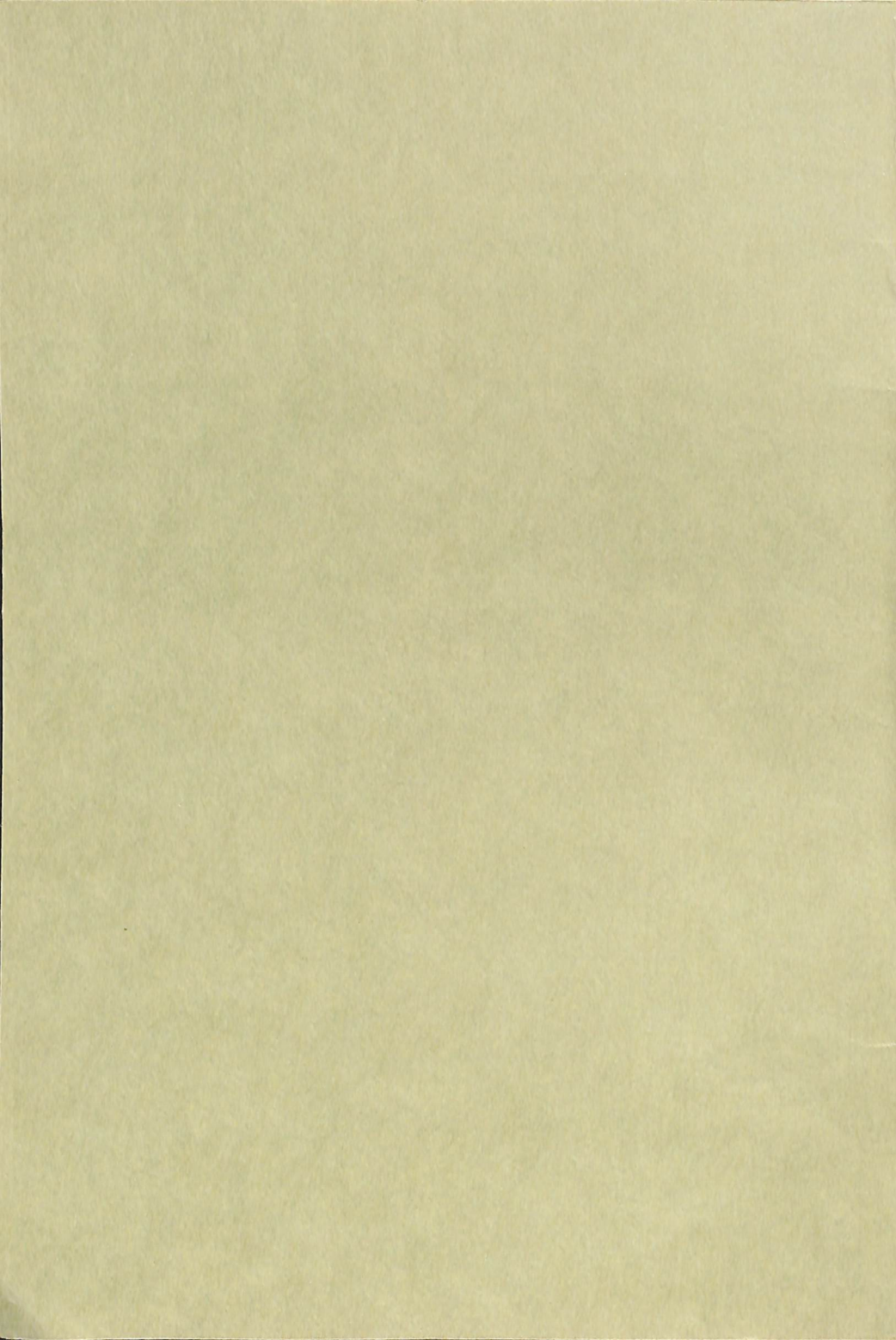




MEHER BABA  
and  
SUFISM  
a personal view

Richard W. Watson





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This talk has three parts: some general comments about Sufism, a brief history of Sufism Reoriented, and an account of my own coming to be connected with Meher Baba and Sufism.

Talking about Sufism is very tricky because there are a lot of misconceptions and distortions of what Sufism is about both within and without the Meher Baba community. In talking about Sufism, there is always the danger that I will add further to these misconceptions. But then again, there is also the possibility that I might be able to give some remarks that would clarify a few points. Therefore, I have decided to take the gamble and to go ahead and talk on the relationship of Meher Baba to the Sufis.

Sufism is a very large elephant and I am a blind man, and I am only going to be able to convey to you that piece of the elephant that I have experienced. Or another way to look at it is this: if I hold up an apple to you, depending upon your position with respect to the apple, the light from your position, whether or not you have had a good night's rest, and many other factors, you will form a particular impression of this apple. But now if I give you the apple, you can feel it, you can take a bite out of it, and then you will have a much deeper conception of what this "concept of the apple" is all about. And not only will you have a deeper concept of what the apple is all about, but you will get nourishment as well. If you then eat the apple down to its core, you will find seeds, and these seeds can be planted and they will grow and form new trees and create more apples. In this talk I am really going to be holding up an apple to you: an apple which I cannot give to you so that you can take a bite out of it. I myself have only taken a very, very small bite out of this apple, and I have hardly reached the core. So, I hope you will keep this idea in mind as we talk. Sufism is a very large subject.

This morning at the Kitchen I was chatting with Bruce Hoffman and he gave me a definition of Sufism that I thought would be worthwhile to start with. Although this definition is rather amusing, it also contains a certain amount of truth. His definition goes as follows: "A Sufi is someone who, as a part of his training, has been taught to cross the street at the crosswalk on a green light." As I go on with the talk, that definition may make more sense.

The word "Sufism" has many meanings, but its prime meaning is that of Wisdom. We cannot trace anything in traditions or histories about its beginning or its founder. In fact, one can say that the first soul to complete the evolution and involution of consciousness was the first Sufi, the Avatar. In fact, Meher Baba, when he visited the Sufi Center in San Francisco, said that he was "The Sufi," although he was also very clear to point out that he was in and beyond all "isms." All teachers of wisdom have been and are Sufis, and those whose outlook on life is illuminated by wisdom and the search for wisdom are Sufis. If one can give a name to the inner teaching of religion, that teaching which understands the unity of all religions and helps toward the direct realization of this unity, one name could be Sufism. To my mind, a Sufi is one with wisdom, thus most of us are not really Sufis, but are only aspirants toward Sufi-hood. In the old traditions, the Sufis never really called themselves Sufis; they had many other names that they gave themselves. They called themselves the Friends, the Seekers, the Brothers of Purity and other names. They called Sufism, not Sufism, but the Way, the Path and so on. It is only in these later years, the last few centuries during the development of academic scholarship interested in Sufism, that the name Sufi has been extensively used.

In all spiritual teaching traditions, the goal is to decondition the aspirant, to remove his *sanskaras*. One of our heaviest areas of conditioning is in the area of language. Our view of the world is constricted and constrained by limited concepts. We categorize and try to hold infinity in a few thousand concepts. Further, associated with these few concepts we have placed value judgments based on our limited experience with the entities in a set represented by a concept. Thus even our few concepts are very fuzzy and highly variable from person to person. One of the main points that I want to get across is that we will be talking about a tradition labeled Sufism for the convenience of our limited mind, but that this concept of

Sufism is infinite. We are only able to talk about a very small part of it. Similarly, we will be talking about one particular group of Sufis associated with Meher Baba which has the name of Sufism Reoriented. 3

Sufis do not think of themselves as distinct from any other group of seekers. The reason that there is often confusion about Sufism Reoriented and Sufis, I believe, is that those who are mureeds, that is those who have a special relationship to the Murshid (mureed can be thought of as meaning student; Murshid meaning teacher, or one with illumination), still have egos. In fact, some of us have larger egos than others. Similarly those who are not mureeds likewise have egos. The essence of the ego, as Meher Baba says, is to foster a feeling of separateness. The ego will go to great lengths to find distinctions with which to create the feeling of separateness. An obvious line of separateness for the ego of a mureed to seize upon is his mureedship. Similarly, an obvious line of separateness for the egos of those who are not mureeds to seize upon is the fact of their not being mureeds. So one must keep this in mind, when one hears particular stories about Sufis or thinks about these things, or even listens to a Sufi, or someone such as I who is talking about Sufism, because obviously what I am saying comes to you filtered through my ego.

There have been Sufis in all ages and in all times. In past Avataric periods, because of the level of evolution of human consciousness, there has generally been an external teaching for the masses and an inner teaching for smaller numbers. It is only now in the Meher Baba period that the two have been made one. The preservation of this inner teaching has often been highly dangerous in the face of orthodoxy. There is a story of a Sufi Perfect Master who lived in a kingdom in which the child of the King became very ill. All the doctors of Islam could not cure him. One of the King's counselors told him about a dervish who lived down in the town who was reputed to have great powers. The King sent for the dervish and told him to cure his son. The dervish said that he would. They brought the boy to the dervish who said, "In the name of God, arise." Nothing happened, and everyone looked very amazed. The tension in the room built up. Then the dervish looked at the boy and said, "In my name, arise." At this command, the boy got up completely healed. But it so shocked the

orthodoxy of the time that this man claimed to be God, that he was skinned alive. Because of the danger presented to those who were following the inner truth in the face of orthodoxy, groups of seekers originated secret symbol systems in language, art, poetry, dance, music and even in their gardens. They did not arrive at this need for secrecy because they were on some kind of an "ego trip" and enjoyed communicating with each other in code. They did so because it was an absolute practical necessity.

One of the functions of the Avatar, during each manifestation, is to ensure the survival of a clean version of his message in a social form that will help its dissemination. Even though Meher Baba has combined the external and the inner teaching and made it publicly available in books, we are aware that each reads these books with a clarity determined by his own level of evolution and maturity. We tend to de-emphasize areas of Meher Baba's teachings which are in conflict with our own egos or our own *sanskritic* patterns. We are all aware of the distortions of Meher Baba's teachings that exist in our lives and in the verbal explanations of his teachings that we give to others. An obvious example of this distortion is to be found in the people who profess themselves to be followers of Meher Baba but who are still using mind altering drugs, when he has been clear that these drugs are harmful physically, mentally and spiritually.

We are all possessed, to one degree or another, of the vices of lust, greed and anger; each of which distorts our understanding of the message of the Avatar. Therefore, although it seems unlikely at this particular time that those who follow the inner teaching are going to be skinned alive, or thrown to the lions, there is still the possibility of the Avataric teaching being seriously distorted.

The tradition generally recognized under the name Sufism is the result of the reorientation given to various mystical orders by the Prophet Muhammad. As Islam spread through military conquests and otherwise, Sufis followed in its path, moving into Europe, India and China. In each of these places, instead of bringing Islam with them, the Sufis adopted, as was their way, the spiritual traditions and social systems already existing there. They re-interpreted them and revitalized them in the light of the true inner teaching and according to the needs of the particular locality. The Sufis used music, poetry, stories and dance as vehicles for the message. Three Sufi Perfect Masters are well known to fol-



lowers of Meher Baba because of his love for their poetry, these Masters being Hafiz, Rumi and Kabir. It is important to realize that Sufism is not an intellectual study, but is highly devotional; it is a path of *bhakti*, and the goal of the Sufis has always been union with the Beloved, union with God.

The goal of the Sufis and the path of the Sufis has been to harmonize with, and to help in those ways open to them, the societies of which they are a part. To live in the world, but not be of it is the *sadhana* of the Sufis. The world is recognized by the Sufi as a giant mechanism for the grinding away of his ego; and to live in the world is welcomed by the Sufi. There is nothing like marriage, going to work every day, interacting with other egos, to help whittle away one's own. The Sufis have been kings, schoolteachers, weavers of rugs, workers in metal, scientists, beggars, soldiers, gardeners, and just any other role that one could find in society. The monastic life has usually been discouraged, although the need for a place of retreat and renewal has been recognized. The Sufi recognizes that he is one with all humanity, and because of this he must serve it and be a part of it. I would like to read a little poem by Kabir which emphasizes this point:

"He is dear to me indeed who can call back the  
wanderer to his home.

In the home is true union, in the home is enjoyment of life.

Why should I forsake my home and wander in the forest.

If Brahma helps me to realize truth, verily I will  
find both bondage and deliverance in the home.

He is dear to me indeed who has power to dive  
deep into Brahma,

Whose mind loses itself with ease in his contemplation.

He is dear to me who knows Brahma and can dwell  
in His supreme truth in meditation, and who  
can play the melody of the infinite by uniting  
love and renunciation in life."

Kabir says:

"The home is the abiding place. In the home is reality. The home helps to attain Him who is real.

So stay where you are and all things shall come to you in time."

It is because of this importance within the Sufi tradition of living in the world that Murshida Duce strongly encourages her mureeds to return to school and to take up regular jobs. This has been a hard pill for many to swallow, but the beneficial results are very plain to see.

The Sufi tradition has always recognized and participated in the spiritual hierarchy. Three of Meher Baba's masters, Babajan, Tajuddin Baba and probably Sai Baba, came out of the Sufi tradition. Because the Sufis have been aware of the many stages of the Path, the Sufi feels the need for a guide to help him to avoid the pitfalls, dangers, and perils on the journey to the goal. Meher Baba has told much about the various points of enchantment of the Path; the very tricky crossing of the fourth plane and other dangerous points during the involution of consciousness. There are also many tricky points to be met while living within the world and allowing it to help grind away one's ego, without getting caught in the world and allowing the world to build up one's ego instead.

The job of the teacher or Murshid is to lead the mureed to the Perfect Master, and the Sufi group without a Perfect Master is a mere shell. The light of the teacher is very helpful to the mureed as he lives his life in the world. The Murshid can point out blind spots in the mureed's development because of the Murshid's objectivity. Often the presence of the Murshid is all that is necessary to help clear the mureed's *sanskaras* enough for the mureed to see for himself what must be done to solve a particular problem. The Murshid works very hard to get the mureed to develop his own inner intuition. A group of mureeds and a Murshid is often called a "school" in Sufi terminology. Each "school" often has a specific social function to perform in its particular environment and point of time.

The above ideas are just a few of the major concepts of Sufism. To review, we have seen that Sufism is a path of *bhakti* or devotion, that Sufis in all ages and all times have recognized and worked with the Avatar, that the Sufis feel strongly the need for a close relationship with a living master, and that living an ordinary outer life is part of the Sufi path.

What I would like to do now after this brief introduction to Sufism, is to talk some about the history of Sufism Reoriented, which is the

Sufi order associated with Meher Baba and to describe how this order became associated with Meher Baba and reoriented by him.

7

Sufism Reoriented is descended from the Sufi Order begun by Hazrat Inayat Khan in 1911. I have with me *The Confessions of Inayat Khan* which is a brief biographical sketch of Hazrat Inayat Khan and I would like to read a few excerpts from it because Inayat Khan was a beautiful man both spiritually and physically. It is said that Meher Baba claimed that Inayat Khan was a great saint. In describing his birth, Inayat Khan says the following:

“I was born in Baroda, India, in the year 1882, when a great religious reform began, not alone in India itself, but all the world over and which was the first source of our present day awakening. I am sure that it was the planetary influence which existed at the time which has kept me busied all my life to seek the Divine Truth which is the garment of God’s glory.

Music and mysticism were my heritage from both my paternal and maternal ancestors, among whom were numbered Maulabakhsh, whom people called the Beethoven of India and whose portrait is in the Victoria and Albert Museum at South Kensington, and Jumma Shah, the great seer of Punjab. I have ever felt much embarrassed when I was compared with these masters, and this humility brought the old saying to my mind, ‘Have pride in thine own merits, rather than in those of thy ancestors.’ ”

Inayat Khan came from a line of something on the order of fourteen generations of mystics and saints and some five generations of very great musicians. As he grew up, he was very much attracted to religious thought, and to mystical philosophy. He had these words to say:

“I first studied comparative religions with an open mind, not in a critical spirit, but as an admirer and lover of Truth in all its guises. I read the lives of the founders, prophets, and seers with as much reverence as their most devout adherents.

This brought upon me a bliss of realization of the truth which all religions contained, as different vessels may yet hold the same wine. It is the conception of truth in all its wonderful forms and expressions, ever borne by different messengers, who most wondrously by their very diversity of garb, civilization, nationality and age revealed the one Source of this inspiration. To me the sole difference was caused by the laws of space and time."

Inayat Khan studied philosophy, religion and had many questions to ask as he continued on his search. He spent his time touring India and playing his Indian instrument, the vina. He has this to say about his music:

"As sound is the highest source of manifestation, it is mysterious within itself and whosoever has the knowledge of sound, he indeed knows the secret of the universe. My music is my thought and my thought is my emotion; the deeper I dive into the ocean of feeling, the more beautiful are the pearls I bring forth in the form of melodies. Thus, my music creates feeling within me even before others feel it. My music is my religion; therefore, worldly success can never be a proper place for it, and my sole object in music is to achieve perfection."

He ran into a group of dervishes one day who were out in the countryside. He became fascinated by them and eventually found a Sufi master and was initiated into the Sufi order. He then went through a long period of training, of which I will not read you any descriptions. Hazrat Inayat Khan does have a very interesting description of some *madzubs* which I would like to read to you because of Meher Baba's great work with the *masts* and *madzubs*:

"Their thoughts, words and actions were truly found to be those of God Almighty. The word is scarcely spoken before the action is accomplished. Each atom of this universe seems to be awaiting their command.

I once saw a *madzub* in Calcutta, standing in

the street and gesticulating as though he were directing all the traffic. The passersby laughed at his insanity. But for all his weird looks, he had most brilliant eyes, shooting forth strong magnetic vibrations which attracted me so much that I wondered if he was a *madzub* in the guise of a lunatic; this dissimulation is often practiced by them in order to escape contact with the world and all life's cares. If they did not adopt this method, it would be harder for them to study the natural hallucinations of humanity. As Saadi says: 'Every man on earth has a craze peculiar to himself.' The truth of this was shown to me by the way the *madzub* laughed at seeing the people in the street hustling and bustling along as if their small affairs were the only important affairs in the universe. I sent the *madzub* word, and asked him if he would care to come and honor me by his presence, but he sacrificed my request to the call of the children who suddenly came running and took him away to play with them. I understood that he preferred the society of children, the angels on earth, to associations with grown-up sinners, who know nothing but the ego and its ulterior satisfactions. I waited patiently after this until I next saw him, and sent a message begging him to give my music a hearing. After he came, and when he entered the room I rose from my seat to do him honor, and saluted him with both hands. His only answer was that he did not require this homage, as he received the same under different attributes and aspects from the whole universe.

In order to be quite sure of his *madzubi*at, I asked him whether he was a thief. He smilingly replied, "Yes," which conveyed to me that all the good and bad attributes, as well as all names and forms, were considered by him to be his own, and that he was thus raised beyond good and evil as above the praise and blame of the world. Then he

sat down and began to discourse and act in such a manner that all in the room should consider him insane. But I told him in a whisper that I knew him well, that he could not fool me, and I requested him to favor us with his inspiring words and blessings. He then began to speak of the journey he had made on the spiritual path, describing each plane as a fort he had to destroy with guns and cannons, until he arrived at the home of his father and embraced his true spiritual Lord. And he went on to tell how at last the Father was also dead and he would inherit his kingdom in the end. It was all related in such quaint language, that none of those present save myself could understand him, and even I only did so with great mental effort. A *madzub* attains perfection through innocence, and from childhood learns of the true inner bliss of which we are deprived by our most deluding knowledge of the outer world. Yet it is not the path for all to follow; but we can derive the truth of existence from it and lead a balanced life as the *salik* does among the Sufis."

Hazrat Inayat Khan continued his studies and then as his Master passed away, his Master gave him this charge:

"Fare forth into the world, my child, and harmonize East and the West with the harmony of thy music. Spread the wisdom of Sufism abroad, for to this end art thou gifted by Allah, the Most Merciful and Compassionate."

So Inayat Khan then came to America and gave the following very humorous description:

"Naturally it was a great change in my existence to leave India, the most spiritually awakened land, and start for the West, and especially for America, that modern home of material progress. It was the very opposite of the dream I had just passed through. The great activity of the people and the rapidity of things in general, the

rush of machinery above, below and all around, the transitoriness of affairs; men running hither and thither for trains and cars with newspapers and parcels in their hands, all this kept me under a complete spell of silence and bewilderment.

It was as if I had gone to sleep at home and had found myself in the bazaar on awakening. But, being a Sufi, I very soon became accustomed to this change of life by attuning myself to my surroundings, and I found that they were indeed true lovers of "dunia," the material world, about which Rumi has written in his *Masnavi*. 'Every race and nation has its infancy, youth and age, has also its birth and its death. And just like every individual, it even undergoes the evolution one passes through during the different stages of life. For from the philosophical point of view, all the sons of the world are as little children, and their most important affairs are no more important than a child's top.' As a new nation, America appears naturally childish owing to its youth, although its material progress is proportionately as great as the spiritual progress of India. But America is a land of promise; in time it will arise to be an ideal child among the children of God and a leader of reform."

The above quotes give you a little feeling for Inayat Khan's writing, some of his thoughts, and his mission. When he arrived in the United States he went around the country, played his beloved vina, an Indian instrument, attracted followers to himself and set up little Sufi groups in the major cities of the United States.

One of Hazrat Inayat Khan's mureeds was a woman whom he later renamed Rabia. Rabia Martin heard about Inayat Khan and went to one of his concerts in San Francisco. During the concert, their eyes met and she knew that this man was somebody with whom she had to get in contact. After the performance she went rushing back to the dressing room, but Inayat Khan had gone and she felt very disappointed. Later, when she heard that he was giving a concert in a few days in Seattle, she did not want to take a chance on missing

him again and rushed up to Seattle. She was waiting for him at the end of the concert. When they got together, Inayat Khan looked at her and said: "I knew you would come!" He initiated Rabia Martin into the Sufi Order. Rabia Martin spent much time with Inayat Khan under his direct instruction. In fact, in some of her memoirs she tells the following interesting story:

She was staying on the East Coast studying with Inayat Khan. Every evening at 7:30 she had private instructions from him. She looked forward to these instructions very much. They were the highlight of her day. One evening when she came in and sat down to have instruction, there had been a very big ice storm and the gas pipes froze so the lights went out. She was very disappointed and said to Inayat Khan, "Well, I guess we can't have our lesson. I just can't see anything. I can't see to take notes, or to think or...." Inayat Khan immediately said, "No, we'll go on with our lesson." And then he sat quietly and concentrated and suddenly a great light came out of his forehead and illuminated the entire room, and they went on with their lesson. At the end of the lesson, Inayat Khan withdrew the light.

When Hazrat Inayat Khan dropped his body in 1927, he passed his charge to Rabia Martin. The Sufi Movement at that time encompassed both American and European mureeds. There was the feeling among some of the European followers that Inayat Khan had not meant Rabia to head up the entire Sufi movement, but just the part in the West, in America, and so there was a schism in the Order at a meeting in Europe to which Rabia had gone to take up her Murshidship. Rabia Martin returned to the United States to San Francisco, and set up the Sufi headquarters. Every fall she would take a tour of the country, visiting the Sufi centers in the various cities in the United States.

Rabia Martin dropped her body in 1947, but beforehand, in 1942, she heard a lecture on Meher Baba by Princess Norina Matchabelli, and got hold of all the books of Meher Baba's writings and the biographical information on Meher Baba that she could obtain. Also Rabia Martin had long conversations with Princess Matchabelli who had recently returned, due to World War II, from India with Elizabeth Patterson after several years' stay with Meher Baba at his ashrams. She became convinced that Meher Baba was in all probability what he claimed to be, a Perfect Master. She was pre-



paring to make contact with Meher Baba when she dropped her body. Before she died she passed her charge to Ivy O. Duce.

Murshida Duce, who is now over 75, has led a very full life and seen much of this world. She was with the American Red Cross in France during the first world war; she was a very fine operatic soprano; she studied law and worked for an international bank, traveling extensively on business by donkey and other means throughout Colombia and other South American countries before her marriage. She married an oil executive who also had to travel extensively throughout the world and she traveled with him. But Murshida's life was primarily oriented toward the spiritual quest and she had been involved in spiritual and philosophical studies for many years before she became a Sufi under Rabia Martin in the early forties.

When she was given the very heavy responsibility of murshidaship, she did not feel that she was quite prepared to handle it, and knew and felt that if Sufism was to continue in America she must find the *Qutub-i-Irshad*. The *Qutub-i-Irshad* is the Sufi term for that Perfect Master who is the head of the spiritual hierarchy; it means the hub of the wheel, the center around which everything moves. Murshida Martin had, of course, told her about her feeling that Meher Baba was this particular person. Murshida Duce, with her daughter, set off for India to determine as well as she could if, in fact, Meher Baba was the *Qutub-i-Irshad*. Murshida Duce, on meeting Meher Baba, knew immediately who he was, but she also forgot her purpose which was to come to Meher Baba to have Meher Baba perform the function of guidance for the Sufis. Murshida, on meeting Meher Baba, wanted to stay in India with him. Meher Baba told her that she had much work to do and must return to the United States and lay the foundations for a Sufi Order which was to last for the next 700 years. He told her that as long as she was honest, selfless and loving, he would help her. Murshida Duce returned to San Francisco and took up her charge as Murshida of the Sufi Order, having been confirmed in this office by Meher Baba.

There followed a period of many years when there were only a small number of Sufis, but these Sufis were working very closely with Meher Baba; many of them having personal contact with Meher Baba, some of them fairly frequently. The Sufis saw Meher Baba as much as possible whenever he came to the United States in the fifties.

In 1952 when Meher Baba visited the United States, he reoriented the work of the Sufi Order. He changed its spiritual practices, modified its curriculum and gave the Order a charter which was to be the model for charters of other orders to follow. The order was incorporated under the laws of California for legal and tax purposes as Sufism Reoriented. Meher Baba gave the Sufis responsibility for publishing some of his books. He gave his blessing on the publishing works of two Sufis, Don Stevens and Francis Brabazon.

While the main purpose of the order is to help its mureeds toward the goal of God realization, it also serves the function of providing training for souls who may in some future age or time be teachers and guides. When one becomes a Sufi, one makes a vow of honesty and trust and faith in the Murshid. As you know, Meher Baba and all the Perfect Masters emphasize again and again that the only way to reach the goal is perfect obedience to the Perfect Master, to become dust at the Master's feet, to have implicit obedience, to surrender one's ego entirely to the Master. This obedience and trust in the Master is very difficult. It is very easy to think about it in terms of some abstract master off in some distant place, but to have it happen to one on a close basis with a living master is not easy. Part of the discipline and work of the Sufis is to learn and practice this obedience.

Because of the nature of the very delicate web of trust which must be built between the mureed and the Murshid, the Sufis teach in closed classes. The reason for these closed classes is not to be found in some secret nature of the material studied. The written material studied by mureeds is for the most part publicly available. There is nothing secret going on, but it is because of this very delicate relationship, this web of trust which is being woven between the mureed, the Murshid and the other Sufi preceptors, that a closed environment is required for this training.

The goal is not to produce mystic experience or mystical powers. As we all know, these are just mere illusion. Instead, the goal is to develop moral character and a loving heart. The aim is to develop discrimination so that one can see from many points of view in order to handle the problems of our daily life in the world in ways which will help us toward our goal of God-Realization.

Reaching the goal does not happen overnight, and most of the mureeds have been in the Order less than five years. Although each

of us can see the positive effect of the training in our lives, we certainly have a very long way to go. The order is very deeply devoted to Meher Baba; we also love and respect our Murshida deeply.

The job of the Murshida, as I see it, is to keep pointing to Meher Baba. The Murshida is certainly not an intermediary between the mureeds and Meher Baba, but is one very useful source of help in our evolutionary journey. There are, of course, many other sources of help, such as Meher Baba's books, the Meher Spiritual Center, and our deeply felt connection with all other lovers of Meher Baba and seekers everywhere. Meher Baba has strongly emphasized that it is not necessary to be a Sufi to come to him, but that Sufism is one of the many highways to God which should be available for those who feel deeply in their hearts that this is the right path. There are many other paths up the mountain and each person must find the one which suits his own *sanskritic* make-up.

Meher Baba, in his own humorous way entitled the Sufi Charter: "Chartered guidance from Meher Baba for the Reorientation of Sufism as the Highway to the Ultimate Universalized." Later in the charter, however, he states that he is concerned with five principal highways to God: Sufism, Vedantism, Christian Mysticism, Dasaterian Zoroastrianism and Broad Buddhism.

In the area of Sufism, Meher Baba said that his aim was to "enlarge the scope of Sufism, to make it all-embracing in its knowledge and practice, while maintaining its original values of purity in striving for God Realization." He outlined the course of study to include God and His attributes, the lives and writings of past Saints and Masters, and, of course, his own basic writings. Besides working on their own inner development, the major public work of the Sufis to date has been the publication of some of Meher Baba's books.

The Sufis recognize that now is the time of preparation for when the present Avataric period ends, and therefore Murshida Duce is working very hard to preserve Meher Baba documents and films for future generations of his followers. The Sufis have also been very active in anti-drug work in the Bay Area with some having a more active national role. The Sufis have organized Meher Baba groups on a number of the Bay Area college campuses, and when these groups

become established, generally withdraw, as Murshida Duce feels that these groups should be primarily run by and for non-Sufis. Sufism Reoriented hopefully will always be ready to help with Meher Baba work at other centers whenever its limited resources make this possible.

That concludes a very brief outline of the history of Sufism Reoriented, and I hope it gives you a feeling for some of its purposes and functions. What I would like to do now is talk about my own personal coming to Meher Baba and the Sufis as a way of shedding a little more light, from a personal view, on the connection between Meher Baba and the Sufis. Also as I look back on the story, it has a number of humorous aspects. The story may also have some relevance for others going through similar inner struggles.

As I look back, I see that my first little spiritual awakenings occurred when I was 15 and a counselor-in-training at a camp in northern Minnesota. The first job I had at this camp was to work in the Infirmary. The husband of the nurse was a Baptist minister and was studying to be a missionary. I became very much involved with a love for Jesus.

On returning from camp at the end of the summer I still stayed very much involved in this type of religion, although I was not completely happy with it. I began to see that maybe there was more tolerance required.

When I went to college I felt that I would learn what the purpose of life was and I looked forward to some great bull sessions, drinking beer, eating pretzels and talking all night solving the mysteries of the universe. But I found that my fellow students were primarily interested in watching T. V., playing bridge, and going to movies and maybe playing a little pool. All of which I also enjoyed. There was compulsory chapel where I attended college, and this turned me into, if not an atheist, at least an agnostic. I thought that maybe I would be interested in majoring in philosophy or at least making philosophy a minor. These ideas were important until I took my first philosophy course, and it became clear that the philosophers I was reading, particularly those in the University, did not seem to have a grasp on truth. Then I tried psychology, reading and auditing a few courses. I found that the psychologists were not too clear on what was the purpose of human existence. In the meantime, I did something practical and became an electrical engineer, so that I could at

least earn a living.

After spending a year in Hawaii teaching high school, I got married and we went on a tour around the world for our honeymoon. Some of the high points of that tour were visiting Benares, Jerusalem and Athens. Jerusalem was particularly interesting to me, because while I thought of myself as a very firm agnostic or atheist, when I came to the church which was built on the spot claimed to be the place where Jesus was crucified, I found myself on my knees kissing this particular spot and being overwhelmed with a strong blissful emotion. It shook me up quite a bit to feel such strong emotions there. When I returned to California to begin my graduate work, I became more actively involved in the quest, and did many of the usual things that one does at such a time, such as get involved with training in sensory awareness and Zen meditation. I did much reading of authors such as Hermann Hesse, Jung and Alan Watts, but none of these writers seemed to have the answer that I was looking for, although they were very interesting and helpful at the time.

Also at this time I became more politically aware. After completing my doctorate, I continued to make some sort of progress. One day in early 1965, an announcement was posted that a couple of professors from Harvard were going to give a lecture on something that had to do with LSD and God. Their names were Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert. I went to listen to them talk and was very fascinated by what they had to say, although their experiments seemed somewhat frightening. Nothing much happened for many months until a friend of mine brought over some marijuana and we all turned on. It was an interesting experience. At this point I became enthusiastic about the potential of the psychedelic drug scene and began to think that maybe I wanted to drop out, and that drugs were the sacrament and the answer and so on. A few months later when a friend gave me some LSD I tried it three times and had what seemed at the time to be strong religious experiences. It certainly confirmed for me that there was something to be sought beyond my everyday experience. I began to read vociferously to try to make sense out of these experiences, but did not have much success. An announcement came during this period that Richard Alpert was going to give a series of talks at the Free University in Berkeley. He seemed from his descriptions to be going through many of the same phases that I

was going through, although he had been going through them many years longer. The important point about the whole lecture series was that I had been reading a lot and I had gotten to the point where I felt that I had read all the relevant books to read, and still had not found the answer. I guess I kept thinking, unconsciously, that I would find some great book and reading it would give me God Realization.

Alpert, at the end of one of his lectures, said that the only person he had read who had really made sense out of his experiences, was a man by the name of Meher Baba in a book called *God Speaks*. Naturally, I went running down to the bookstore to get the book and they did not have it. They had a book of Meher Baba's called *Listen, Humanity*. I brought the book home and did not read the front half. I just read the second half which contained a number of Meher Baba's discourses. Every word I read seemed to make my mind sizzle. The book had the feel of truth, but it also had a lot of ideas strange to me. This man seemed to claim to be someone called an Avatar, the return of Jesus Christ, Krishna, Rama, Buddha, Muhammed and he was discoursing about concepts such as reincarnation. I just was not in a position to be able to accept it all. Not only that, he was against the use of psychedelic drugs, which I thought at that point were probably a real answer for humanity. Therefore, I put the book on the bookshelf and tried to forget Meher Baba. I really wanted to put him out of my head completely. But every day when I came home, there was the book in the bookcase, sending out I'm not sure what, but it was sort of vibrating there, as strange as this may sound. I was drawn to it every day but I did not pick it up. It would bring Meher Baba into my mind and I would get into conflict over questions, such as: is he the Avatar, what is he saying, is this material about reincarnation true? I half wanted to believe it; it would be comforting to think that we did not disappear after we dropped our bodies, but I could not honestly make the leap and reconcile my Western background with such ideas. Meher Baba's views on psychedelic drugs were also counter to my views on their possible value.

After this had gone on for several days, I just could not stand having that book around and ran down to the bookstore and sold it. I felt quite relieved. I thought I had really finished with Meher Baba

and there would be no more problem with him, and I could continue on with what I was doing, reading other books and occasionally smoking a little grass. But the question of who was Meher Baba kept popping into my mind; but since I could not accept the concept of reincarnation, I could not get serious about answering that question.

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Several months went by in which I read a lot of books and learned about many occult ideas. One day my wife called me up at work and said that there was going to be a lecture by a man named Hugh Lynn Cayce about drugs and clairvoyance. Being interested at that time in anything on drugs and occult ideas, I went to the lecture. One thing that did strike me, since at that time we were trying to be hip, was that there were primarily very straight people at the meeting and that it started out with a little prayer. It was in a Unitarian Church and a little old lady in tennis shoes gave a very lovely sincere prayer. It struck me at the time, as I looked around the room, that there were all these very straight people involved in what seemed at the time to be very far-out ideas. That certainly did not fit the stereotype that I was forming in my mind about hip and straight.

The central point about this particular incident is that at the end of the lecture, a little old man, almost an archetypical little old man, tapped me on the shoulder and said that I would enjoy going back to the table of Edgar Cayce's books. He took me back to the table and pointed out one particularly that he thought I would enjoy reading, called *There is a River*. This book is the biography of Cayce. I looked at it and it seemed of possible interest. I browsed around these books for about fifteen minutes, and by this time everybody had gone except for the lady and a couple of her friends who were manning the book table. My wife and I started out the door, and from nowhere it seemed, the little old man appeared. He grabbed me by the arm and said, "Come back!" He dragged me over to the table. He put *There is a River* in my hand and said, "Buy this book." This really startled me, and I thought maybe I should as I did not want to hurt his feelings and it only cost about a dollar. I bought the book and went home. It was then around 10:30 or 11:00. I climbed into bed and started reading the book.

After I had gotten through the first part of the book to the part where he had gotten into Cayce's reincarnation experiences, my

mind just started to sizzle. Everything was just making so much sense to me that I kept waking up my wife every twenty minutes, jabbing her in the ribs, saying: "Listen to this, listen to this." I would read her a few pages; she would very tolerantly listen and then go back to sleep. I was just so high from this experience that by the time I had gotten through with the book at about three or four in the morning, I had totally accepted the concept of reincarnation.

This re-opened the whole Meher Baba question. This experience took place in April or May and the whole Meher Baba question became a burning issue. I kept bumping into Meher Baba cards, and occasionally a Meher Baba poster, and so on. I tried to categorize Meher Baba. I had a number of categories: is he crazy, is he really what he says he is, is he a nice guy but deluded, is he deliberately on an ego trip and trying to pull the wool over our eyes, and one or two other catagories. I worked very hard at this process, although I had not learned anything more about Meher Baba except what I had read in *Listen, Humanity*. Meher Baba did not seem to fit into any of the categories and thus I could not get him out of my mind.

I kept reading a lot of other books and then in about November I took a vacation. I was in Big Sur at the time. I had one of those underground newspapers, the *San Francisco Oracle*, and there was an article in it by Timothy Leary. In the article, Leary had mentioned a couple of books that had excited him. One of these was *The Sufis* by Idries Shah and the other was *The Teachers of Gurdjieff*. Somewhere in the past few months I had been quite interested in Gurdjieff, so I was very interested in these books. However, I had never heard of the Sufis before. As soon as I got back home, I ran over to my friendly neighborhood metaphysical bookstore and found these books, bought them and read them. They were very interesting books. *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* particularly intrigued me. In *The Teachers of Gurdjieff*, a fellow leaves his home in France and wanders all over the Middle East searching for the masters of Gurdjieff and they pass him from one to another because he was not ready for serious study. He finally ended up in Afghanistan. The Murshid there said that he would find what he was seeking in a little Sufi group near Paris. This experience of his gave me an idea. Maybe there was a Sufi group near me.

The kind of Sufis I was looking for were the stereotyped kind, a Murshid with a long flowing gown, wild deep eyes, and hair like the mane of a lion, a hawk on his arm and sitting on a beautiful Oriental



rug doing copper work or something. Therefore, I did the only thing I could think of to do. I opened up the San Francisco telephone book and sure enough, there on the page were the words "Sufism Re-oriented." I found out their address and went running over to their center. You can imagine my disappointment when I found out they were a Meher Baba group! They seemed very straight and frankly I was very turned off by the whole experience. They just seemed to be too straight. There was little around their center except Meher Baba books. I remember there was a little pamphlet rack and in it there was a "Reader's Digest" reprint on virginity and the whole place just did not fit into my trying-to-be-hip self-image. I talked with the lady who was running their little bookstore and found out that they did have some introductory classes. But they were primarily about Meher Baba and I thought that at least I ought to be open-minded and learn a little more about this man who was bothering me so much.

Therefore, I signed up for them and had an interview with one of the Sufi preceptors, Lud Dimpfl. I told him that I did not think I wanted to be a Sufi, but that I was interested in finding out a little about Meher Baba and would he mind if I just sat over in a corner of the class.

I came to the first class and I did not know what I expected when I went there. It sort of frightened me to go to this class. I thought that maybe there would be a lot of old ladies. But when I got there, I was surprised to find very nice younger people. Everyone was so loving and warm and wonderful. I had never been in a group with such friendly people. It was an interesting lecture and well given. I learned some more about Meher Baba, but the lecture did not make sense to me in many areas.

In the meantime, one night on the way home from work, I stopped at the bookstore that I went into frequently, and in the rack that I was looking at was a book called *The God-Man*. I thought it would probably be on the life of some Saint. I picked it up, and it was about Meher Baba. I could not seem to get away from this guy. I read a few pages; I thought, well, I'll at least find out a little bit more about this guy. On reading the first few pages, I found Meher Baba being kissed by a little old lady which gave him God Realization, somebody was throwing a stone and hitting him in the forehead, and he was in his house pounding his head on rocks to return to regular

consciousness. Now I knew which category to put him in; he was obviously crazy. I slammed the book shut and put it back on the shelf, and felt a great sense of relief that I had finally categorized Meher Baba and I did not have to worry about him at all. He was crazy! I went home feeling very good.

Well, to my surprise I found myself the next night back in that same bookstore walking over to that little rack where *The God-Man* was located and I picked it up. I read the next few pages. Again Meher Baba was doing very strange things. He was founding some sort of commune called Manzil-e-Meem in Bombay, throwing disciples down stairs, telling them not even to read billboards, getting them up at four in the morning and making them take cold showers. I said to myself, "Yes, he's definitely crazy, and he has somehow duped all those poor people." I shut the book and put it back on the shelf.

The next night I was drawn back to that bookstore again. I just could not seem to stay out of it. I picked up the book and, again, I read the next few pages. Now he was doing even wilder things; he was keeping silence and going to the Hollywood Bowl to break his silence and then not breaking it. I said to myself, "He is certainly crazy." I shut the book and put it back on the shelf. I felt very good again that I had once more confirmed my categorization of Meher Baba and that I was finished with him.

The next night I found myself back in the same bookstore and pulling out *The God-Man*. At this point, I did have the sense to realize that I might as well buy the book and take it home with me. I read the whole book. By the time I had read the book, I decided that maybe he was not crazy, because later in his life he seemed to be doing more sane things. Further, a lot of the things he said made a certain amount of sense.

The next week I went to the next Sufi class. They talked about Meher Baba again, but I had decided from reading *The God-Man* that Meher Baba certainly was not the Avatar. He might not be crazy, but he was probably deluded. I went up to Lud Dimpfl and said, "Thank you very much. Meher Baba is not the Avatar and I certainly do not want to waste anybody's time. Good-bye." I sort of unconsciously hoped he would argue with me, but he did not. He was just very nice and said, "It was nice of you to come."

A few days later my wife called me at work and said that she

had seen a poster that was advertising something called The New University, which was giving a course on Psychedelic Anthropology. I thought, "Saved!" This person will certainly know about Meher Baba because he's using psychedelic drugs. I had come to the point somehow in thinking that anyone who was sincerely using psychedelic drugs had had to come to grips with Meher Baba, and that the lecturer would be able to tell me who Meher Baba was.

I went to the class with my wife and listened to the lecture. It was interesting, but rather academic. Afterwards, I went running up to the lecturer, whose name was Allan Coult, and asked him, "Who is Meher Baba?" He looked at me rather bored and uninterested and said that he was some mystic. I said, "Well, what is your view on Meher Baba's stand on drugs?" He did not know how to answer me, and mumbled something or other. It was very clear that this person had not come to grips with Meher Baba. I decided that this course was not going to be very useful to me.

The question of who was Meher Baba had become a deeply burning issue. Every night and all day long at work, there was this mantrum going on in my head: who is Meher Baba, who is Meher Baba, who is Meher Baba? At this New University I thought I would be away from Meher Baba and that even if Coult did not know the answer, he would give some interesting lectures.

They had another class that was to follow the one on Psychedelic Anthropology. It was to be on Marshall McLuhan, and since it was the first class, we could audit it. You cannot imagine what my internal state was when I saw the person who was going to teach this class. He walked into the room wearing a button with a picture of Meher Baba on it. I was overwhelmed. I just could not seem to get away from Meher Baba.

After the class, I went running up to the lecturer and asked something stupid about how does Marshall McLuhan fit into Meher Baba, or the other way around, I do not remember which. The lecturer turned the question around the other way and it was very unsatisfactory. I could hardly wait until the next class, which was two days later. I spent several hours with him after class. There were only about five or six of us in the class, most of whom stayed to listen. I had many, many questions: why I thought Meher Baba was crazy, all the evidence I had built up I rattled off to him and he fielded each individual point and made me feel that maybe Meher Baba was

sincere and sane. I would then go away and create a whole new batch of questions. At the next lecture the lecturer, Minor Van Arsdale, again spent several hours with me and, again, fielded each question. This sequence went on week after week. I could not say how much time and energy Van Arsdale put into talking with me about Meher Baba.

One day when my wife and I were in the park, I had taken along the copy of *The God-Man* and was going back over it in the light of the conversations I had had with Van Arsdale. I was reading to my wife from "The Highest of the High" discourse and suddenly she looked at me and said, "He's God." This suddenness surprised me and sort of scared me, that she believed Meher Baba's claim. I just was not quite ready at that point to accept him. I did decide, though, that I would form the tentative hypothesis that he was who he said he was, so we went home and threw away our little bag of marijuana. This was a relief as I had felt for some months that I would like to do this.

Then something happened in the next couple of weeks, which I cannot explain. I realized finally who Meher Baba was. He really was the Avatar. It was a long and difficult struggle.

The question then became, what do I do now? Do I give up everything and run to India? At that point in time, I had been thinking about dropping out and it was just a question in my mind of when and where. Should it be in Big Sur or in Mendocino, California, or maybe it should be in New Mexico. Because I had been slightly politically involved, I felt a great deal of antagonism toward the society in which I lived and I wanted out. We were planning a vacation to a commune in New Mexico which we had heard was run by some people interested in Meher Baba. We thought that maybe we would go there and spend a couple of weeks and see if that was where we should be. At this time, our landlord decided to sell the house we were living in. When we went on vacation, we left all our goods in storage. This was very convenient, because it meant that if we were to live in a commune, everything was taken care of. Just at the last moment, I had to go to New York to take care of some budget problem. This was an opportunity to come down to Myrtle Beach. We enjoyed the four days which we spent here very much and felt Meher Baba's presence very strongly.

When we got to the commune, we were surprised to find that

although Van Arsdale was there, the people who were running it, while doing a very nice thing aesthetically, were not really into Meher Baba, at least in the way that we wanted to be. In fact, it was considered to be in somewhat bad taste to talk about Meher Baba very much. This attitude disturbed me, but it was a very nice place, and the people were trying to do something very useful. The hard work during the two weeks of building was a fine experience. But it became clear to me that this, or any place like it, was not where I was going to be spending my life. All the hang-ups and difficulties that I felt existed in the straight world existed here, too. Instead of people worrying about "publish or perish," their positions, titles, salaries, etc., there was attachment of egos to how many nails one could pound a day, how straight one's boards were sawed, how straight one's rows were when hoeing in the garden, and how much you could cook for a meal within the budget you had, and so on. Nothing was ever said explicitly, but it was very clear that there was a strict pecking order based on these types of skills. What was going on there was the same thing that was going on in the straight world except that the costumes were different and the setting was different. Of course, the setting was very beautiful being in New Mexico on the side of a mountain, but still spiritually it was the same. There was not any major advance over what was happening in the rest of society, in my view. It became very clear to me that I had had all this engineering training and that I could probably be more useful living a regular life in the world.

After we returned and found a house and got settled, we decided that we ought to check out the Sufism idea once more. And if that really was not for us, then we would have to find our own way with Meher Baba as well as we could.

The whole Sufism idea made me uneasy, because there was the relationship of obedience to the Murshid. It bothered me very much to think that she might ask me to do something that I did not want to do. The fact that the Sufis seemed so straight when I had been working so hard to put on hip trappings was a block, also. I was not certain at all that I wanted to become a Sufi. But I decided that I would check it out, if for no other reason than to complete the classes I had started before, and find out more about Meher Baba from people who had been with him.

We went to the classes and this time the classes seemed rather elementary to me. I had by now read much about Meher Baba and I had had all this formal education to which my ego was attached. Yet at each class something was happening to me. I came away from each class feeling a little straighter and troubled by issues raised. My head was a little clearer each time. There was a little deeper understanding of Meher Baba. This progression went on with each class. It was about the sixth or seventh class that Murshida Duce came and gave a talk. What she talked about was irrelevant. There was really some unconscious effect taking place in me in her presence. Something happened in being with her such that it became very clear to me that I did want to be a Sufi very badly, so badly that I could not imagine living without being a Sufi. This sudden change surprised me. There was a very intense feeling that this was my spiritual path, that this was what I had been searching for and had to do. There was the possibility that she would not accept me as a student, but this had to be faced. We went through the rest of the classes with each one being more intense. We felt more strongly each week that this really was the path for us. We eventually became initiated as Sufis, or at least we became mureeds, aspirants toward Sufihood. Over two years since initiation have now gone by and it becomes clearer weekly if not daily that we are finally on the path home.





