

Selections from Murshid on Chivalry

Gatheka 3 Sufism--Beyond Religion

Modern writers have often made mistakes by writing of Sufism as a Persian philosophy or the esoteric side of Islam. Some have erroneously believed it to be a borrowed influence of Vedanta or Buddhism upon Islam. Some Oriental writers have patriotically called it an outcome of Islam in order to secure the credit for their own religion, while some Occidental writers have attempted to win it for Christianity.

In fact, according to the sacred history which the Sufis have inherited from one another, it is clear that Sufism has never been owned by any race or religion for differences and distinctions are the very delusions from which Sufis purify themselves. It might appear that Sufism must have been formed of the different elements of various religions which are prominent today, but it is not so, for Sufism itself is the essence of all the religions as well as the spirit of Islam.

Sufism reveals all the shades and colors which represent the various religions of the world, having no particular color itself. All prophets, saints, sages, and mystics are practically owned by their followers, as Christ by the Christians and Moses by the Jews. Yet Christ was not a Christian nor Moses a Jew, all being Sufis, pure from earthly distinctions. The Beloved Ones of God are even as God, impervious to religious dogmas and principles.

Sufism is not a religion nor a philosophy, it is neither deism nor atheism, nor is it a moral, nor a special kind of mysticism, being free from the usual religious sectarianism. If ever it could be called a religion, it would only be as a religion of love, harmony, and beauty. If it be called a philosophy it is beyond that because a Sufi, through the study of metaphysics, escapes the selfishness produced by philosophy and kindles the fire of devotion with one's eyes open to reason and logic. The Sufi prays to Allah every moment in one's life, invoking God's Name and realizing at the same time that the self is no other than God. For to a Sufi God is not a personal being but a mighty healer to awaken the soul from its delusion of earthly individuality, and a guide to lead it to self-realization, the only aim in life.

The Sufi, by learning the greatest of all morals, which is love, arrives at the stage of self-denial, wherein one liberates oneself from all earthly morals. Mysticism has several aspects but the Sufi strives towards the path of truth, its ultimate goal. The truth of the Sufi is the one truth which is common to all religions and philosophies, and in the realization of which one finds one's salvation, or Najat. Sufism, being the first brother/ sisterhood of purity, has been known under different names, such as that of the Brothers of Purity, the Knights of Purity, the Brotherhood of the Cave, on which initiative several other institutions have established kinships under different names.

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Chapter X Chivalry

There is a story told of Sa'di, that chivalrous and most ideal of poets, that he loved a girl very dearly; he admired and valued her more than all else in his life, so that there was nothing that he would not do for her sake. One day coming to see her he found her, though he could scarcely believe his eyes, in the arms of another; but going away quietly he took his stand at the gateway of her house. When the other man saw Sa'di standing there he thought, 'Surely now, filled with jealousy he is waiting to kill me'. But Sa'di, as he saw him approach, called: 'Friend, be at peace. I am waiting to give you a word of good advice: that as I have seen and gone away quietly, so do you, if you should see her in the arms of another. For that is the way in which the wise love.'

Ghayrat, or chivalry, so often takes the form of jealousy that the one is usually confounded with the other. This same male tendency lies at the root of dueling, a custom not foreign to any part of the world, which down the ages has been the cause of every kind of conflict and upheaval. The honor of one may be the honor of another, or of ten, or a hundred others; and thus a woman's honor may be upheld as that of a king.

Man has always held woman to be most sacred in life; more precious to him and appealing more to him than all the rest of life. If she be his mother, he sees her as his source and creator, his only sustainer and protection; in heartbreak and disappointment and in the very depths of despair comes the thought of the mother,

who was his first friend before anyone was attracted to him, and his first guardian and teacher. If she be his sister he thinks more of her than of himself, for her position in life is more delicate than his; she is the honor of his family, and he considers that he shares the responsibility of his parents for her. None of this goodness is artificial; it is of the very essence of humanity, springing from the nature of things. To a father the responsibility of a daughter seems greater than that of a son; her dishonor or unhappiness strikes at him most keenly. And in that closest relationship of life, a word against a man's wife destroys his happiness and peace; he would accept any degradation to shield her; and this equally whether he be attached to a woman worthy of his ideal or to a prostitute, to one who has lost all sense of self-respect. In each relationship her honor is his own honor.

This male tendency is seen taking selfish and brutal forms in the social life of the community. For instance, when the responsibility that the birth of a daughter places upon the family has induced such a custom as the killing of female children at birth, a custom found in many different countries at different times; or when, as now in Western civilization, even among the wealthy, parents restrict their families and take means to prevent the birth of any child, male or female, through dread of responsibility. Again, the natural dependence of woman is often greatly increased by man; for so strong is the feeling that a man's responsibilities in life are greater than hers, since he bears hers as well as his own, that woman is deprived in order that he may have every advantage that offers. In order that he may be better fitted for his fight in the world, her natural disabilities are added to and increased.

One sees in the West that girls often receive less opportunity for education than their brothers; that daughters inherit a lesser portion than sons; that the work of women is paid at a lower rate than that of men. And in the East this male tendency is responsible for such customs as the seclusion of women. Thus everywhere, East or West, even if unexpressed, there exists this tendency to regard a woman as the honor and care of a man, and consequently as less dependent upon her own efforts than upon his.

It is the thought of individual freedom that is attacking the old ideals, and destroying also this ideal of *Ghayrat*, or chivalry; for in spite of the selfish, even brutal forms that it may take, it is an ideal; and he who follows it possesses a religion. In the West man accepts greater advantages of life without accepting

corresponding responsibilities. The Hindu, with a less strong thought of individual liberty, still preserves many ancient ideals; and no student of Hindu life can deny that these are as sacred to him as his worship of gods and goddesses, and are part of his Dharma or religion. If the Hindu once calls a woman sister, or daughter, or mother, he regards her as such all his life, through the sacred bond of his promise, and he feels in honor bound to protect and sustain her, though she may not be related to him in any way.

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There is a feminine chivalry which the poets of Hindustan call *Naz*, a beauty that shines out if lighted by the deference of a man. It is a beauty that lies silent and hidden till an act of attention, of admiration, or respect on the part of a man stimulates the vanity in which it is rooted. Under courtesy and consideration it unfolds to a perfection that is shown in the woman's every action and feeling; in her words and deeds, smiles and tears, so that every one of them becomes filled with beauty. The value that a woman attaches to a man's small acts of courtesy is rarely understood by man, and it seems to him inexplicable and part of that mystery which he believes shrouds her from him. But there is no woman, no matter of what type or class, country or nation, in whom there is not this beauty which the courtesy of man alone discloses.

There is another kind of feminine chivalry which the poets call *Nayaz*. This tendency is seen expressing itself in the gallant and courageous response that a woman will make to her admirer; or it may express itself in a gentle, yielding forbearance towards him. It makes her lenient and forgiving to a man, modest and gracious. When he has a desire to protect and to help her, it is a gentle chivalry on her part that makes her put herself, as it were, into his hands. She gives him that trust which he wants her to place in him, and accepts his attentions, just because he so desires her to trust him and to receive his care or homage. It is her chivalry which constrains her to value male chivalry and hold it precious.

And there is yet another kind of feminine chivalry: *Nakhra*, which is the radiance and beauty that man recognizes as feminine. When a woman possesses this quality, nothing can hide it; it shines out unwavering and undimmed, natural, without self-consciousness. No effort on a man's part is needed to disclose it; nor on the other hand is it the result of any conscious effort of her own. In it there is no pointing

with a dart, no aiming with an arrow, towards some target of admiration or reward. It lies in her simple and unaffected recognition of a certain part of life as her kingdom, over which she is by right a queen, and where she reigns with consideration towards those dependent upon her. That is the very essence of aristocracy and chivalry.

No situation in life can extinguish this natural beauty; and it may be seen shining in the unconscious movements, in the unclouded gaiety and serenity, and in the intelligence of a maiden who is as yet untouched by any burden of life. It is a queenliness, a womanliness that irradiates its possessor at every step of her journey through life; and more than any other human quality it wins the heart of man.

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And now coming to the idea of aristocracy or democracy, what does Sufism teach? It is the greatest pity--and every thoughtful person of every nation will realize it, if he would stand to look at life--that the chivalry of the knights and the noble manners, the noble ideals that the ancient people, the aristocratic people had, seem to be finished today. And although they are not realizing it today, there will come a day when we will realize that something which was most beautiful in humanity has been lost. I do not mean to say that we must become today what the world was a hundred years before. It is not necessary, and it cannot be. But at the same time we need not forget and we need not disregard all that was beautiful at that time.

The human tendency is such that when something has gone down or when some idea has become an old idea, or an idea which they despise, they turn their back to it and forget all the good that the idea had. Many live their lives today without ideal, without principle, without a manner, and call it freedom. If that is freedom! That is the wrong meaning of freedom. That freedom cannot spread happiness, cannot produce beauty of manner and spirit. Therefore the work of Sufism is to create the nobleness of the spirit in man, not only occult powers and psychic powers and esoteric things and clairvoyance.

This is the foundation: a person must develop in his soul, cultivate in his spirit the nobleness of the soul. That is aristocracy. And then he will rise to the democracy, and that democracy is to be kind and good and respectful, tolerant and forgiving

and friendly to the saint and sinner both. You go and see the Sufis in the world today: wherever you will go, you will find that spirit with a beautiful manner, with humility, with gentleness, meekness, dignity. Another thing is developed, and that is the democratic feeling. Never to despise anyone, never to hate, never to condemn, never to look down upon anyone, but to see the divine expression in all beings.

That is the balance of life. That is the aristocratic spirit of nobleness and the democratic spirit of tolerance that brings about equality, that brings about the balance we should strike in life.