

Sufi Thoughts

by Hazrat Inayat Khan

There are ten principal Sufi thoughts, which comprise all the important subjects with which a person's inner life is concerned.

I. There is One God, the Eternal, the Only Being; none exists save He.

The God of the Sufi is the God of every creed, and the God of all. Names make no difference to him. Allah, God, Gott, Dieu, Buddha, Brahma, or Bhagwan, all these names and more are the names of his God; and yet to him God is beyond the limitation of name. He sees his God in the sun, in the fire, in the idol which diverse sects worship; and he recognizes Him in all the forms of the universe, yet knowing Him to be beyond all form; God in all, and all in God, He being the Seen and the Unseen, the Only Being. God to the Sufi is not only a religious belief, but also the highest ideal the human mind can conceive.

The Sufi, forgetting the self and aiming at the attainment of the divine ideal, walks constantly all through life in the path of love and light. In God the Sufi sees the perfection of all that is in the reach of man's perception and yet he knows him to be above human reach. He looks to Him as the lover to his beloved, and takes all things in life as coming from Him, with perfect resignation. The sacred name of God is to him as medicine to the patient. The divine thought is the compass by which he steers the ship to the shores of immortality. The God-ideal is to Sufi as a lift by which he raises himself to the eternal goal, the attainment of which is the only purpose of his life.

II. There is One Master, the Guiding Spirit of all Souls, Who constantly leads His followers towards the light.

The Sufi understands that although God is the source of all knowledge, inspiration, and guidance, yet man is the medium through which God chooses to impart His knowledge to the world. He imparts it through one who is a man in the eyes of the world, but God in his consciousness. It is the mature soul that draws blessings from the heavens, and God is busy speaking through all things, yet in order to speak to the deaf ears of many among us, it is necessary for Him to speak through the lips of a person. He has done this all through the history of man, every great teacher of the past having been this Guiding Spirit living the life of God in human guise. In other words, their human guise consists of various coats worn by the same person, who appeared to be different in each. Shiva, Buddha, Rama, Krishna on the one side, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed on the other; and many more, known or unknown to history, always one and the same person.

Those who saw the person and knew Him recognized Him in whatever form or guise; those who could only see the coat went astray. To the Sufi therefore there is only one Teacher, however differently He may be named at different periods of history, and He comes constantly to awaken humanity from the slumber of this life of illusion, and to guide man onwards towards divine perfection. As the Sufi progresses in this view he recognizes his Master, not only in the holy ones, but in the wise, in the foolish, in the saint and in the sinner, and has never allowed Master who is One alone, and the only One who can be and whoever will be, to disappear from his sight.

The Persian word for Master is Murshid. The Sufi recognizes the Murshid in all beings of the world, and is ready to learn from young and old, educated and uneducated, rich and poor, without questioning from whom he learns. Then he begins to see the light of Risalat, the torch of truth that shines before him in every being and thing in the universe, thus he sees Rasul, his Divine Message Bearer, a living identity before him.

Thus the Sufi sees the vision of God, the worshipped deity, in His immanence, manifest in nature, and life now becomes for him a perfect revelation both within and without.

It is often for no other reason than clinging to the personality of their particular teacher, claiming for him superiority over other teachers, and degrading a teacher held in the same esteem by others, that people have separated themselves from one another, and caused most of the wars and factions and contentions which history records among the children of God.

What the Spirit of Guidance is, can be further explained as follows: as in man there is a faculty for art, music, poetry and science, so in him is the faculty or spirit of guidance. It is better to call it spirit because it is the supreme faculty from which all the others originate. As we see that in every person there is some artistic faculty, but not everyone is an artist, as everyone can hum a tune but only one in a thousand is a musician, so every person possesses this faculty in some form and to a limited degree. The spirit of guidance is found among few indeed of the human race.

A Sanskrit poet says, "Jewels are stones, but cannot be found everywhere; the sandal tree is a tree, but does not grow in every forest; as there are many elephants, but only one king elephant, so there are human beings all over the world, but the real human being is rarely to be found."

When we arise above faculty and consider the spirit of guidance, we shall find that it is consummated in the Bodhisatva, the spiritual teacher or divine messenger. There is a saying that the reformer is the child of civilization, but the prophet is its father. This spirit has always existed, and must always exist; and in this way from time to time the message of God has been given.

III. There is One Holy Book, the sacred manuscript of nature, the only scripture which can enlighten the reader.

Most people consider as sacred scriptures only certain books or scrolls written by hand of man, and carefully preserved as holy, to be handed down to posterity as divine revelation. Men have fought and disputed over the authenticity of these books, have refused to accept any other book of similar character, and, clinging thus to the book and losing the sense of it have formed diverse sects. The Sufi has in all ages respected all such books, and has traced in the Vedanta, Zendavesta, Kabala, Bible, Qur'an, and all other sacred scriptures, the same truth which he reads in the incorruptible manuscript of nature, the only Holy Book, the perfect and living model that teaches the inner law of life: all scriptures before nature's manuscript are as little pools of water before the ocean.

To the eye of the seer every leaf of the tree is a page of the holy book that contains divine revelation, and he is inspired every moment of his life by constantly reading and understanding the holy script of nature.

When man writes, he inscribes characters upon rock, leaf, paper, wood, or steel. When God writes, the characters He writes are living creatures.

It is when the eye of the soul is opened and the sight is keen that the Sufis can read the divine law in the manuscript of nature; and they derived that which the teachers of humanity have taught to their followers from the same source. They expressed what little it is possible to express in words, and so they preserved the inner truth when they themselves were no longer there to reveal it.

IV. There is One Religion, the unswerving progress in the right direction towards the ideal, which fulfills the life's purpose of every soul.

Religion in the Sanskrit language is termed Dharma, which means duty. The duty of every individual is religion. 'Every soul is born for a certain purpose, and the light of that purpose is kindled in his soul' says Sa'di. This explains why the Sufi in his tolerance allows everyone to have his own path, and does not

compare the principles of others with his own, but allows freedom of thought to everyone, since he himself is a freethinker.

Religion, in the conception of a Sufi, is the path that leads man towards the attainment of his ideal, worldly as well as heavenly. Sin and virtue, right and wrong, good and bad are not the same in the case of every individual; they are according to his grade of evolution and state of life. Therefore the Sufi concerns himself little with the name of the religion or the place of worship. All places are sacred enough for his worship, and all religions convey to him the religion of his soul. 'I saw Thee in the sacred Ka'ba and in the temple of the idol also Thee I saw.'

V. There is One Law, the law of reciprocity, which can be observed by a selfless conscience, together with a sense of awakened justice.

Man spends his life in the pursuit of all that seems to him to be profitable for himself, and when so absorbed in self-interest in time he even loses touch with his own real interest. Man has made laws to suit him, but they are laws by which he can get the better of another. It is this that he calls justice, and it is only that which is done to him by another that he calls injustice. A peaceful and harmonious life with his fellow men cannot be led until the sense of justice has been awakened in him by a selfless conscience. As the judicial authorities of the world intervene between two persons who are at variance, knowing that they have a right to intervene when the two parties in dispute are blinded by personal interest, so the Almighty Power intervenes in all disputes however small or great.

It is the law of reciprocity that saves man from being exposed to the higher powers, as a considerate man has less chance of being brought before the court. The sense of justice is awakened in a perfectly sober mind; that is, one which is free from the intoxication of youth, strength, power, possession, command, birth, or rank. It seems a net profit when one does not give but takes, or when one gives less and takes more; but in either case there is really a greater loss than profit. For every such profit spreads a cover over the sense of justice within, and when many such covers have veiled the sight, man becomes blind even to his own profit. It is like standing in one's own light. 'Blind here remains blind in the hereafter.'

Although the different religions, in teaching man how to act harmoniously and peacefully with his fellowmen, have given out different laws, they all meet in this one truth: do unto others as thou wouldst they should do unto thee. The Sufi, in taking a favor from another, enhances its value, and in accepting what another does to him he makes allowance.

VI. There is One Brotherhood, the human brotherhood which unites the children of earth indiscriminately in the Fatherhood of God.

The Sufi understands that the one life emanating from the inner Being is manifested on the surface as the life of variety; and in this world of variety man is the finest manifestation, for he can realize in his evolution the oneness of the inner being even in the external existence of variety. But he evolves to this ideal, which is the only purpose of his coming on earth, by uniting himself with another.

Man unites with others in the family tie, which is the first step in his evolution, and yet families in the past have fought with each other, and have taken vengeance upon one another for generations, each considering his cause to be the only true and righteous one. Today man shows his evolution in uniting with his neighbors and fellow-citizens, and even developing within himself the spirit of patriotism for his nation. He is greater in this respect than those in the past; and yet men so united nationally have caused the catastrophe of the modern wars, which will be regarded by the coming generations in the same light in which we now regard the family feuds of the past.

There are racial bonds, which widen the circle of unity still more, but it has always happened that one race has looked down on the other.

The religious bond shows a still higher ideal. But it has caused diverse sects, which have opposed and despised each other for thousands of years, and have caused endless splits and divisions among men. The germ of separation exists even in such a wide scope for brotherhood, and however widespread the brotherhood may be; it cannot be a perfect one as long as it separates man from man.

The Sufi, realizing this, frees himself from national, racial, and religious boundaries, uniting himself in the human brotherhood, which is devoid of the differences and distinctions of class, caste, creed, race, nation, or religion, and unites mankind in the universal brotherhood.

VII. There is One Moral, the love which springs forth from self-denial and blooms in deeds of beneficence.

There are moral principles taught to mankind by various teachers, by many traditions, one differing from the other, which are like separate drops coming out of the fountain. But when we look at the steam, we find there is but one stream, although it turns into several drops on falling. There are many moral principles, just as many drops fall from one fountain; but there is one stream that is at the source of all, and that is love. It is love that gives birth to hope, patience, endurance, forgiveness, tolerance, and to all moral principles. All deeds of kindness and beneficence take root in the soil of the loving heart. Generosity, charity, adaptability, an accommodating nature, ever renunciation, are the offspring of love alone. The great, rare and chosen beings, who for ages have been looked up to as ideal in the world, are the possessors of hearts kindled with love. All evil and sin come from the lack of love.

People call love blind, but love in reality is the light of the sight. The eye can only see the surface; love can see much deeper. All ignorance is the lack of love. As fire when not kindled gives only smoke, but when kindled, the illumination flame springs forth, so it is with love. It is blind when undeveloped, but, when its fire is kindled, the flame that lights the path of the traveler from mortality to everlasting life springs forth. The secrets of earth and heaven are revealed to the possessor of the loving heart, the lover has gained mastery over himself and others, and he not only communes with God but also unites with Him.

"Hail to thee, then, O love, sweet madness! Thou who healest all our infirmities! Who art the physician of our pride and self-conceit! Who art our Plato and our Galen!" says Rumi.

VIII. There is One Object of Praise, the beauty which uplifts the heart of its worshippers through all aspects from the seen to the unseen.

It is said in the Hadith, "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty."

This expresses the truth that man, who inherits the Spirit of God, has beauty in him and loves beauty, although that which is beautiful to one is not beautiful to another. Man cultivates the sense of beauty as he evolves, and prefers the higher aspect of beauty to the lower. But when he has observed the highest vision of beauty is the Unseen by a gradual evolution from praising the beauty in the seen would, then the entire existence becomes to him one single vision of beauty.

Man has worshipped God, beholding the beauty of sun, moon, stars, and planets. He has worshipped God in plants, in animals. He has recognized God in the beautiful merits of man, and he has with his perfect view of beauty found the source of all beauty in the Unseen, from whence all this springs, and in who all is merged.

The Sufi, realizing this, worships beauty in all its aspects, and sees the face of the Beloved in all that is seen and the Beloved's spirit in the Unseen. So wherever he looks his ideal of worship is before him. "Everywhere I look, I see Thy winning face; everywhere I go, I arrive at Thy dwelling- place."

IX. There is One Truth, the true knowledge of our being, within and without, which is the essence of all wisdom.

Hazrat Ali says, "Know thyself, and thou shalt know God." It is the knowledge of self, which blooms into the knowledge of God. Self-knowledge answers such problems as: Whence have I come? Did I exist before I became conscious of my present existence? If I existed, as what did I exist? As an individual such as I now am, or as a multitude, or as an insect, bird, animal, spirit, jinn, or angel? What happens at death, the change to which every creature is subject? Why do I tarry here awhile? What purpose have I to accomplish here? What is my duty in life? In what does my happiness consist, and what is it that makes my life miserable? Those whose hearts have been kindled by the light from above, begin to ponder such questions but those whose souls are already illumined by the knowledge of the self understand them. It is they who give to individuals or to the multitudes the benefit of their knowledge, so that even men whose hearts are not yet kindled, and whose souls are not illuminated, may be able to walk on the right path that leads to perfection.

This is why people are taught in various languages, in various forms of worship, in various tenets in different parts of the world. It is one and the same truth; it is only seen in diverse aspects appropriate to the people and the time. It is only those who do not understand this who can mock at the faith of another, condemning to hell of destruction those who do not consider their faith to be the only true faith.

The Sufi recognizes the knowledge of self as the essence of all religions; he traces it in every religion, he sees the same truth in each, and therefore he regards all as one. Hence he can realize the saying of Jesus: "I and my Father are one." The difference between creature and Creator remains on his lips, not in his soul. This is what is meant by union with God. It is in reality the dissolving of the false self in the knowledge of the true self, which is divine, eternal, and all pervading. "He who attaineth union with God, his very self must lose," said Amir.

X. There is One Path, the annihilation of the false ego in the real, which raises the mortal to immortality, in which resides all perfection.

"I passed away into nothingness—I vanished; and lo! I was all living." All who have realized the secret of life understand that life is one, but that it exists in two aspects. First as immortal, all-pervading and silent; and secondly as mortal, active, and manifest in variety. The soul being of the first aspect becomes deluded, helpless, and captive by experiencing life in contact with the mind and body, which is of the next aspect. The gratification of the desires of the body and fancies of the mind do not suffice for the purpose of the soul, which is undoubtedly to experience its own phenomena in the seen and the unseen, though its inclination is to be itself and not anything else. When delusion makes it feel that it is helpless, mortal and captive, it finds itself out of place. This is the tragedy of life, which keeps the strong and the weak, the rich and poor, all dissatisfied, constantly looking for something they do not know. The Sufi, realizing this, takes the path of annihilation, and, by the guidance of a teacher on the path, finds at the end of this journey that the destination was he. As Iqbal says:

"I wandered in the pursuit of my own self; I was the traveler, and I am the destination."

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