

Sufis

Excerpt from *Finding Oneness in Loving Awareness*
By Thomas D. Stanks

The religious traditions offer ways of getting beyond the ordinary, daily functioning of the mind, and to enjoy various higher states of consciousness, such as I have been pursuing. I turn now to a Sufi, Kabir Edmund Helminski, and his wonderfully instructive book, *LIVING PRESENCE*. Kaminski is a translator and interpreter of Sufi works. He is a Shaikh (Noble Elder) associated with the Mevlevi Order founded by Rumi; he is also a transpersonal psychologist. Large portions of his book center on love, including three chapters and much of the last four chapters devoted to the subject.. He elaborates, "Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi has said, 'The religion of Love is like no other.' It has no form, and it is not dependent on laws, but it can be recognized despite outer forms by those who know it. It is the same religion Jesus brought, calling it the **NEW COVENANT**. The religion of Love was also brought by Mohammad and passed on through Ali and Abu Bakr to become Sufism."

Sufism is not indissolubly linked to Islamism. Again, Helminski makes the point, "Sufism is the attribute of those who love. Lovers are people who are purified by love, free of themselves and their own qualities and fully attentive to the Beloved. This is to say that Sufis are not held in bondage by any quality of their own because they see everything they are and have as belonging to the Source. An early Sufi, Shebli, said: 'The Sufi sees nothing but God in the two worlds.'" His words make me think that love may be the criterion by which to judge any religion. Is my religion an attribute of love?

Helminski relates his view on standard Sufism: "In classical Sufism the continuum from the false self to the essential Self has been described in seven stages. The word for self, *NAFI*, is also equivalent to 'soul.'" I believe his naming of each stage helps to describe the process of what is transpiring at that particular stage. One needs to consult the book for a full explanation.

1. The self of compulsion....
2. The self of conscience....
3. The self of inspiration....
4. The soul of tranquility....
5. The soul of submission....
6. The soul of total submissio....
7. The soul of perfection....

Stages 1 and 2 are more or less under the domination of the false self. Stage 3 might be called the natural self, whereas stages 4 through 7 represent various degrees of the essential Self." His book is devoted to what he calls "The Work," or Soul Work. He explains: "What is most characteristically human is not guaranteed to us by our species or by our culture but given only in potential. A spiritual master once expressed it this way: A person must work in order to become human....We are made to know ourselves; we are created for this self-awareness; we are fully equipped for it....The education of the soul, or essential Self, is different from the education of the personality or the intellect. The education of the soul involves not only knowledge, but the realization of a presence that is our deeper nature and that includes attention, will, and self-transcendence...."

"Presence is the state of being consciously aware....It is not a belief or opinion, but a practice." Our awareness is usually occupied with more superficial layers of mind activity, particularly our ego's thoughts and desires. With work, it is possible to listen within more constantly. "Through this listening, mind and heart, ego and subconscious can be integrated....The heart, as Sufis and others call it, is the totality of the mind's faculties, both sub- and supra-conscious. These faculties work behind the curtain of our conscious awareness. They function erratically, partially, and unconsciously in most of us, because the human heart is fragmented and in conflict. If, however, the subconscious mind functions in harmony with the Divine Unknown, the Creative Power, life becomes filled with new meaning that flows into conscious awareness."

"To purify and harmonize our conscious and subconscious faculties, to make the heart pure around a single center, or master desire, and to patiently awaken those faculties that have gone to sleep or atrophied--this is the work of presence...."

"With consciousness it is possible to direct one's attention and even to be conscious of where one's attention moves, to see moment by moment what attracts it....With true consciousness, in contrast to passive awareness, the present moment is a wide space....the present is perceived as it is, in the perfection of its many dimensions. Consciousness is knowing that you are....Presence is to have this quality of energy activated. As human beings we can know that a single creative energy connects everything and that we are integral to it...." "One day the heart may reach such contact with its own source through merging directly with the Creative Power and knowing the One behind multiplicity that it may make a home in unity." Then one may feel being held or

upheld, connected with everything and at home anywhere. It's a communing with and an opening to all. "Human beings are destined to realize this possibility more and more. The result is the complete human being, the drop that becomes the Sea. It is not difficult to achieve this end, because we are made for it."

"At higher levels, there are fewer laws. Two stones cannot occupy the same space, but two fragrances can. In the world of solid material existence, a stone has a weight and mass that limits what it can do. Fragrance, on the other hand, being matter in molecular form, has powers of diffusion and penetration that allows it to spread at phenomenal speeds over great distances in all directions at once. A rock, however, can move only if it is moved, and then in a single direction and at a speed limited by the force acting on it."

Helmski finishes the comparison: "The difference between matter in its solid state and matter in its molecular state is analogous to the mind limited by the ordinary intellect and senses and the mind that has become spiritualized." For the drop to become the Sea, some dissolution must take place. Some part of the self dissolves and yet is still present. "The conventional idea of self begins to break down. The boundaries of the self are less limited, and yet the identity has not been weakened. The self has dissolved: it is there, but not in its old form. A new quality enters into our relationships--a deeper love, as if we were loving a part of ourselves. Within ourselves we are surrounded by presences; the saints and masters are here within us, as is the Presence of Spirit." The individualized mind that I spiritualize is not something separate from the mind of the universe, but a reflection of this mind as it draws nearer to its source. "The heart is the individualized, manifesting part of the Cosmic Mind. It is a reflection of the Cosmic Mind's attributes: love, compassion, mercy, patience, generosity, will, service creativity, beauty, wisdom, awareness, and innumerable other qualities. To the extent that we can increase our reflection of these qualities, we are also developing the heart."

"The real Work is completed under the protection and guidance of Love....Our tendency is toward personal independence....ego-protective behaviors...keep us in separation. We need to open ourselves to other beings in this milieu of love....Only as we begin to open to others in love can the isolated ego be transformed....An awareness of our interdependence with our fellow human beings and with all of life provides the environment in which the seed of the soul can flourish."

"What we love we will become....The experience of love will activate our conscious and subconscious faculties....For those who love, serve, and remember, (the universe) will demonstrate corresponding values. Those who call

on God with sincerity will find the living Presence of that God within themselves." If I become what I love, is not the destiny of those who love God to become God?

"Never think of love as the goal of anything," a teacher of mine said, "always think of it as the cause." Developing that thought, Helminski says, "At all levels of existence a single cosmic energy is active. The whole universe is alive with intelligence, creativity, and constant evolution. Another name for this cosmic energy is Spirit, and we experience Spirit, this cosmic energy, as love."

Later in the same chapter, "Love the Transformer," the author repeats the injunction, "Love is not the goal of anything; it is the cause of everything, including our own final transformation." If I take these words seriously, love is the cause not only of good acts but of evil actions as well. It may be self-preservation or ego-driven, but the perpetrator is still acting out of love, no matter how misdirected. I don't think we can act at all except from the motive that what I do is ultimately good for myself in some way or other.

I believe it is easier to accept that love is the cause of everything if I see that I and all others were created out of love. If love is the cause of our being, the energy does not end. I am love and made to love. When dealing with the Christian Scriptures, I quoted what St. Augustine said in the fifth century about love, which is worth repeating here: "If nothing else in praise of love was said in the rest of the epistle, nay in the rest of Scripture, and we had heard from the mouth of the Spirit of God that one statement, 'God is love,' (1 Jo 4:16) we would not have to look for anything else." "Love brings together what needs to be brought together....The psyche's refinement toward more continuous presence results in our being able to meet more and more manifestations of Life with unconditional Love. We are able to overcome our separation to such an extent that we feel at one more and more. Wider awareness" leads us to "overcome the inner tyrannies of attraction and preference."

"As the psyche opens in love to its milieu, a marriage occurs between the heart and the electromagnetic milieu of love, and a child is born: will, or conscious action. Until then we have only ego--the bastard child of intellect and desire. The marriage of the subtle faculties of mind, or the heart, with unconditional love gives birth to true, conscious, unqualified will....This merging of the heart with the milieu of Love brings us to the stage known as unconditioning, which is the highest state of subtlety of the mind and heart."

Helminski says, "we experience Spirit, this cosmic energy, as love....Spirit plus Nothing: that is your highest destiny....This Spirit is not to be understood as a metaphysical assertion or belief, but as something we can experience for ourselves,...The essential Self will be found to have the attributes of Spirit,

including unconditional love and fundamental creativity."

"We come face-to-face with Love as we gather in its name. Love is the milieu in which we all exist. Together we can join our hearts to this field....All we need is within if we are free of the obstructing ego. Love is the tamer of ego."

Helminski and other Sufis call the total mind "heart." It has a specific meaning in their spiritual glossary. "The heart includes those faculties that are beyond the intellect; but as long as we are attached to this physical body, we working THROUGH the intellect....It includes the subconscious/superconscious mind; all the subtle faculties that are nonintellectual....Nothing originates with the intellect....Heart is spiritualized mind."

"At the beginning of spiritual work, and for as long as it takes, it is necessary to go through a process of deconditioning: meticulously observing the influences of our conditioning, learning more and more to see things as they are.

Simultaneously, it is necessary to cultivate the sensitive and conscious capacities." Helminski explains how this cultivation works: we need conscious effort springing from a love for developing our true nature. "How much of the latent capacities of the mind do we employ? How often are we conscious, actively receptive, living in true service, or asking a real question? How often do we listen within, and how often do we consciously receive the subtle impressions of the heart?"

"The ability to use our subconscious faculties depends on a quality of presence....With the development of presence comes a more refined awareness of all levels of experience." The more we are conscious, the more we are aware of knowledge and information not restricted by space and time. "We should learn to be cautious about accepting images that arrive fully formed and detailed, since they are likely to be creations of memory and association. We should also be wary of information and impressions that come too quickly and strongly, since these are more likely to be examples of mental noise."