



ALL ABOUT
SUFISM REORIENTED





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I.

The Purpose of This Booklet

MORE and more people are becoming interested in various spiritual paths. Some of these spiritual orientations are new to the western world. Sufism Reoriented, a small spiritual school, has been called one of these "new religions." Actually, the Sufi path is neither new nor is it a religion in the traditional sense.

The general public seems to have become both more interested and more suspicious of non-traditional religious groups. As a result, this booklet was prepared as a general introduction to this Sufi order, its history, beliefs and practices. In addition, the booklet includes discussions of other issues an inquirer might be likely to ask about.

II.

What Is Sufism?

THE spiritual message now called *Sufism* has existed throughout recorded history. Sufism is not a religion; it is the essence of all religions, the true and inner aspect of all spiritual orientations.

The Meaning of Sufism

Individuals who pursue the path of Sufism are called *Sufis*. The word *Sufi* has been used to describe these persons for almost fourteen hundred years. In Greek and Persian, the word means *wisdom*. In Arabic, the word seems to be derived from *safa* (pure, clear, unadulterated), and perhaps from *soof* (wool), associated with the robes worn by Muslim Sufis.

Many historians think that Sufism is only an offshoot of the Muslim faith. In reality, there were Sufi schools (brotherhoods, orders, groups) throughout the times of Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna and Buddha. There is evidence that Abraham, the father of great religions, was initiated into a Sufi order. It is thought that the *Essenes*, a mystical group of Hebrews before the time of Jesus, are best described as

Sufis. Sufis consider John the Baptist as a great Sufi teacher, and many Christian groups have preserved basic Sufi teachings. Thus Sufism is not a religion—it is the unifying essence that is at the heart of all the great religions of the world.

A Short Sufi History

Most of the spiritual groups now called Sufis trace their roots to the Middle East, including Northern Africa, Persia (Iran) and India. Whenever a world messenger appears, a fresh wave of illumination and spiritual energy is released. As Jesus gave new impetus to the Sufi message of his time, so did Muhammad (explaining the apparently stronger influence on the Sufi tradition by Islam).

This resurgence of the Sufi ideal gave birth to a rich spiritual, philosophical and poetic outpouring. Sufi teachers and writers of the Middle Ages are now being rediscovered and given credit for their influence on western thought. Their profound spiritual teachings are just beginning to be appreciated. Probably still unfamiliar to most readers, the names of Hafiz, Jalal-ud-din Rumi, Ibn Al-Arabi, Kabir and others stand as beacons of light in a dark period of civilization. Many people of the western world may be more acquainted with two other Sufi writers—Omar Khayyam (often misunderstood because of his symbolic meanings)

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and Kahlil Gibran (one of the first major Sufi writers using English as an original language).

Despite its widespread influence, Sufism has never tried to be a dominant organizational force. It is described as being "mystical" (or "inner") in its orientation, as contrasted with the "outer" side of religion that includes ritual, ceremony and arbitrary dogma. To describe the Sufis as mystical merely means that they are oriented toward the inner Truth and believe that it is possible to experience God directly, ultimately through personal experience. Jesus enjoined his followers, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Sufis work with all their might toward this ideal.

Historically, most Sufi groups have gone underground, a controversial threat to the intolerant established religions. Partially because it was the object of serious discrimination, Sufism became a "mystery" school, veiled both in literary works and in the methods of spiritual teaching. The secrecy of Sufi groups was often a political necessity. In addition, the inner teachings could be given profitably only to the few who were prepared and spiritually committed. Everything considered, it is no surprise that such an important spiritual path should have remained virtually unknown except to those mystically inclined. Recently the western world has become more interested in the Sufi tradition, partially because of its teachings about the nature of consciousness,

and partially because it is one of the few mystical traditions that is practical for life in western society, and promotes happiness.

The Development of Sufi Schools

The true tradition of Sufism is the message of love and harmony among peoples and the reality of spiritual truth in a merciful and attainable God. As a general message of love, harmony and spirituality, the Sufi ideal can help inspire individuals of all religions to appreciate the hope and beauty in the pursuit of the Truth. This is the broader contribution of Sufi thought.

However, there have always been a few persons whose spiritual longing was particularly intense, who could not be satisfied with ordinary religious teachings or teachers. For them, special spiritual instruction has always been available, although it is not always easy to find. As a result, committed spiritual seekers have sought out schools, brotherhoods, and teachers capable of transmitting inner lessons for spiritual growth. Such groups have ranged from authentic yogis in India, to Kabbalistic groups in Judaism, to the intense experience provided by St. Francis for his disciples.

As in any other tradition, there have been many strains of Sufi schools and thousands of individual Sufi orders throughout history. Although some of the groups included the monasticism and self-deprivation that many people

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associate with spiritual orders, Sufi brotherhoods most often stressed living as an ordinary person in the prevailing society.

All true Sufi schools are organized around a central teacher, called the *Murshid*. Without an enlightened or illuminated *Murshid*, a Sufi school is, at best, an inspirational environment to develop spiritual longing; at worst, a hollow shell of words and practices that lead the aspirant nowhere. Thus, Sufi schools crop up and die out with the arrival and departure of teachers wise in knowledge, selfless in motive and overflowing with love. As a result, an authentic Sufi school may remain for a few years or centuries, depending upon the level of spiritual guidance available to it.

This booklet focuses on one particular Sufi order—*Sufism Reoriented*—a Sufi school which is both universal and unique. The Order shares with the Sufi tradition the essential spiritual orientation of love for God and service to humanity, in harmony with the true teachings of any and all religions. Unfortunately, most religions tend to put the stamp of exclusive ownership upon their saviours, prophets and mystics, unwittingly separating themselves from other faiths and diluting the very words of their holy men who have always preached love and brotherhood. On the other hand, the Sufis are taught to love and revere all great saviours and prophets, seeing the One in the many and hearing God speak through them all. As one of its founders (Hazrat Inayat Khan)

observed, "The true religion, to the Sufi, is the sea of Truth, and all different faiths are as its waves."

Although it shares this universal perspective, Sufism Reoriented is also unique in the Sufi world in its structure and role, its association with the universal spiritual Master Meher Baba, and its particular way of teaching practical mysticism.

III.

The History of Sufism Reoriented

THE particular spiritual beliefs of Sufism Reoriented are discussed later in this booklet. At this point, it might be most helpful to describe the origin of this Sufi Order and to show how its connection with Meher Baba has influenced its development.

An Early History

The Sufi Message was brought to the western world by Hazrat Inayat Khan of Baroda, India, in 1910. Much has been written about this great mystic, philosopher, poet and musician. He was sent by his master to establish the Sufi work in the western world. He traveled extensively in America and all over Europe, restating the inner wisdom in terms of the religious philosophy of love, harmony and beauty. The work and interest in Sufism expanded until his passing in 1927.

Ada Martin of San Francisco was Hazrat Inayat Khan's first American disciple. He renamed her *Rabia* after the famous Rabia of

Basra, and in July 1912 gave her the title and status of *Murshida* (the feminine of *Murshid*). Her life was dedicated to the Sufi cause.

Before she passed away in 1947 she appointed Mrs. Ivy Oneita Duce, to whom she had already given the title of *Murshida*, to carry on the work of her school. Murshida Duce had already lived a unique external and inner life. Born in 1895, she had been an operatic singer, student of law, businesswoman-explorer in South America, and New York magazine editor. After marrying an internationally respected geologist and business executive, she undertook deep study of spiritual mysticism even while living a whirlwind existence in Washington and foreign capitals.

One of the duties of a Sufi *Murshid* is to bring his *mureeds* to a Perfect Master when they are ready. She had heard that Meher Baba of India was a Perfect Master and, in fact, was the *Qutub-e-Irshad*—head of the spiritual hierarchy in the world which is above and beyond any particular religious affiliation. Murshida Duce determined to meet him.

About Meher Baba

Meher Baba ("Compassionate Father") lived as a universal spiritual Master of highest rank, unshackled by dogma, ritual or attachment to any particular religion. His physical activities extended throughout India and around the world spanning an extraordinary life between

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his "unveiling" in 1914 and his passing in 1969. His life reflected a remarkable mix of divine and human perfection. His well-documented history (see References) is a powerful example of compassionate love, tireless service, unlimited wisdom, delightful humor and brilliant innovation.

Meher Baba was a constant communicator, even though he kept physical silence for forty-four years. Transcribed from hand signs and gestures, his insights (such as found in the *Discourses* and *God Speaks*) are among the most comprehensive reviews of spiritual dynamics ever produced, and these books are often used as textbooks by many colleges and universities. Unless one understands the nature of a true Master, Meher Baba's life seems miraculous—at least, mind-boggling. But he never asked his followers (he called them "lovers") to do anything that he had not done already. He showed disciples all over the world how the most mystical of inner journeys is best pursued in the context of ordinary life.

Meher Baba revealed himself to be the universal Avatar (Christ, Messiah, God-Man) of this spiritual age. His followers consider him that same God-Man who was previously Muhammad, Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Rama and Zoroaster. Accordingly, Meher Baba's approach to spiritual development transcends differences between various factions of spiritual philosophy. He was born into a Zoroastrian

family, attended Christian schools, had both Hindu and Muslim masters and has disciples from almost every faith, race and social background.

Members of Sufism Reoriented accept Meher Baba as that universal God-Man, and believe that to follow his inspiration and guidance is to follow the essence of every authentic spiritual path and every real spiritual teacher. As Baba said, "I have come to sow the seed of Love in your hearts so that, in spite of all the superficial diversity which your life in illusion must endure, the feeling of Oneness through love is brought about amongst all nations, creeds, sects and castes of the world."

Meher Baba and the Sufis

In 1948, Murshida Duce went to India to see Meher Baba and was immediately convinced that he was the head of the spiritual hierarchy. She would have preferred merely to become his disciple, but he instructed her to return to the U.S.A. to carry on the Sufi work and confirmed her authority as *Murshida*.

Murshida Duce continued nurturing the Order under Meher Baba's direct guidance. In 1952, Baba wrote a new charter for the Sufi group, making it even more universal. It was entitled "Chartered Guidance from Meher Baba for the Reorientation of Sufism as the Highway to the Ultimate Universalized." In his new instructions, Baba removed some

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spiritual practices and certain aspects of the Sufi tradition that were no longer necessary. Thus, under the direction of its second founder, Meher Baba, the Order became known as *Sufism Reoriented*, and has remained dedicated to the guidance of Meher Baba.

As far as is known, Sufism Reoriented is the only spiritual brotherhood under the charge of Meher Baba, although Baba said that he was willing to re-orient all authentic "isms" that lead to one God. Thus, the Order has a dual role—as a classic Sufi school and as a group that makes Meher Baba's message known to the general public.

IV.

Sufism Reoriented: The Organization

MANY people are curious about the external functioning of spiritual organizations. This section anticipates several questions and issues of probable interest to the general public.

Meher Baba suggested that the re-oriented Order be established as a non-profit corporation governed by democratic election. The membership elects a President, officers and eleven Directors, all of whom serve three-year terms. They handle the business matters entailed in providing a building for meetings, arranging for teaching material, the publication of books and the operation of a day care center and elementary school.

The formal, secular aspect of the organization is separate from the spiritual teaching and counseling function, which is headed by the *Murshida*. The *Murshida* has trained and appointed ten "preceptors," who can give more individualized attention to students. Actually, the formal organization could be dissolved and the spiritual structure would remain.

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Is Sufism a Cult?

There has been increasing concern over the role of so-called religious "cults" that have surfaced recently in the United States. Many citizens and parents have sensed the danger to the personal freedom and independence of idealistic young people who might get ensnared in pseudo-spiritual activity.

Of course, the Sufis respect legitimate rights to religious freedom. However, it is important to distinguish between the Sufi Order and the practices of questionable cults with unsavory characteristics. It might be helpful to summarize the most critical differences:

- The Sufis employ no period of intense indoctrination for potential members. There are no marathon weekends at secluded retreats; no protein-poor diets and sleepless nights; no bombardment with propaganda or scripture. The formal introduction for potential members is one class per week of an hour and a half for thirteen weeks. For initiated members, there is no attempt by the Order to control students' minds from the outside. Indeed, control of *one's own mind* is a Sufi objective.

- Sufism tries to increase personal freedom, not subjugate its students. The Order does not take away material possessions from members. It requires no dues or financial contributions. Students are expected to take care of themselves and their families by working in the world, according to their own talents and potential.

- Neither the *Murshida* nor the "preceptors" (other teachers) of Sufism receive financial reward for their spiritual work. The Order does not carry on any profit-making activity, nor does it allow any student to solicit funds from the public or sell materials on behalf of the Order. The school seeks not to expand its material holdings; the teaching would continue even if the Order had no physical structure.

- Sufis have no interest in proselytizing and have remained a relatively small group. It is expected that this Sufi school is suited to only a few individuals and that they will be inspired to seek out its guidance without publicity or general recruitment.

- Sufis do not believe that their way is the only way. There is no fanatic dogma that excludes the legitimacy of other authentic paths. Non-Sufis are not regarded as satanic or evil. Reason and rationality are given their place; Sufis are encouraged to question concepts they do not understand. There is no pretense that Sufism holds a monopoly on spiritual advancement.

- The great respect and obedience offered to the Sufi *Murshida* occurs by choice. Members are not encouraged to join the Order unless they are convinced that the teacher is more evolved than they and can help guide them closer to God. In such a situation, it is always better to take advice from one wiser, whether or not one can see the reason behind the advice. However, the Sufi is instructed ultimately to

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obey his or her conscience, whatever the teacher counsels.

- The Order is joined only by free will and any member may leave at any time, with no pressure brought to bear. Sufism Reoriented does not threaten punishment for its members for disagreeing, disobeying, or leaving the Order.

- The Order emphasizes love and harmony with parents, spouses and children. Students are expected to make personal sacrifices to improve fractured relationships with their families. Sufi parents are urged to take personal responsibility for the upbringing of their children and the development of their character.

Those familiar with religious cults will notice that cults are often characterized by qualities other than those described above. This Sufi school is not to be confused with spiritually distorted groups. The essence of Sufism is harmony and oneness, a far cry from the tragically superficial practices of some sects and their "gurus."

Requirements for Membership

As stated above, there is no particular recruitment for new members. Individuals first become eligible for membership only after they have acquired, on their own, conviction of the identity of Meher Baba. New members are al-

ready followers of Meher Baba but are seeking more help in translating their convictions into spiritual reality for their daily lives.

Typically, potential members are drawn by their intuition about the *Murshida* or by qualities they admire in other members of the Order. If, upon investigation, they like what they see, they pursue the matter further. If their interest appears sincere, they are admitted into a free candidates' class which meets once a week for an hour and a half during the autumn of each year.

Readings are suggested to supplement candidates' background. They are also informed that initiation into the Order is conditional on being free from the non-medical use of drugs for two years and that they are expected not to engage in premarital or extramarital sexual relationships. The candidates' class is designed to explain the nature of the school, its principles, values and the commitment required. If candidates are still interested after the class concludes, they are interviewed by a preceptor. If the preceptor is satisfied with the candidates' sincerity and is convinced that the candidates' lives are sufficiently stable to make such a commitment, they are recommended to the *Murshida*. The *Murshida* makes the final decision on all candidates since she would become ultimately responsible for their spiritual and personal welfare.

On acceptance by the *Murshida*, a simple initiation takes place, when the new Sufi vows to

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aspire toward the goals of the Order and to develop trust in the guidance of Meher Baba and the *Murshida*. The new member is called a *mureed* (a student or aspiring disciple). Simultaneously, the *mureed* becomes a full voting member of the secular side of the organization.

By 1977, there were almost 300 members, most in the San Francisco Bay area or the Washington D.C. area, representing a wide variety of personal backgrounds. There are Sufis who are Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Black, Arab, Caucasian, female, manual laborers, artists, professionals, teenagers, those over 80, married, single, divorced, etc. But whatever their backgrounds, *mureeds* are all spiritual seekers and are treated with equal respect.

About Money

Tragically, several of the new religious movements seem to prize dollars more than God. They appear to suggest that consciousness can be purchased by material wealth, that poverty is proper for members but wealth is appropriate for the central organization and its leaders or "gurus."

In contrast, this Sufi school teaches that God cannot be bought for all the money in the world and that spiritual teaching should "cost" effort and sincerity, never dollars. The Sufi charter expressly forbids the charging of dues or mandatory donations. The school has no interest in

the private economic affairs of its members. Neither the *Murshida* nor her preceptors receive a salary for their spiritual work.

How then does the Sufi Center maintain financial support for its physical center and other activities? Monetary support comes through voluntary contributions, primarily by members. Selfless service is a key concept in the Sufi school and all members are offered the opportunity to serve others by contributing to the Order. Voluntary cash contributions are accepted as long as they are given with love. The *Murshida* will not accept donations given for selfish motives. There is no attempt to discover who contributes and who does not. Indeed, the *Murshida* has directed that she should not be informed about the names of member-contributors.

Members who wish to contribute to the Sufi work also volunteer their time in service and labor. Contributed labor rarely exceeds 10 hours per week and is not allowed to interfere with vocational, educational, or family responsibilities. Ultimately, the type or amount of contribution is a matter of members' consciences.

As explained below, the Order publishes and distributes books about Meher Baba and Sufism. Modest additional income is generated by the sale of such books, but profits are always turned back into new publishing projects. Also, tuition is accepted to help support the work of the White Pony Elementary School and Day Care Center.

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The Sufis do not solicit outside funds. The Order neither asks nor requires members to seek materials or conduct businesses that might accrue profits for the Order. In the event that voluntary contributions might decrease, the Order would simply reduce its external activities. Although material resources are used to assist aspects of the Sufi work, the essence of the Order is entirely independent of money or property. Students are taught to be attached neither to wealth nor to poverty and to do the best they can, as selflessly as possible, with the resources available to them.

Ultimately, the physical Sufi Center itself and all related service activities could be disbanded and the teachings would remain unaffected. As long as members could meet freely and communicate with their *Murshida* and preceptors, nothing essential would be lost. The wealth on the Sufi path is love, not material possessions.

V.

What Do Sufis Believe?

THE spiritual beliefs and values of Sufism Reoriented are a blend of historical Sufi teachings and their enrichment by the revelations of Meher Baba. Although volumes have been written about Sufi perspectives, the summary below highlights this Order's orientation toward God, the nature of man, and the Sufi path of love for God.

About God and the Universe

The Sufi order teaches the following about the nature of God:

God is infinite existence. God is everywhere and in everything. In His personal aspect, He is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-merciful. The primary energy of God is love. What we call the universe is only an aspect of God's consciousness. Everyone is in fact one with God, although very few experience this oneness.

The creation of the universe and the evolution of consciousness within it has one major purpose—that God, masquerading in limited forms, might experience fully His infinite consciousness. Thus, the deepest motive and in-

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instinct of every living thing is to grow in awareness of its oneness with God, that someday every soul can enjoy this oneness in infinite wisdom and bliss.

Sufi beliefs about God and the universe are essentially the same as the mystical metaphysics of all inner spiritual traditions. Meher Baba has explained even more fully the way the soul comes to realize God:

All souls are like drops in the ocean; they are one with the ocean but consider themselves separate. All souls evolve from the most limited forms of matter through inorganic and organic life forms, constantly evolving more consciousness. Finally souls take on human forms. Still ignorant about their real nature as God, individual souls "reincarnate" time and time again, accumulating more experience and wisdom until consciousness has become clear enough that the conscious longing for God surfaces. Through many more human lifetimes, the spiritual aspirant begins an "involution" of consciousness and becomes more and more aware of his real self. As the soul reaches higher and more pure awareness (or planes of consciousness), he/she is likely to be considered a holy person or a saint.

Ultimately, with the help of a soul who has already reached perfection, the individual reaches the goal of conscious enjoyment of oneness with God. Some souls choose to become re-involved with the illusion of ordinary life to help those still trapped in limitation. These souls are called Perfect Masters. One Perfect

Being, the Avatar (Christ, Messiah) is God Himself, manifesting every seven hundred to fourteen hundred years to give a special spiritual push to all of Creation.

About Humanity

The Sufis believe that all people are struggling to get closer to God, whether they know it or not. Also that:

None can truly be happy until they realize their true identity. Basically, everyone is good; essentially, everyone is God. However, the limitations in different souls' experiences cause unspiritual thoughts and actions. The life experiences of the soul are controlled by the law of *karma* (or cause and effect), which insures that every relevant spiritual lesson will be learned, even if suffering is necessary to learn it.

The maturing of consciousness and wisdom can be speeded up by conscious spiritual effort. This is the real purpose of religion and spiritual practice. Certain paths are best for seekers at different periods of their spiritual journey. There is no single correct path or way, although some paths can be more effective than others. The Sufis say, "There are as many ways to God as there are souls of men."

About the Sufi Path

As practiced by Sufism Reoriented, the Sufi path is a blend of the path of love and the path

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of knowledge, bound up in selfless service and made possible by the guidance of the teacher.

In 1915, Murshida Martin wrote, "For many centuries the Sufis have had a sacred science and system of development, which extends the vision and faculties to planes which are not perceivable by the five senses. Love, Prayer, Meditation, Introspection and Concentration lift the veil of the senses and develop the tender and finer emotions of the heart, and are a key to Self-Realization. The mission of all prophets and leaders on the message of wisdom and truth, has been carried out to bring man from the outer forms of worship to the inner Light and Truth.

"Arguments, discussions, premises and conclusions, cannot bring man to the highest perfection; only the heart full of Love in God, purified from all corruptions, separated from mental and physical images, and gathered into a perfect stillness, is the means of uniting with Him."

More than fifty years later, Murshida Duce wrote, "Sufism Reoriented provides a system of inner training for those who wish to go beyond the form side of religion and arrive at the real heart of spiritual life. We have to not only intellectually know but *realize* that one current running through everything and every creature in existence. We have to learn how to achieve harmony with each other, with God, and within ourselves. We have to cease compartmentalizing our lives, and to translate our

spiritual knowledge into everyday life . . . Sufistic training teaches that detachment by which one can "leave all" even in the midst of a pressured active mundane life, for Sufis regard the world as their school wherein they have to learn how to live a divine life."

Compared with other authentic strains of mysticism across the world, the Sufi path ultimately emphasizes the heart (love) more than the head (knowledge), but seeks to integrate them both in a practical life of harmony, discrimination and inner stability. The Order believes that spiritual growth is the most important attainment possible, and, although Sufis are encouraged to be cheerful about their life experiences, the path is considered an extremely serious matter. Members are not admitted for social reasons; Sufism Reoriented is not a social organization even though there are several social get-togethers in the course of the year. The Sufis believe that all phases of life, whether vocational, interpersonal or social, are improved as a matter of course once spiritual priorities have been set.

VI.

The Sufi Method

ASSUMING that a potential member of Sufism Reoriented aspires toward spiritual growth, how does the Order assist this development?

Sufis realize that the ultimate attainment of God-realization is a long and difficult struggle, probably not to be had in this present lifetime. However, with diligent effort and faultless guidance, it is possible to make considerable strides toward the goal, creating, at least, a matchless inner peace and personal stability.

Spiritual Instruction

Sufism Reoriented uses spiritual techniques and practices that develop those qualities which help members express love, harmony and spiritually oriented sound judgment in their daily lives. In the Sufi tradition, the essential foundation of this practice is the relationship between Sufi teacher and the disciple. As explained later, this relationship of love, trust and obedience gives the potency to all the spiritual activities of the Sufi.

Formal Instruction. The formal teaching of spiritual concepts is done in two ways—reading and oral instruction. Students read the works of Meher Baba, enlightened Sufi writers of the past, and other material by or about great saints of all spiritual traditions. Perhaps the more important learning is accomplished through oral lessons.

All members attend meetings of an hour and a half on two different evenings each week. (These meetings are offered in Walnut Creek, California and Washington, D.C. Some Sufis live elsewhere, but members are not initiated unless it is anticipated that they will be living in one of these areas near the teacher.) One meeting is a general one for all Sufis and includes spiritual lessons by the *Murshida* or preceptors, films of Meher Baba, talks by members about great saints, or other presentations of spiritual and practical relevance. A second meeting in small groups is led by a preceptor.

Practices. In reorienting Sufism, Meher Baba reduced the mandatory spiritual practices to a total of one hour per day. These practices contribute to the inner stabilization of the aspirant, produce a kind of spiritual energy applicable to daily life, and help to associate consciousness with the highest inspiration and spiritual priorities.

The members of Sufism Reoriented do not engage in practices such as "dervish dancing" or asceticism or other practices sometimes associated with Sufism. Nor are there exercises

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designed to produce psychic experiences or occult powers. Although the existence of psychic phenomena and occult talents are well-documented, the Sufis believe that their acquisition is more often spiritually dangerous than helpful. Besides the possibility of damage to the vehicles of consciousness, success in acquiring such abilities often leads to an egoism and pride that obstructs spiritual progress.

Spiritual Counseling. All members have access to Sufi preceptors for spiritual and personal counseling. Most of the issues discussed center around the integration of spiritual principles into daily life, including work, personal relationships and life style. Discussions with preceptors do not preclude more formal psychological counseling or medical referral, but are designed to give the student a sympathetic sounding board and relevant advice.

The Role of the Murshida

There is no more important aspect of the Sufi method than the role of the *Murshida*. The *Murshida* sets into motion the spiritual energy of all instruction and practice, and is the spiritual director of all inner and external activities of the Order. For those aspiring to the final destination of the spiritual path, the *Murshida* is as essential as is a guide for a safari group completely lost deep in an African jungle. No matter how well equipped the group, no matter how efficiently they are organized,

only the guide knows how to get home with the least danger.

The *Murshida* does spiritual work in many ways. She creates conditions for Sufi study that will be most beneficial to students. She also gives spiritual instruction through lessons and spiritual insights, orally transmitted at meetings. Further, she trains and supervises the preceptors, making herself available for consultation on any difficulties with students. When necessary, the *Murshida* gives personal interviews to members.

Perhaps more significant is the *Murshida's* teaching through personal example. The *Murshida* represents the kind of attainment sought by every *mureed*, making it possible for students to learn directly from the way she perceives situations, makes judgments and acts in the world. To the extent that students can see personally an example of the highest type of spiritual expression interacting with all the problems of the world, they have a way of knowing precisely in what ways they might change and develop. In the best of Sufi Orders, the *Murshid* or *Murshida* becomes the seat of inspiration, the wise teacher and the compassionate friend.

Love, Trust and Obedience. On the Sufi path, it is rather silly to be half-hearted about trust in the teacher. The ultimate power of any mystical method is the competence and wisdom of the teacher. Of course, God as the ultimate teacher is always within and available for guid-

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ance. But the experienced spiritual aspirant knows the possibility of self-delusion and has always welcomed the help of advanced living teachers.

The best progress on the Sufi path is obtained with the highest kind of love and trust for the *Murshid*. This trust sustains the disciples through the predictable trials and crises in their spiritual journey. The love helps the student to want to please the teacher; and what pleases the teacher is the spiritual progress of the student.

Obedience to the *Murshid* is equally critical for the most rapid spiritual progress. In Sufism Reoriented, obedience is really the same as sensitivity to the wisdom of one's guide. The *Murshida* and her preceptors are, in fact, reluctant to tell students what to do in any particular situation. Ideally, they might remind students of spiritual principles and thus stimulate the wisest personal decisions. It is the goal of the Sufi teacher to increase the inner wisdom and spiritual decisiveness of the *mureed*, not to hand-feed instructions about every facet of life.

Naturally, there are times when the *Murshida* must intervene to protect the *mureed* from making spiritual mistakes; advice given is taken extremely seriously. Students who go against the hints (or the rare direct order) of the *Murshida* merely find that she was absolutely correct about the situation. After all, Sufi students select a guide not to challenge or doubt but to lead them to freedom. On this Sufi

path, faith in the *Murshida* is not "blind," even when students are baffled about the advice they receive; the wisdom of obeying the teacher has been demonstrated time and again, both rationally and intuitively.

VII.

The Sufi Ideal: Spirituality in the World

ULTIMATELY, the Sufi method cannot be separated from its application to daily life. Attempts at loving and wise thought, speech and action are both a result of Sufi training and a technique of spiritual learning. Even in the best of secluded spiritual orders, it is almost impossible to expose the disciple to a sufficiently wide range of challenging situations. It is quite possible to have ecstatic meditations and insights in a cave and yet become completely unraveled when returning to the pressures of civilization. Sufis do not believe that the world is necessarily an impediment to spiritual growth, but that it may be among the best laboratories for learning.

Selfless Service

As expounded by the present *Murshida*, selfless service to others is a powerful adjunct of the Sufi teaching. Selfless service is applied love, and love is the guiding light of the Sufi path. Service to others without selfish motives

helps to reduce the "ego," that prideful artificial self which consistently obstructs spiritual advancement.

Sufis are encouraged to help others in need according to their ability, to show kindness, generosity and consideration. Sufis try to be cheerful and tolerant, control, work out and/or sublimate their hostilities and generally produce a positive influence on others. Compassion for all living things helps students to realize the omnipresence of God. Students are encouraged to inject harmony in conflict, to "give in" on small things without compromising their spiritual principles. Obviously, such a life does not come easily; students consistently fail and then try again. But hopefully, the priority of service and love becomes more and more ingrained as time goes on and is more likely to be manifested in action.

The Development of Character

Sufism Reoriented attempts to bring about the development of the highest moral and ethical qualities in the character of the student. One hundred percent honesty, patience, forbearance, integrity, kindness, love of one's fellowman, fighting unnecessary worry—all these are qualities of great importance on the path to the Sufi aspirant. In a way, they all sound old-fashioned. But Sufis do not try to develop such qualities merely for pious reasons or because of later rewards after death. Students

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learn that the application of these so-called virtues results in the greatest happiness and satisfaction.

The development of character also leads to inner strength. Sufis on the path must be able to rely on themselves and create the kind of inner stability that enables them to follow their principles no matter what the situation. Because of this growing faith in themselves and their spiritual orientation, it has been observed that Sufis are less shaken by personal disasters than most, so that in crisis situations they become a source of strength to others who have not been so trained. As Hazrat Inayat Khan put it: "Life is a continual battle. Man struggles with things that are outside him, and so he gives a chance to the foes who exist in his own being. Therefore the first thing necessary in life is to make peace for the time being with the outside world, in order to prepare for the war which is to be fought within oneself. Once peace is made within, one will gain by that sufficient strength and power to be used throughout the struggle of life within and without."

Living in Contemporary Society

Over the years, the Order has developed general guidelines for different facets of life in society. The following paragraphs highlight some of the Sufi attitudes.

Personal Health. Because unnecessary disease disrupts personal harmony and de-

tracts from one's ability to pursue responsibilities, good health—without becoming enslaved to physical welfare—is a Sufi objective. Good preventive practices are encouraged—rest, good nutrition, exercise, and rhythm in life style. When in physical distress, Sufis take advantage of any treatment modality appropriate to the condition, including medical, chiropractic and psychological care. The Order's membership includes health care professionals of these and other therapeutic techniques.

Unlike several esoteric groups, the Sufis emphasize no unusual dietary regimens. Regarding diet, Meher Baba once said, "It is more important what comes out of your mouth than what goes into it." Some Sufis are vegetarians, although most are not. Adequate protein and vitamin intake are encouraged, and Sufis try not to overeat or undereat.

Underlined by Meher Baba's statements in the mid-1960s, Sufis do not indulge in the non-medical use of psychoactive drugs, including marijuana. Drug use is one of the most profound blocks to spiritual judgment, will power, emotional stability and thus spiritual progress. Some Sufis drink small amounts of alcoholic beverages, but if drinking becomes habitual, heavy or an escape, Sufi preceptors will point out that drunkenness or dependence on intoxicants is contradictory to the spiritual goals of the Order. Indeed, the only intoxication respected by the Sufis is the intoxication of love for God.

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Work and Education. Sufis are expected to be productive members of their society and to take their place with their fellowman in the work of the world. Members are encouraged to get as much advanced education or training as necessary to develop talents and skills to their full potential. Sufis are encouraged to succeed at their vocation consistent with spiritual principles, and look at their work as an opportunity for service. At the same time, they learn to become detached from the ordinary threats and stresses in vocational situations. All work done with the proper attitude—whether menial or professional—is looked upon as having equal value in the sight of the *Murshida*.

Relationships. In the context of love and harmony, the Order asks its students to work toward good relationships with their parents, even if the relationship has previously been poor, and to have love and respect for them.

Regarding relationships between men and women, Sufis seek natural friendships and try not to get caught up in the over-romanticized and sensual orientation dominant in society today. Sufism regards sexual relationships as being spiritual roadblocks to real selflessness unless sex occurs in a loving and committed situation. Thus, Sufi sexual relationships are encouraged only in marriage.

Marriage is seen as a great opportunity for spiritual learning and every effort is made to inspire married Sufi students to make their family situation one of harmony and self-

sacrifice, allowing deep love to develop. However, when absolutely necessary, divorce is permitted. Many Sufis are married to other Sufis because, understandably, marriage is happiest when both spouses are undergoing the same type of inner development, especially when the spiritual commitment is the highest priority. For that reason, the Order takes special care before accepting members whose spouses are not enthusiastic about the school. Marriages are not arranged. However, single persons are expected to consult with the *Murshida* before marrying; this pre-marital consultation is often extremely helpful.

The *Murshida* and preceptors realize that there is a trend for social relationships to become "inbred" in small spiritual organizations; this tendency is considered undesirable and Sufis are expected to widen their circle of acquaintances so that they can be as comfortable among non-members as among members. Sufis are not encouraged to be aggressive about their beliefs among other people. They do not discuss them nor do they impose them on others, believing that the one God looks after all. Unless people ask about Sufism, the subject is never mentioned.

Child-Rearing Practices. Children of Sufis are not automatically Sufis. There is no attempt to indoctrinate them with Sufi beliefs, although parents are encouraged to surround them with sufficient love and spiritual example so that the children have a good personal and

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moral foundation. There are "Sunday-school" classes available to children one evening per week, but these are not compulsory. Some Sufi children attend a Sufi-sponsored elementary school and day care center.

VIII.

Community Service Activities

SUFISM REORIENTED sponsors several types of activities that are designed to help the general public and other spiritual seekers. All of these activities have the additional function of providing resources for members or allowing them to be involved in service for others.

Publishing

Sufism Reoriented is a major publisher of books by and about Meher Baba, including the *Discourses*, *God Speaks*, *How a Master Works*, *Life at Its Best*, *Glimpses of the God-Man* and others. Via mail, it distributes these books and a variety of publications about Meher Baba, Sufism and other spiritual topics. Recently, the Sufis have begun publishing and distributing a series of children's books, stories with wholesome and spiritual themes. A complete booklist is available by writing the Sufi Center. Sufism also operates a bookstore at its main Center in Walnut Creek for those wishing to browse or purchase materials.

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Dramatic and Musical Productions

Utilizing the considerable talents of the membership, the Sufis occasionally present ambitious theater productions for the general public. Most noteworthy has been a yearly dramatic series portraying aspects of Meher Baba's life through dialogue and song. It is not unusual for over one hundred of the members to be involved in these plays as actors, musicians or support staff. A limited number of other musical recitals or concerts are offered to the general community by Sufi members. In the past, a few musical records and tapes have been produced for limited circulation.

Libraries

The Order has a collection of some 3,000 books in a well-catalogued library, primarily used by members. Also housed at the Sufi Center is an extensive collection of films of Meher Baba and of tapes of talks given by the *Murshida* on selected topics. Many of these films and tapes are being preserved carefully so that future generations will have access to them. Some of the sound tapes are part of another Sufi service—a revolving mail-order library that duplicates and loans tapes to Meher Baba groups around the world.

School and Day Care Center

Reflecting the importance given to the proper development of children, the Order re-

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cently began full operation of the White Pony Elementary School and Day Care Center. It is open to the general public as well as to Sufi children. It serves the needs of working mothers who appreciate having reliable and loving day care available. The Order has several experienced and qualified teachers who are combining some of the Montessori and Rudolph Steiner methods in the elementary curriculum. An interesting feature of the school is its integration with respect not only to race and creed but also in the admission of retarded children. Teachers are also prepared to handle hyperactive children without the use of drugs.

IX.

For Further Information

HOPEFULLY, this booklet has introduced the reader to the history, beliefs, practices and attitudes of the spiritual Order called Sufism Reoriented. Persons interested in learning more or with special questions are invited to write to Sufism Reoriented, Inc., at 1300 Boulevard Way, Walnut Creek, California 94595. For those living near or passing through the San Francisco Bay area, a personal visit can be arranged with advance notice.

References

A complete booklist is available from the Center or from the bookstore at the address above. However, the reader might be interested in a few basic books that go into more detail about Sufism and Meher Baba.

About Sufism Reoriented

How a Master Works, by Murshida Ivy O. Duce (Sufism Reoriented: Walnut Creek, California, 1975; distributed by Dodd, Mead & Co.) Hardcover. This book will become a central

teaching book for many spiritual seekers; in autobiographical style, it is an extraordinarily rich resource.

Sufism, edited by Murshida Ivy O. Duce (Sufism Reoriented: San Francisco 1971) Softcover. This 58 page booklet is a collection of relevant articles on the nature of Sufism, its relationship with Meher Baba, and the Sufi path, all written by members of Sufism Reoriented.

The Mastery of Consciousness, edited by Allan Y. Cohen (Harper & Row Colophon Books: New York, 1977) Softcover. See Chapter 15, pages 158-160 for a discussion of Sufism Reoriented as a Meher Baba group.

About Sufism in General

Hazrat Inayat Khan. Any of his several volumes.

Sufism, by N.S. Fatemi et al, (A.S. Barnes & Co.: Cranbury, New Jersey, 1976) Hardcover. An excellent introduction to the development of Sufism and to some of its major figures.

What Am I Doing Here, by Murshida Ivy O. Duce (Harper & Row: New York, 1972) Softcover. A readable introduction to the metaphysical principles underlying Sufism and the philosophy of Meher Baba.

By and About Meher Baba

Much Silence, by Tom and Dorothy Hopkinson (Dodd, Mead & Co.: 1975) Hardcover.

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Perhaps the best introductory biography of Meher Baba yet to appear.

Discourses, by Meher Baba. 6th ed., 3 volumes (Sufism Reoriented: Walnut Creek, 1967) Softcover. The one most comprehensive source of Meher Baba's explanation of the spiritual path and the techniques of practical mysticism.

Listen, Humanity, by Meher Baba (Harper & Row: New York, 1971) Softcover. A collection of important discourses by Baba on a variety of significant subjects.



