

Sufism is...

These quotations have been selected from the works of Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, the founder of the Sufi Order International.



Sufism is only a light thrown upon your own religion, like a light brought into a room containing all the things you want; the one thing needed was light.

To the question, “Are you a Christian?”, “Are you a Muslim?”, “Are you a Jew?”, the Sufi’s answer would be ‘yes’ rather than ‘no’, for the Sufi opposes no religion but sympathizes with all. In fact Sufism cannot be called a religion, for it does not impose either belief or principle upon anyone, considering that each individual soul has its own principles best suited for it, and a belief which changes with each grade of evolution.

The germ of Sufism is said to have existed from the beginning of the human creation, for wisdom is the heritage of all; therefore no one person can be said to be its propounder. It has been revealed more clearly and spread more widely from time to time as the world has evolved.

Sufism takes away the boundaries which divide different faiths by bringing into full light the underlying wisdom in which they are all united.

Is Sufism a religion? ...the religion of the Sufi is not separate from the religions of the world. People have fought in vain about the names and lives of their saviours, and have named their religions after the name of their saviour, instead of uniting with each other in the truth that is taught. This truth can be traced in all religions, whether one community calls another pagan or infidel or heathen. Such persons claim that theirs is the only scripture, and their place of worship the only abode of God. Sufism is a name applied to a certain philosophy by those who do not accept the philosophy; hence it cannot really be described as a religion; it contains a religion but is not itself a religion. Sufism is a religion if one wishes to learn religion from it. But it is beyond religion, for it is the light, the sustenance of every soul, raising the mortal being to immortality.

Is Sufism mysticism? As green is considered to be the colour of Ireland, yet it cannot be said to belong exclusively to the Irish people, for anybody can wear green, and green is found all over the world, so mystics in Islam have been called Sufis; but Sufism, divine wisdom, is for all, and is not limited to a certain people. It has existed from the first day of creation, and will continue to spread and to exist until the end of the world. Sufism is a mysticism if one wishes to be guided by it in the unfoldment of the soul. Yet it is beyond mysticism.

Is Sufism a school of thought? Wisdom is not restricted to one geographical spot such as a country, a city, a building or meeting place. Sufism cannot be correctly described as a school of thought, if by that is meant the instruction of a certain doctrine; but it might be correct to speak of it as a school of thought in the sense that through Sufism one learns wisdom, just as in a school one learns wisdom of a certain kind. Sufism is beyond philosophy.

Sufism does not mean goodness, kindness, or piety; Sufism means wisdom. All things in life are materials for wisdom to work with, and wisdom cannot be restricted to any principles.

Sufism, in the meaning of the word, is wisdom; wisdom is a knowledge acquired from both within and without. Sufism is not only an intuitive knowledge, nor is it only knowledge acquired from life in the world outside. Sufism in itself is no religion, nor even a cult as a distinct

or definite doctrine. No better explanation of Sufism can be given than by saying that any person who has a knowledge of life outside and within is a Sufi. Therefore there has not been, in any period of the world’s history, a founder, or an exponent, of Sufism; yet Sufism has existed all the time.

One of the words to which the term ‘Sufi’ is related is the Greek Sophia, meaning wisdom; wisdom which is a knowledge acquired both from within and without. Therefore Sufism is not only an intuitive knowledge nor is it only a knowledge acquired from the outer life of the world. Sufism in itself is not a religion nor even a cult with a distinct or definite doctrine. No better explanation of Sufism can be given than by saying that any person who has a knowledge of both outer and inner life is a Sufi. Thus there has never in any period of the world’s history been a founder of Sufism, yet Sufism has existed at all times.

Another word which has a connotation with Sufism is the Arabic word Saf which means pure. All the tragedy in life comes from the absence of purity, and as pure really means to be natural, the absence of purity means to be far from being natural. Pure water means that no other substance is mixed with it, in other words that it is in its natural condition. Sufism, therefore, is the process of making life natural. One may call this process a religion, a philosophy, a science, or a mysticism, whatever one wishes. All the religious teachers who have come to this world at different times have brought this process of purification in the form of a religion. It is not a new process, it is the same ancient process that the wise of all ages have bestowed. If anything new is given in it, it is the form in which it is presented to suit a certain period of the world.

There is one principle mission of Sufism, that is, to dig the ground under which the light of the soul becomes buried. The same is the teaching of Christ, who has said, that no one shall cover his light under a bushel, also. “Raise your light on high.”

Many Sufi saints have attained what is known as God consciousness, which is the most all-inclusive realization of the meaning of the word ‘good’ attainable by man. Strictly speaking, Sufism is neither

a religion nor a philosophy; it is neither theism nor atheism, but stands between the two and fills the gap. Among the religious, Sufis are considered to be free-thinkers; while among intellectual philosophers they are considered religious, because they make use of subtler principles in life to elevate the soul than can readily be followed by material logic.

Sufism is not a religion, for it is beyond the limitations of faiths and beliefs which make the diversity of religions in the world. Sufism, in short, is a change of outlook on life. It is like viewing from an aeroplane a town, the streets of which one has known and walked through, and yet one has never before seen the whole town at a glance.

In a few words Sufism means to know one's true being, to know the purpose of one's life and to know how to accomplish that purpose.

The principal teaching of Sufism is that of learning to become a pupil, for it is the pupil who has a chance of becoming a teacher, and once a person considers that he is a teacher, his responsiveness is gone. The greatest teachers of the world have been the greatest pupils. It is this principle which is represented by the crescent: the crescent in the heart signifies that the heart which is responsive to the light of God is illuminated.

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The practices of Sufism first develop the heart qualities which are often overlooked by other mystics. It is the purification of the heart which makes it fitted for the illumination from the soul.

The principal teaching of Sufism is that the heart of man is the shrine of God, and one can recognize God in one's own heart, feel His existence, presence, virtue, goodness, and all manner of beauty. It must be remembered that the whole of life around us is a life of falsehood. The more you see and experience, the more you see how very false it is and how much disillusionment there is. The only way of getting over it is to light the lamp in the darkness of night, and all will be cleared. The secret of life is this, to produce beauty in ourselves. When beauty is produced in the heart, then all that breaks the heart vanishes, and the whole universe becomes one single vision of the sublimity of God.

Sufism is not a religion nor a philosophy, it is neither deism nor atheism, nor is it a moral, nor a special kind of mysticism, being free from the usual religious sectarianism. If ever it could be called a religion, it would only be as a religion of love, harmony, and beauty. If it be called a philosophy it is beyond that because a Sufi, through the study of metaphysics, escapes the selfishness produced by philosophy and kindles the fire of devotion with one's eyes open to reason and logic. The Sufi prays to Allah every moment in one's life, invoking God's Name and realizing at the same time that the self is no other than God. For to a Sufi God is not a personal being but a mighty healer to awaken the soul from its delusion of earthly individuality, and a guide to lead it to self-realization, the only aim in life.

Let people call it what they will; Sufism being the essence of all religion, it matters little what faith people profess, provided they understand rightly.

The Sufi sees both the creator and the creation both in man. The limited part of man's being is the creation, and the innermost part of his being is the creator. And if that is true, then man is limited and man is unlimited both. If he wished to be limited he can be more and more limited. If he wished to be unlimited he can be more and more unlimited. If he cultivated in himself the illusion of being a creation he can be more and more that; but if he

cultivated in himself the knowledge of the creator he can be more and more that.

The soul with divine manner is sober compared with the drunken person of the world. This soberness produces in one that purity called Sufism; through that purity God reflects in his or her mirror-like soul.

The idea of Sufism is to bring humanity, nations, and religions, now so far apart, into harmony and unity by awakening the thought of unity in souls. It is a message not to one community or race only, but to the whole humanity; not a call to join any particular church or religion, but a call to join in the human brotherhood.

The object of Sufism is the uniting of life and religion, which so far seem to have been kept apart. When a man goes to church once a week, and devotes all the other days of the week to his business, how can he benefit by religion? Therefore the teaching of Sufism is to transform everyday life into a religion, so that every action may bear some spiritual fruit.

If anybody asks you, "What is Sufism? What religion is it?" you may answer, "Sufism is the religion of the heart, the religion in which one thing is most important, and that is to seek God in the heart of mankind."

Sufism, therefore, is the analyzing of the self, the self which has for the moment become a mixture of three things, of body, mind, and soul. By separating the outer garments of the soul the Sufi discovers the real nature and character of the soul, and in this discovery lies the secret of the whole life.

Beliefs and disbeliefs are the cause of sects, each of these being blinded from the vision of the singleness of the whole of existence. As soon as thought is restricted, it ceases to be Sufism.

What is Sufism? It is wisdom. To learn wisdom at every step on the path of life is the only work of the Sufi.