

Islamic mysticism in the words of Shahid Murtadha Mutahhari

Like every other religion - in fact more than any other religion - Islam has explained the relationships of man with God, with the world, and with himself; and it has also given attention to describing and explaining existence.

The practical teaching of *'irfan* is also called the itinerary of the spiritual path (*sayr wa suluk*; lit. 'traveling and journeying'). Here, the wayfarer (*salik*) who desires to reach the goal of the sublime peak of humanness - that is to say, *tawhid* - is told where to set off, the ordered stages and stations that he must traverse, the states and conditions he will undergo at these stations, and the events that will befall him. Needless to say, all these stages and stations must be passed under the guidance and supervision of a mature and perfect example of humanity who, having traveled this path, is aware of the manners and ways of each station. If not, and there is no perfect human being to guide him on his path, he is in danger of going astray.

The perfect man, the master, who must necessarily accompany the novice on the spiritual journey according to the *'urafa'*, has been called in their vocabulary as *Ta'ir al-quds* (the Holy Bird) and Khidr:

Accompany my zeal on the path, O Ta'ir al-Quds,

The path to the goal is long, and I am new to the journey.

Leave not this stage without the company of Khidr,

There is darkness ahead; be afraid of losing the way.

There are and have always been *'urafa'* - particularly amongst the Shi'ah - who bear no external signs to distinguish them socially from others; yet, at the same time, they have been profoundly involved in the spiritual methodology of *'irfan* (*sayr wa suluk*). It is these who are the real gnostics, not those who have invented for themselves hundreds of special mannerisms and customs and have brought innovations into being.

There is a world of difference between the *tawhid* of the *'arif* and the general view of *tawhid*. For the *'arif*, *tawhid* is the sublime peak of humanness and the final goal of his spiritual journey, while for the ordinary people, and even the philosophers, *tawhid* means the essential Unity of the Necessary Being.

For the *'arif*, *tawhid* means that the ultimate reality is only God, and everything other than God is mere appearance, not reality. The *'arif's* *tawhid* means that 'other than God there is nothing'.

For the *'arif*, *tawhid* means following a path and arriving at the stage when he sees nothing but God. However, this view of *tawhid* is not accepted by the opponents of the *'urafa'*, and some of them have declared such a view to be heretic. Yet the *'urafa'* are convinced that this is the only true *tawhid*, and that the other stages of it cannot be said to be free of polytheism (*shirk*).

The *'urafa'* do not see the attainment of the ideal stage of *tawhid* to be the function of reason and reflection. Rather they consider it to be the work of the heart, and attained through struggle, through the journeying, and through purifying and disciplining the self.

The methodology of spiritual progression, *sayr wa suluk*, as the words *sayr* (traveling) and *suluk* (journeying) imply, is a dynamic one . . .that is, *'irfan* speaks about a point of departure, a destination, and the stages and stations which, in their correct order, the wayfarer must traverse in order to arrive at the final destination. In the *'arif's* view, there really is a path before the human being - a path that is actual and not in the least a metaphor - and this path must be followed stage by stage, station by station; to arrive at any station without having traversed the preceding one is, in the *'arif's* view, impossible. Thus the *'arif* views the human soul to be a living organism, like a seedling or like a child, whose perfection lies in growth and maturation in accordance with a particular system and order.

In the spiritual methodology of *'irfan*, much mention is made of the heart and the states and happenings it will experience, and these experiences are known only to the wayfarer of the path during the course of his struggles and his journey on the path

In the *'arif's* view, human perfection does not mean having a picture of the realm of existence in one's mind; rather it is to return, by means of treading the spiritual path of progression, to the origin from which one has come, to overcome the separation of distance between oneself and the Divine Essence, and, in the realm of nearness, to obliterate one's finite self to abide in Divine Infinitude.

The tools of the philosopher are reason, logic and deduction, while the tools of the *'arif* are the heart, spiritual struggle, purification and disciplining of the self, and an inner dynamism.

Extracted from:

Light Within Me, Part 1

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