, they give up everything that can distract them from God's path.

Sarmad Shahid, a Sufi saint once wrote, referring to the *meraj* (Heavenly journey) of Prophet Mohammed (PUBH), "The mullah says that Ahmad went to the heavens; Sarmad says the heavens were inside Ahmad." (Gandhi, 2015). Bulle Shah, another Sufi saint who settled in Punjab and composed his poetry, wrote, "*Masjid dha de, Mandir dha de; dhaa de jo kuchh dainda; Per kadi kise da dil na dhayeen; Rabb dilan wich rehnda.*" ("Demolish the mosque, the temple or anything you see; but do not break a human heart for that is where God resides") (Nav Singh, n.d.).

This approach made Sufis most inclusive, embracing, and compassionate toward all human beings, living creatures, and nature. They strive to control their desires, emotions, and fears and put them in service of God and the creation of God. Rabia al-Adawiyya, an 8th century Sufi saint from Basra, Iraq, went a step ahead and wanted to douse the fire in hell and burn down heaven, as the lure of heaven and fear of hell are hindrances to the true vision of God. Those who serve God should not see God as an object of hope, of paradise or fear of hell. They should be motivated to tread the path illuminated by God only out of love for God. The *Sufi* emphasis is more on obedience to God out of love for God.

## Sufi Doctrines

Muhyuddin Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), and other Sufi saints subscribed to the doctrine of *wahdat ul-wujud* (unity of being or existence). This essentially emanates from the concept of *tawhid* or unity and *wahadat* or one. The concept of oneness of God translates into unity of all beings, whatever the color of their skin or physical features, race, tribe, or ethnicity, or even religious beliefs. They are all manifestations of God and therefore all are to be embraced and seen as God in creation. None is stranger, alien, or “other.” No culture, language, custom, or tradition is alien or that of “other.” Not to accept this would mean denial of *tawhid* or oneness of God. Those speaking a different language or who have different cultures or physical bodily attributes are all creations of the same God. *Sufis* therefore always embrace all cultures and languages and adopt them as a medium to transmit the message of God.

The goal that *Sufis* strive to achieve is *sulh-i-kul* (complete or absolute peace). Peaceful and harmonious relations between all human beings entail peace between all religions and acceptance of diversity and interfaith dialogue. This goal is to be achieved by reorienting oneself toward equilibrium with people, nature, and surroundings. There are two dimensions to reach *sulh-i-kul*. The first is when one continuously strives to acquire knowledge about people’s behavior, culture, social traditions, and customs. The second dimension is when one strives to develop love and compassion toward the people, which enables one to understand the context of the culture and social tradition and accept them if they are not contrary to and not forbidden by God. The principle of *sulh-i-kul* discourages one to be judgmental about people and communities. Inculcating this ability helps the Sufi practitioner grow in his or her spiritual relationship with God.

## The Master–Disciple Relationship

In order to achieve *sulh-i-kul*, a Sufi who is initiated into the order by a master or *Pir*, regrets the sins that he or she might have committed, feels deep remorse, and

turns to God in obedience. Holy Qur'an states, "Ye who believe! Turn to God with sincere repentance; In the hope that Your Lord will remove from you your ills" (66:8). Whenever a *pir* accepts a *murid* (disciple), he or she is kept in a closed room in seclusion for a period of 2 to 4 weeks under guidance and supervision. During this period, the *murid* is left to himself or herself and does not meet anyone else. He or she must eat very simple food and continuously pray to God. The *murid* recalls his or her past sins while praying to God for forgiveness. The *murid* undertakes *tafakkur* or deeply reflects on his or her past and thinks systematically in great details on the Islamic way of life. The *murid* discerns what is evil and harmful and what is righteous conduct. One finds God and tries to be in the company of God alone. The *pir* assists the *murid* in purification of all false beliefs, dark thoughts and feelings, and conceptions and imaginations that separate him or her from the truth (Gulen, 2006). The master plays an important role in guiding the student according to religious tenets.

Not all those who seek to be initiated into *Sufi* orders survive this period of seclusion, which is very rigorous, and the rigorous simplicity associated with it. While the *murid* is being initiated into a *Sufi* order, he or she learns to gradually renounce worldly pleasures and carnal desires. Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, a woman *Sufi* based in Basara, gave up all worldly desires so that she might serve God without distraction. She heard an inner voice saying to her,

Have a care, if you desire it, I will endow you with all the pleasures of this world, but I shall take concern for Me out of your heart, for such concern and the pleasures of this world cannot dwell together in one heart. O Rabi'a, you have a desire and I have a desire, I cannot combine my desire and your desire in one heart. (Smith, 1994, p. 41)

A *Sufi* firmly believes that the journey of life on earth is but a small fraction of eternity. Permanence is only in God. The pleasures associated with the journey of life on earth therefore are also temporary. In the Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqara states, "They ask thee what they should spend (in charity). Say: Whatever ye spend that is good, is for parents and kindred and orphans and those in want and for wayfarers" (2:215). "They ask thee how much they are to spend; Say: "What is beyond your needs" (2:219). *Sufis* strive to reduce their needs to the minimum so that they can spend the rest in charity as commanded by God.



Nizamuddin Awliya would fast on all days and not just during month of Ramzan when it is obligatory for all Muslims to fast, even though he ran a kitchen for all those who came to his *khanqah* (hospice where Sufis reside and meet their followers). He would enjoy seeing others take food and that felt as if he himself was taking food (Nizami, 1991). Normally *Sufi pirs* wore coarse woolen fabrics with many patches stitched on to them. The favorite murid would inherit the robes of the *Sufi pir* and would highly value the robe and wear it. Most preferred to own just two robes and wear one while the other was washed.

*Sufi pir* Sarmad Shahid from India, who was guillotined by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, would roam about the streets naked. It is said that when the emperor saw Sarmad naked on the steps of the royal mosque, Jama Masjid, he asked Sarmad to cover himself with a blanket lying nearby. As the blanket was pulled to cover Sarmad, all the heads of those whom the emperor had assassinated to grab the throne rolled out. Sarmad famously told the emperor, "Should I cover my naked body with the blanket, or should the blanket cover your sins?"

*Sufis* live a simple life with as little means as possible so that they can spend the rest on those who really need them. At the Sufi *Khanqas*, one rule was followed meticulously: not to save anything for the next day. All the donations and grants received were to be spent on the same day for the needy. The next day, they believe, God would give them, again to be spent on the needy. All possessions are strictly discouraged.

## **Fanaa Filla**

A Sufi's path is to tread on the path prescribed by God to the hilt while journeying on earth and to seek permanence in God. In order to seek permanence in God,

one must constantly strive to eliminate oneself and one's existence by moulding oneself to God's will. The great poet Galib (n.d.) puts this sentiment beautifully in his poetry:

*na thā kuchh to k̄hudā thā kuchh na hotā to k̄hudā hotā*

*Duboyā mujh ko hone ne na hotā maiñ to kyā hotā*

(When there was nothing, then there was God; If there was nothing, there would have been God

My being (coming into existence) let me down; if I had not come into existence, what would have been there?)

According to this verse, one's existence must not be separated from God's will. The exercise of choices to fulfill one's earthly and carnal desires and to seek pleasures of life are contrary to the path prescribed by God. Life's journey, therefore, should be to conquer oneself and one's desires. This can be achieved by constant remembrance of God and meditation to understand God's message and to love God and God's creation—all humans, animals, living beings, and nature. One should strive to constantly purify one's carnal soul from all sins through asceticism, as it is said, "When cleansed from these lusts of the flesh, the soul could enter on the Path which was destined to lead it to union with the Divine" (Smith, 1994, p. 73).

## Tariqah

While *Sufis* follow the *Shari'ah*, particularly the five basic tenets every Muslim has been called on to, so far as applicable to them, the *Sufis* devote themselves to the teachings of the Qur'an and follow them more intensely. The five basic tenets that every Muslim is called upon to follow are: (a) profession of faith by reciting *kalima* and bearing witness to oneness of God and the Prophethood of Muhammed; (b) praying five times a day; (c) fasting in the holy month of Ramzan; (d) pay *zakaat* i.e. tax equivalent to 2.5% of one's wealth or undertake charity in non-Islamic states; and (e) pilgrimage to Haj after fulfilling all other duties. There are Sufis who spend their time in remembrance of God and praying through the night.

Rabi'a used to pray all night, and when the day dawned she allowed herself a light sleep in her place of prayer, until the dawn tinged the sky with gold, and I used to hear her say, when she sprang up in fear from that sleep, O soul how long wilt thou sleep and how often wilt thou wake? Soon wilt thou sleep a sleep a sleep from which thou shall not wake again until the trumpet call of the Day of Resurrection. (Smith, 1994, p. 48)

Many *Sufis* fast all year round and consume very simple food and as little as possible for they feel they have to account for every grain of food. They consume barely enough food to keep their body and soul together. Thus, they ensure that their needs remain at the bare minimum to be able to spend the rest according to God's command, as stated in Qur'an (2:219) They would insist on non-possession and saving nothing for the next day in order to ensure that whatever they received was spent that day among the poor and the needy. "Just as in orthodox Islam the Kaaba in Mecca is the true center for Muslims, for *sufis* the true destination is the "Kaaba of the heart", or the center of the soul where Oneness with Allah resides" (Katya Faris, 2018). *Sufis* were inclusive in their approach to ways of worship and never looked down on any other way of worship of God. The real essence of worship lies not in external forms or rituals, but the purity of heart with which one remembers God.

In Rumi's *mathnavi* (poetic compositions), God says to Moses,  
 Ways of worship are not to be ranked as better or  
 worse than one another  
 It's all Praise it's all right  
 It's not me who is glorified in acts of worship  
 It's the worshippers! ... (Jafri, 2019)

*Sufis* were strict in the outward observance of Islam. However, they also adapted various psycho-energetic practices that ensure all-around spiritual development of the *murids* called *tariqah* (method). Psycho-energetic practices ensure all-around ethical and intellectual self-development of the *murid's* spiritual progress

at all stages. All students receive special tasks from their shaykhs according to their individual capabilities and peculiarities. The shaykh also gives psycho-energetic training to a group of students. Different exercises are suggested to enable the *murids* to develop their concentration, control their flow of thought, and achieve mental pause. After that, various psycho-physical exercises are used—rhythmic movements to music, Sufi whirling, and so on. These exercises have a purifying effect; achieve subtle attunement of body, mind, and consciousness; and bring the *murid* to a state of ecstasy and love of God, for example, the *Dhikr* (rhythmic recitation of name of God and qualities associated with God) or remembrance of God. The ways of remembrance of God are many and could be performed individually or in a collective. A group of *murids* sit in a circle and chant the *kalmia* or name of Allah rhythmically, first slow and then to the tune of the *Shaykh*. The Qur'an states, "Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of God: for without doubt in the remembrance of God do hearts find satisfaction" (13:28). *Dhikr* of Allah is a source of tranquility for Sufis.

*Dhikr* of Allah could be done by ecstatic chanting of God and God's qualities or during *sama*, singing hymns praising God. *Qawwalis* are sung in praise of God at *Chisti Dargahs*. The Dervishes of *Mevlana* order become ecstatic during a whirling dance that signifies circumambulating one's heart, which is God's abode. The camel fur cap on their heads signify their ego's tombstone and the black cloak represents the evil, which the dervish removes before whirling, thereby being spiritually born to the truth. The white dress they wear signifies ego's shroud. As the *sama* commences, the dervish crosses his hands on his chest, representing God's unity, and bows. While whirling, the dervish slowly opens his arms and spreads his right arm skyward, ready to receive God's beneficence. His left arm is pointing to the earth. The dervish turns from left to right, symbolizing spiritual upliftment. The whirling signifies revolving around one's heart, embracing all humankind and creation with love and affection. The drums symbolize God's order to Creation: "Be." *Sufis* use metaphors of lovers to describe the state in which they are during *Dhikr*. *Dhikr* manifests in the heart and leaves them drunk on Divine love. (BBC, 2009). The whirling exercise relaxes the mind and bestows peace within. There are general rules for performing the whirling exercise. It should not be undertaken until 3 hours after meals. The eyes are fixed on one of the raised hands or not fixed on anything at all. The number of whirls is no more than 40 in a minute; in rare

cases it can go up to 60 whirls in a minute. The beginning and end of the exercise should be as smooth as possible. In case one falls down during the exercise, one should turn on the stomach and relax. After performing the exercise, one needs to relax fully. The duration of the exercise depends on the individual and his or her adaptation to the technique (The Beauty of Islam).

While adhering to *Shari'a* (Qur'anic prescriptions and laws derived from the holy Qur'an); *Sufis* also practiced *tariqahs* to ensure their complete submission to God. *Tariqahs* are many and some believed as many as the number of Muslims. Whirling round, singing qawwalis in praise of God and the Prophet (PUBH), chanting the name of God ecstatically, dancing in ecstasy, and are some *tariqahs*. The Sufis adopted all methods. Along with *tariqahs*, they also embraced various cultures, languages, and traditions that were not contrary to the path set out by God. Baba Farid Ganj-i-Shakkar (1179–1266) composed his poems in Multani language; Amir Khusro (1253–1325), disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya (1238–1325), composed his poetry in Hindawi; Hazrat Dada Hayat Khalandar or Baba Budan (16th century), a popular Sufi in the Chikmagalur District of Karnataka State, conversed in Kannada; Vali Gujarati (1667–1707) was very popular in the state of Gujarat and adopted Gujarati as his language. Some of the dialects, like Multani, Saraiki, Awadhi, which were employed as a medium for transmission of *Sufi* ideas, developed into languages with scripts and literary traditions. Sufis blended and communicated extremely well with the local cultures and performing arts like music and dance.

The Hindu festival of colors—Holi, during which a fire is lit symbolizing burning of all ill feelings toward fellow beings and the following morning everyone sprinkles color on each other in the neighborhood—is celebrated with great revelry. Amir Khusrau (1253–1325) has composed excellent poems on Holi and the spring season, in which Holi is played. Sufi *sama*, or ecstasy in music sessions, contributed greatly to the development of musical instruments and classical ragas (music compositions). Amir Khusrau developed a popular instrument used in Indian classical music tradition – a sitar- a musical instrument with strings. Sufis had an inclusive approach toward worship as well. Nizamuddin Auliya once commented on seeing Hindus worshipping idols on the bank of river Jamuna, “Every people have a religion and a house of worship” (Nizami, 1991, p. 124).

## Piri–Muridi

The spiritual journey of a Sufi toward becoming *linsan-e-kamil*, or a perfect human being, has various stages. Some of the stages are tawba or repentance for the sins one may have committed in the past; muhasaba or self-criticism for any evil deed committed in order to seek inner spiritual depth; tafakkur or reflection to understand the world and God's message and purpose; *firar* and *itisam* (fleeing and taking shelter), the journey from the created to Creator, from lesser qualities to Divine attributes; *zuhud* (renouncing worldly pleasures), resisting carnal desires, living austere life, and refraining from sin in fear of God; *taqwa* (piety), performing God's commands and observing His prohibitions; *ibada* (worship and deep devotion), not only worship but fulfilling God's commands in daily life; *ikhlas* or sincerity and purity of intention; *tawadu* or good nature; *sidq* or truthfulness; *haya* (modesty); *sabr* (patience); *ihsan* (obliging others through as one's duty); *sakina* and *itmīnaan* (serenity and peacefulness); *qurb* (feeling the support of God for good deeds one does as servant of God); *ma'arifa* (attaining and acquiring spiritual knowledge of God); *mahabba* (love) that is so deep and irresistible that it longs for union and struggles to comply with all His desires and commands in all thoughts and acts; and *walaya* or sainthood.

To traverse these stages is most challenging. The journey needs a master and a guide who can take the incumbent through the process wherein one gives up natural human desires and attachments to worldly materials and puts oneself on the path of subservience to God. In order to become a *murid*, one needs to give an oath of allegiance to the *pir* (*bayyat*), taken by putting one's hand on the hand of *pir* and repeating a prescribed oath. A *murid* needs to have certain attributes (*adab*), including a belief that his *pir* is the best and the *murid* will follow his *pir's* command. *Pir* or *shaikh* or *musrshid* of a Sufi dargah is the spiritual guide who helps the incumbent seeker or *murid* on the spiritual journey. The *murid* cannot reach his destiny on the spiritual journey without the *pir*. *Murids* remain bound to their *pir* by their vow of allegiance to him, the *pir's* friendliness, sympathy, material, magical and psychological assistance, and, when that is not enough, fear of his magical power. This is achieved through a lengthy socialization process that spans a period ranging from 12 years to a lifetime. This socialization process is very painful, and some disciples (*murids*) run away (Pinto, 1995).

The *murid* is skillfully guided by the *pir* step by step, taking him through all the phases. Each *murid* is different and the *pir* guides the *murid* individually. Those who stay on the path of spiritual journey see God in the *pir*, and the *pir* helps the *murid* see God in everything. The *murid* is socialized according to the *tariqah* of the *Khanqah/Dargah*. The *pir* gives tasks to the *murid*, duly understanding his capacities and strengths. The *pir* is responsible for giving instructions and then supporting, monitoring, and appraising the spiritual progress of the *murid*. *Dhikr* (constant recitation) and invocation of “Allah–Allah” till the *murid* becomes ecstatic is the normal task given. *Dhikr* helps the *murid* concentrate and see Allah in the *pir* and things around him.

The spiritual work given individually to *murids* to meet their specific spiritual needs is called *wird* (plural - *award*). *Wird* (such as saying, “Allah, Allah”) is described as a unit of *dhikr* constructed to contain certain patterns of knowledge and self-awakening. The initial goal is to gradually improve concentration by learning to stop the flow of thoughts—“living in the moment.” (Sarfaraz, 2011)

Constant and fast and increasing remembrance of Allah several times draws the *murid's* attention away from his daily needs, and the *murid* realizes that he cannot even breathe without the *dhikr* of Allah. The *murid* starts seeing first his *shaikh* in every direction and even in his dreams. This stage is called *fanaa fi shaikh*, or annihilation of oneself into the *shaykh*—seeing the *shaykh* and oneself as one and the same, acquiring attributes of the *shaykh* into oneself.

As the *dhikr* and remembrance of Allah continues and becomes more challenging, an arduous task requiring greater dedication and concentration for longer periods under the supervision of the *shaykh*, the *murid* realizes that his *shaikh* is but a curtain or a veil for Allah. The *murid* starts dreaming about Allah. This stage is called *fanaa fi'llah*, wherein the *murid* intensely desires union with Allah and acquires attributes of God, intensely desires union with God, and completely treads God's path. Sufi Mansur Al-Hallaj (858–922) declared himself as *Ana'l-Haq* (I am God).

## Conclusion

Sufi Islam is human-centric, tolerant, accepting plurality of culture and ways of worship that mould every individual into *insan-e-kamil*—a perfect human being through the path of love of Allah, while accepting all creation and appreciating the diversity in the world. Sufism believes that peace with all, or *sulh-e-kul* and unity of existence, or *wahadat-e-wujud*, is a liberating resource to build a peaceful world.

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