

state. (Shah 132)

Sufism is not a religion, but rather that mystical experience which is at the heart of every religion. Religion, with its rituals, organization and laws, was the outer shell of an experience with the divine. Among themselves Sufis would say, " Sufi is a Moslim, a Christian, a Buddhist. A Sufi is a carpenter, a housewife, a banker." Sufism had (has) to do with the full development of the person by way of recognizing his True Self, i.e. God, within himself. Anyone, therefore, who is in touch with the reality of his religion, the reality of this world, is, they would say, a Sufi.

However Sufism, like religions, experienced time when its forms were used and the contents forgotten. This led, for example, to "dervishes" (Sufi wanderers) begging and expecting to be cared for because they were the holders of special, spiritual knowledge. Another problem was a feeling of superiority to recognized laws and codes of behavior which came about because they felt they had discovered the "real" truth of life. One of the beliefs that had crept in was that it was possible to experience God (the Divine Essence) yourself without a Mediator. This was a corruption of Sufi wisdom because the learning was always given from person to person. A modern Sufi said that reading a book about Sufism was like eating canned pineapple. You have to get the wisdom from a person. However, this was still not as far as Bahá'u'lláh's claim that you needed a Divine Mediator, a Person of another station than human, a "Manifestation".

How did Bahá'u'lláh speak to them?

In the Seven Valleys Bahá'u'lláh talks to the Sufis of his day in their own symbols and forms. For example, he uses the oldest form of the Sufi literature, the Seven Valleys (or Cities, as it is also known), of the poet Attar, to present His vision to the Sufis. He also quotes copiously from Rumi. Thus he built credibility for His argument.

And His argument? What was it exactly?

In the Seven Valleys Bahá'u'lláh sifts the wheat of Sufi teaching from the chaff that had crept in over the years. His point is that mankind can have an experience of the Divine (Valley of Love), can grow in understanding (Valley of Knowledge), can experience the unity of all things (Valley of Unity), be content (Valley of Contentment), and experience amazement (Valley of Wonderment), but there is a veil between the Creator and the created which can only be penetrated by a Being of another quality than man. He is the Messenger and His counsels must be followed. Bahá'u'lláh says: "In all these journeys the traveler must stray not the breadth of a hair from the 'Law', for this is indeed the secret of the 'Path' and the fruit of the Tree of 'truth', and in all these stages he must cling to the robe of obedience to the commandments, and hold fast to the cord of shunning all forbidden things, that he may be nourished from the cup of the Law and informed of the mysteries of truth."

In conclusion.

Bahá'u'lláh's message to the Sufis (and mankind) was that although a seeker of the Divine Essence can develop his consciousness considerably in this world, true contact with the Essence is impossible. Full development can only come through recognition of the Messenger and obedience to His Laws.

Shah, I., The Sufis, Doubleday 1964

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