



ACCESS TO THE CENTER

Sufism Here and Now

If My servant asks thee about Me, truly I am near.
I answer the call of the caller if he calls upon Me.

Quran 2:186

Say: "To God belongs the East and the West;
He guideth whom He willeth upon the
straight path."

Quran 2:142

From coast to coast there is the army of oppression,
and yet,
From pre-eternity to post-eternity is the
opportunity of the dervishes.¹

Hāfīz

All is assembled in the present moment,
The descent of Jesus and the creation of Adam.²

Mahmūd Shabistārī



HERE AND NOW

As long as we are in the human state, we remain inseparable from here and now no matter where we are and when we live. Here and now are connected to human consciousness by an unbreakable bond. Wherever we are we can be here, and whenever we come to our senses we find ourselves in the present moment, or now. God is always near to us, the here and the now being the ever-present gateway to Him. And yet fallen humanity, whose soul is dispersed and attention turned to the world of multiplicity, does everything possible to escape from here and now. Most of our lives are constituted of daydreaming, whereby we seek not to be here but somewhere else and not to be in the present but either in the past or the future. The goal of the spiritual path is to bring us to the here and now, to the Center, which is also the eternal present moment.

In relation to this world, which determines the contents of the consciousness of most human beings, especially believers, the spiritual world and ultimately the Garden of Truth is There, in the beyond, and reaching it lies in an eschatological future, past the days and years of our terrestrial life. Esoterically, however, it can be said that the There is Here and the eschatological future Now. This inner doctrine espoused by Sufism, like other esoteric teachings, does not in any way diminish the sacred character of the Beyond or the Tomorrow, which comes after the days of our earthly existence. Rather, it makes possible the realization of the truth that There *is* Here and the eschatological future, of which most religions speak so often, *is* Now. Of course the Here, when seen as the locus of There, is no longer here as usually understood; nor is Now, as the eternal moment, the same as now as fallen humanity usually perceives it.

The Garden of Truth is utterly beyond all limitative existence; it is the Beyond in the ultimate sense of the term. Yet, as already stated, it resides also in the very center of our being, Here, in the deepest sense of the word. Although reaching it is associated with our eschatological future, it can be realized right Now at the present moment. As mentioned before, this truth does not, however, diminish the reality of the Garden beyond all spatial and temporal confines so that we can continue to think of it as beyond, transcendent, and eternal. Sufism is an Islamic spiritual path that makes possible for us to reach the Here and the Now, which are so close to us and yet so unattainable. It possesses a

key that can open the door to our inner levels of existence and allows us to know who we are, what we are doing here, and where we should be going. It also makes possible knowledge and love of God at the highest level. It is not the only path that provides such possibilities in this day and age, but it is, relatively speaking, one of the most complete, well preserved, and accessible of spiritual paths in our world.

WHAT DOES SUFISM HAVE TO OFFER?

In order to find a path to the Garden of Truth and follow it to its conclusion, one does not have to master the knowledge of various Sufi orders and gnostic writings summarized in the appendixes that follow. One can become a Sufi saint in the Pamir Mountains without ever having heard of the Tijāniyyah Order in Senegal. But considering the present-day situation of most readers of this book, who are used to the historical setting of ideas, I felt it necessary to present in the appendixes something of the vast Sufi tradition so that they can better judge the nature of the teachings and guidance upon the path provided by Sufism. Otherwise, what has been said in this book thus far suffices for those who are not interested in information about the paths to the Garden but want to actually reach the Garden themselves. The historical and literary accounts that follow this chapter can have a spiritual significance to the degree that they make clear the traditional roots and foundations as well as historical manifestations of Sufism that have made possible the continuous emanation of the light of this torch of wisdom down to this day.

In light of the long Sufi tradition, one can ask what legacy Sufism has left for those who are attracted to it. Perhaps *legacy* is not the proper term, however, because it usually refers to someone who has died, while Sufism is very much a living tradition. Perhaps we should ask what present-day Sufism has inherited from its long past that it can offer to those in quest of the spiritual life.

METAPHYSICAL KNOWLEDGE

Since Sufism is a path of liberating knowledge, it is natural that it would leave for posterity a complete doctrine of the nature of the Principle and Its manifestations, both macrocosmic and microcosmic, that is, metaphysics along with cosmology and traditional psychology,

including pneumatology. Sufism has provided for us simple utterances on gnosis as well as elaborate treatises, symbolic tales as well as esoteric commentaries upon the Quran and *Ḥadīth*, prose letters as well as mystical poems, all of which offer teachings about metaphysics and gnosis as well as love and correct action.

These writings include systematizations that are more philosophical and that combine metaphysical unveiling (*kashf*) with intellection (*ta'qqul*). Such treatises deal with the nature of Reality, the inner meaning of creation, levels of being both macrocosmic and microcosmic, grades of knowledge, the esoteric significance of the Quran and of Islamic sacred rites, ontology as the science of Being as well as a metaphysics dealing ultimately with the Beyond-Being, and many other subjects. There is hardly any legitimate philosophical or rational question arising in the mind that cannot be answered through recourse to the knowledge provided by Sufism and applications of the principles of this knowledge to the matter at hand. Sufi writings include furthermore the most profound exposition of love, divine and human, and the relation between the two.

LITERATURE

Sufism has also provided for us a vast literary treasure in many languages, especially in the form of poetry, some of which has been translated in earlier chapters of this work. In this book I could not address in detail Sufi literature in the sense of the art of writing rather than simply written works, although I have mentioned some literary figures here and there. I have dealt more fully in the appendixes that follow with some foundational Sufi writings that are also important from the literary point of view. Suffice it to say here that there are a large number of prose masterpieces in Arabic dealing with Sufism, while the most universal poets of that language who can still speak to us across the barrier of time and culture are Sufi poets, such as Ḥallāj, Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and in the recent period Shaykh al-'Alawī, Shaykh Ḥabīb, and Asad 'Alī.

The second major Islamic language, Persian, is even richer than Arabic in terms of Sufi poetry. Such poets as Bābā Ṭāhir, Sanā'ī, 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Ḥāfiz, Shabistārī, Jāmī, and many others have made Persian perhaps the richest language in the world in mystical poetry. For those who are Persian speakers this body of poetry is like a vast garden of

spiritual reality in which they can become absorbed, reposing and taking refuge in it from the vicissitudes of the world. Such poets provide not only knowledge of the path, in both its theoretical and practical aspects, but also an “alchemy” that has the power to cure the ailments of the soul. Since most people are not given to the reading of metaphysical texts, Sufi poetry is also the means for the dissemination of the teachings of Sufism to the larger public. The Sufis have used beauty to adorn the expressions of the Truth, and they attract souls to the Truth through the beauty of the literary form in which it is dressed.

Sufi poetry also has the power to induce a spiritual state (*ḥāl*) even in the souls of those who are not following formally the path to the Garden but who possess spiritual taste (*dhawq*). Very few people in my country of origin, Persia, can read a metaphysical and gnostic treatise by a figure such as Jāmī, even if this work be in Persian. But I know of very few Persians who do not know some poems of Rūmī and Ḥāfīz, which they recite on various occasions in their lives. After the Quran, perhaps no book is found more frequently in the homes of Persian speakers than the *Dīwān* of Ḥāfīz. I can hardly overemphasize the importance of Sufi poetry for the followers of the path as well as the larger public. Such poetry is the gift of Sufism to Islamic culture in general as well as the means of attracting those with the necessary capabilities to the path itself.

What is said of Arabic and Persian Sufi poetry also holds true for other Islamic languages. In Turkish, the poetry of Aḥmad Yasawī, Fuḍūlī, and Yūnus Emre are still read by many even in modern Turkey, which sought to ban Ottoman Sufi literature. One still hears the verses of the greatest popular Sufi poet of Turkey, Yūnus Emre, who lived in the fourteenth century, on the radio and in concerts as well as in the everyday speech of many Turks. Likewise, the most outstanding poets of the Urdu language, such as Bīdil and Ghālib, were rooted in the Sufi tradition. Moreover, in Bengal, Persian Sufi poetry served as the model for Bengali poetry that appeared after the Islamization of the land, as we see in the poetry of Muḥammad Ṣaghīr. Many other Indian languages such as Sindhi and Punjābī have as their greatest literary figure a Sufi poet, for example, the famous Sufi saint and poet of Sindh, Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, whose poems are widely sung to this day.

A similar situation prevails in Africa among Berbers as well as in sub-Saharan Africa. The literature of this region, much of which remains oral, is usually crowned by works on Sufism and poems in praise

of God and the Prophet with Sufi color. Some of the best-known poems are translations from Arabic, such as the famous *Burdah* (*The Mantle*) of Sharaf al-Dīn Būṣīrī (d. between 1294 and 1297), whose translation into Berber, Fulfunde, and other African languages remains popular to this day. In any case, in sub-Saharan Africa from Senegal to Somalia one can find Sufi poetry of great power that continues to move the souls of men and women and that remains an integral part of the culture of the people.

In the Malay world, with the most homogeneous Islamic population, linguistically and ethnically speaking, the Malay language has been the most important Islamic language during the past five centuries and remains so today despite the presence of other languages such as Javanese. In this ambience, as mentioned earlier, Sufi literature played a definitive role in molding Malay into an Islamic language. I have already alluded to the role of Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī in connection with this question but must add here that he also wrote Sufi poetry and that such poetry continues to be read widely in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and southern Thailand.

Some of this vast body of Sufi literature in various Islamic tongues has been translated into English, German, French, and other European languages, especially from Persian. In fact, it was mostly through such translations that the modern West first became acquainted with Sufism. During the last few decades some European languages such as English are themselves becoming primary vehicles of Sufi literature and especially poetry, and it becomes difficult to draw a line between translation of poetry and original poetic composition, as we see in the poems translated by Martin Lings, several of which I have quoted in this book. When the supreme Sufi poet of the Persian language, Rūmī, becomes the most widely sold poet in America, it is time to realize that Sufi poetry in English has become a part of the contemporary American literary landscape rather than a literature that is of interest only to scholars of Islamic culture and history.

In any case, Sufi literature, and especially poetry, is among the most important legacies of the Sufi tradition. It provides for the contemporary world an exposition of both the doctrine and practice of Sufism and the spiritual universe in which it breathes, in language more accessible than that found in abstract treatises on doctrine or long expositions on spiritual practices, the virtues, and so forth, such as those mentioned in the appendixes. This legacy is of central significance for

the Islamic world and is also growing in importance in the West as the number of translations, many carried out in a highly poetic form, increases in various European languages.

MUSIC

Harmony is the result of the manifestation of the One in the many, and since the manifold is created by the One, harmony pervades creation. The cosmos and its functioning are based on a harmony whose origin is beyond the cosmos. We human beings are given eyes to see and ears to hear this harmony if only we become cured of the habitual blindness and deafness that now are second nature to us as fallen beings. One of the miraculous manifestations of this harmony is music, whose melodies, rhythms, and harmonies in the technical musical sense *can* reflect the cosmic harmony and lead us back to the Origin if music remains faithful to its traditional nature and cacophony is not mistaken for music. Of course, not all that is called music today falls under the category of the traditional and particularly sacred music that we have in mind.

The power of sacred music is, needless to say, universal, hence its importance in sacred rites and spiritual practices of nearly all religions, from the chanting of the Vedas to the sacred songs of Native Americans and including, of course, the great Christian tradition of sacred music going back to Gregorian chants.

From the beginning, Sufism was fully aware of this power of sacred music. It interiorized the musical traditions in the Islamic world and made them vehicles for the flight of the soul to God. I recall several decades ago when the great European violinist, Yehudi Menuhin, visited Tehran after spending some time in India studying and hearing classical Indian music. Until that time he had had no experience of classical Persian music, which is deeply impregnated by the spirituality of Sufism. A number of friends and I arranged for him an intimate concert of this music with only a few people present so that he could listen to this music in a private ambience. Listening intently, he was deeply moved and when asked his evaluation of what he had heard, he said, "This music is a ladder of the soul to God." Being a great musician with spiritual sensibility, he found immediately in this music what the Sufis have claimed throughout the Islamic world for all forms of sacred music that have in fact been cultivated and performed to a large extent by the Sufis themselves over the ages. A Sufi master once said

that the effect on the soul upon hearing one hour of a spiritual concert (*samā'*), when the soul is ready to hear its message, is equivalent to a thousand days of spiritual practice. Rūmī, who was a great lover of music and very sensitive to its beauty, spoke of music as the vehicle for the expression of the deepest spiritual realities and would fall into an exalted spiritual state (*ḥāl*) upon hearing just a few rhythms or melodies of music.

Sufism was the main force in the creation of several major musical traditions in the Islamic world, from what in Arabic is called *musīqā'l-andalus* (Andalusian music) to Sundanese music in Java. In India and Pakistan, Sufis and even non-Sufis with some spiritual proclivity listen to *qawwālī* and *khayāl* singing, as well as *rāgs*, which were taken from Hindu music and Islamicized. In Persia and Afghanistan they listen to *ghazals* of Ḥāfiẓ and other Sufi poets accompanied by the classical modes as well as *mathnawīkhānī*, which means chanting of the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī set to a special genre of music. In the eastern Arab world the classical modes continue to convey the ethos of Sufism while many poems, including those in praise of the Prophet, are sung (this and the chanting of Sufi songs in general being called *nashīd*) and sometimes accompanied by instruments. In the western part of the Arab world in addition to Andalusian music there is also the specifically Sufi chanting to be found in many Sufi centers. In Turkey the tradition of classical music is closely associated with the Mawlawiyyah Order of Rūmī, and most of the orders also have regular sessions in which *ilāhīs*, meaning Sufi songs, consisting of Sufi poems of such masters as Yūnus Emre, are sung accompanied by musical instruments. The same holds true for sub-Saharan Africa, the Malay world, among Kurdish, Baluchi, Berber, and other local ethnic groups, and even among Chinese Muslims, especially those of Xinjiang, who have preserved a rich musical tradition. Each of these musical traditions has a distinct language, as do Sufi poems in diverse Islamic languages, but they all speak of our separation from our Beloved and provide wind currents for the wings of the soul to fly and return to Her abode.

The musical heritage provided for us by Sufism is of great contemporary importance. Besides its spiritual and even therapeutic value for Muslims, the heritage is one of the most accessible means for Westerners to approach the realities of Sufism and Islam itself. With the eclipse of sacrality in much of Western music after Bach, and especially in recent times, many Western lovers of music have turned during the last few

decades to non-Western musical traditions. It is remarkable how in this ambience Sufi music is playing such a central role. This fact is notable particularly because there is such aversion to matters Islamic in many circles in the West and especially in Europe today. And it is precisely in Europe, in such countries as France and Spain, that there is such a powerful attraction to the various traditions of Sufi music. The Fez Festival of Sacred Music, held annually in the city of Fez in Morocco, draws not only performers but also many listeners from Europe. Furthermore, whenever there is a good concert of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and other forms of music of the Islamic peoples in Europe, the concert is usually sold out long in advance. Sufism has of course left its imprint upon many other arts, such as calligraphy and architecture, but its musical heritage is of particular significance today for the world at large. On the wing of melodies, rhythms, and harmonies, beyond the concepts of theology and the dicta of the legal aspects of religion, these musical traditions are playing a vital role in bridging the divide between the West and the Islamic world at a time when there is so much need of bridge building. But above all, the sacred music of the Sufis has the power to awaken in the soul its need to travel to the Garden of Truth and also to help it along on the journey.

A SPIRITUAL ETHICS

A morality that is intellectually and spiritually opaque and is purely sentimental can drive many an intelligent person away from religion or reduce religion to only externals and lead to what is called fundamentalism. The first possibility has been realized extensively in the West since the Renaissance, while the second is to be found worldwide today in Christianity as well as in Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism. Sufism, while always emphasizing ethical behavior and the necessity of morality for those who wish to follow the path, has also sought to spiritualize ethics, to cast the light of intelligence upon the virtues. The works of Imam Qushayrī, Ibn al-'Arīf, Imam Ghazzālī, and many others, some already cited in earlier chapters and some not, bear testimony to this fact. But more important than writings has been the manner of living of Sufis, who have demonstrated in a concrete fashion what it means to live ethically in a spiritual manner and in opposition to hypocrisy, false humility, ostentatious charity, and the like. As mentioned, some Sufis, like the *Malāmatīyyah* or the People of Blame, went so far as to perform

acts that appeared outwardly as blameworthy, thereby inviting blame by self-righteous hypocrites upon themselves, while in reality their actions were virtuous and not against legal injunctions of the religion. Such people provided an antidote to religious hypocrisy, which can and usually does manifest itself in societies where religion is as strong as secularism and secular hypocrisy are in the secular societies of today.

The spiritual ethics of Sufism, based on the spiritual and intellectual significance of such virtues as humility, charity and compassion, and sincerity and truthfulness, is a great treasure for the contemporary Islamic world and the antidote to self-righteousness and fanaticism. But it can also be of great value to those Westerners who seek to be ethical in a religious manner but find ordinary morality as taught in many churches or synagogues to be unintelligible and opaque. They do not have to be Muslims to appreciate the easily accessible Sufi ethics, which has its equivalents in the writings of many great Western mystics.

TECHNIQUES OF SPIRITUAL REALIZATION

To walk upon the path to the Garden, to get from Here to There and then realize that the There is Here, requires certain specific spiritual techniques beyond simply thinking about the spiritual world and having faith, although both of these are indispensable prerequisites for the journey. There is the need to learn how to control the mind through meditation; how to control the body through correct breathing and right postures; how to place the Divine Reality through the Names revealed by that Reality at the center of our being; how to escape from the labyrinth of the psyche and to transmute the psyche in an alchemical manner so that it can become wed to the Spirit; how to become aware of our subtle bodies, deeper levels of being, and higher orders of consciousness; and many other matters. One can simply wait upon God and expect Him to lift us to His Presence. That is certainly a possibility, one followed by many Christian and some Muslim mystics. But walking upon the path to the Garden is an active matter requiring the necessary spiritual techniques, and Sufism is a tradition that, while allowing for the possibility of a passive form of mysticism, emphasizes the active role of the adept and therefore seeks to teach the adept how to walk, how to become a wayfarer (*sālik*), and finally how to fly.

Like all integral spiritual traditions such as Zen and Shin Buddhism and Hindu Yoga, Sufism is still in full possession of its techniques of

spiritual realization. This living treasure is of course of the greatest importance for Muslims who wish to begin the journey back to God while they are alive here and now, but it is also precious for Westerners. After the Second World War, a number of people from the West realized how important it was to master the techniques of spiritual realization, and they turned first to Zen and Yoga before becoming interested in Sufism. What Sufism offers that is especially significant for the West is that it is a living esoteric path within the Abrahamic family of religions, to which Judaism and Christianity, the main Western religions, also belong. Some Catholic and Protestant theologians and spiritual practitioners have tried to incorporate certain spiritual techniques from East and South Asia into Christianity and have spoken of Zen Catholicism or Christian Yoga, as also have some Jewish seekers for Judaism. In this domain, however, the most accessible and easily applicable techniques to a Jewish and Christian setting are perhaps those of Sufism, which belongs to the world of Abrahamic monotheism and shares many basic tenets with Judaism and Christianity. In the Middle Ages there developed in fact a Jewish school of mysticism called Jewish Sufism associated with such figures as the grandson of the great Maimonides. Such a possibility certainly exists today.

METAPHYSICAL AND COSMOLOGICAL DOCTRINES

Pure metaphysics, which is also the theoretical dimension of salvific knowledge, is the science of the Real and is therefore most essential for human beings, since they have ultimately no possibility of escaping from reality. In the modern West, metaphysics and gnosis soon became a branch of philosophy, understood in the modern sense, and this subordination was followed by the complete rejection of metaphysics by many schools of Western thought, especially from the nineteenth century onward, as we see in Marxism, Comptianism, logical positivism, Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy, and the like. Soon real metaphysics was forgotten, not to mention the means of realizing its truths. But the thirst for real knowledge continued to manifest itself in certain Western souls, who again turned to the Orient and, with its help, to the forgotten metaphysical tradition of the West. In this quest for metaphysical knowledge Hinduism, especially the school of Advaita Vedanta, attracted many people. It is only during the past few decades

that the metaphysics of Sufism, as elucidated primarily in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī and his school (to which I shall turn more fully in appendix 2), has become available to the larger Western public.

This vast body of metaphysical knowledge, along with traditional cosmology, which results from applying metaphysical principles to both the macrocosmic and microcosmic domains (not what is understood by cosmology and psychology today), is one of the great legacies of Sufism. This body of knowledge provides a key to understanding the nature of the Real, the reality of the cosmos, and our own being. It contains a map for getting from Here to There as well as the means of realizing that There is Here and Now, at the center of our being and in the present moment.

In the traditional Islamic world this knowledge was known to only a few, but now with the spread of all kinds of modern secular philosophies and problems created by ill-posed questions that threaten the very citadel of faith, this metaphysical and cosmological knowledge bequeathed by over a millennium of Sufism to the present-day generation is of the utmost importance for the Islamic tradition as a whole. It also provides the necessary preliminary map for those, including non-Muslims, who want to know who they are, where they are, and where they should be going.

INITIATIC CURRENT

Above and beyond all that we have mentioned, Sufism offers here and now what is perhaps the rarest and most precious gift in today’s conditions, and that is an authentic initiatic current (*walāyah/wilāyah*), discussed earlier in this book. This current has been transmitted over the centuries in an unbroken chain going back to the Prophet. Sufism is not the only esoteric tradition today in which is found authentic initiation and the power and grace that are its concomitants. One can find this possibility in certain forms of Hinduism and esoteric Buddhism, as seen in such schools as Vajrayāna or Tibetan Buddhism, and even in Christianity, where this aspect of the tradition has been eclipsed to a large extent for a long time except in Orthodoxy. The availability of the initiatic current in Sufism to those qualified to receive it is of the utmost importance in present-day conditions, not only for Muslims but within the whole Abrahamic world and even for those who have left Western exoteric religion altogether in quest of other paths of spir-

itual realization and genuine esoteric teachings. This aspect of the Sufi heritage is also particularly significant in a world in which there is so much pseudoesotericism and so-called teachers with extravagant claims, some of whom unfortunately also wear the garb of Sufism. There is therefore the need for discernment and the presence of an orthodox framework to be able to distinguish the wheat from the chaff and to be able to benefit in an authentic manner from the initiatic current present within Sufism.

SUFI SHRINES

While the Sufi saint is still alive, the saint's *barakah*, or grace, is mostly confined to his or her companions and followers. But after death this *barakah* becomes more public, and members of the Islamic community at large are drawn to the shrines of these saints through a profound intuition. Putting aside those affected by either modernism or fundamentalist puritanism, the vast majority of Muslims, who still follow traditional Islam, visit such shrines in great numbers and draw spiritual sustenance from such pilgrimages. These shrines are in a sense the extension of the tomb of the Prophet in Medina and connect the pious to the foundational figure of their religion and through him to God.

Sufi shrines are found everywhere in the Islamic world from Malaysia to Morocco. They are located on the tops of mountains and in the middle of the desert, in small villages as well as in urban centers. Many Islamic cities, such as Cairo and Fez, came into being as a result of the tomb of saints who were descendants of the Prophet but who were also considered pivotal figures of Sufism. Furthermore, after the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina (and until a few decades ago Jerusalem), the most extensive pilgrimage by hundreds of thousands if not millions of pious Muslims is to such shrines, as one sees in the annual pilgrimage to Ajmer and the tomb of Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī in India or Tanta in Egypt, where the tomb of Aḥmad al-Badawī is to be found.

It might be thought that such shrines belong to popular piety and have little to do with those who walk on the path to the Garden of Truth. This claim is, however, false. First of all, many Sufi including even advanced ones, often visit such sites and derive special inspiration from them. Second, in many places in the Islamic world Sufi gatherings are held in or adjacent to these shrines, whose *barakah* plays an important role in the spiritual practices of members of various Sufi

orders. Some Sufis even call such shrines a reflection of the paradisaical Garden. Of course, of all the legacies Sufism has left for us today, this one is of consequence almost completely only for Muslims while the others are also of great value for all men and women who are attracted to the spiritual life whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim. And yet even this legacy can be like a magnet for certain non-Muslims, drawing them to the transcendent and immanent Reality that they seek.

CAN CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM THE HERITAGE OF SUFISM?

We live in a world, especially in the West, that emphasizes change and worships the deity of newness, a world in which practically everything around us is considered outmoded faster than at any time in human history. The thought, art, culture, and even religion of an earlier generation are made to appear old and not pertinent to us except in fits of nostalgia, which themselves change rapidly. In such a world, how can one benefit from the heritage of Sufism, which over a millennium of history has addressed men and women very different from us? The answer to this question is that in the deeper sense we carry within ourselves the same reality as did our ancestors in the past. Our deepest needs, such as having hope, finding meaning in life, discovering happiness, learning to face tribulations, pain, sorrow, and misery, and being able to confront the reality of death, are the same for us as for men and women who lived in the past and whom the teachings of Sufism addressed over the ages.

Human beings are still born, live, and die. Our consciousness and our intelligence still seek meaning in our lives and in the world about us. We still face inner and outer obstacles in our earthly life. We still become despondent and need hope. We still seek a haven in the storm of life. And in the deepest sense we are still beings created for immortality and in need of the Infinite Reality, which is beyond our mental, psychological, and physical limitations and constraints. Some still crave the love that “moves the heavens and the stars”; they are thirsty for the wine of gnosis, for that light of liberating knowledge that alone can illuminate our whole being. Amid the fanfare about all the ways modern science and technology transform modern life, the inner person, who stands beyond all the din of the world and who does not surrender to external forces, is still alive within us.

It is this inner person, whom some Sufis have called “the man of light” within us, who is attracted to the heritage of Sufism, not as a heritage of only historical and archaeological interest, but as a living reality of significance for us here and now. For the spiritual person not mesmerized by the glitter of a world that has lost its spiritual mooring and is spinning out of control, the message of Sufism—its literature and music, its ethics, its spiritual methods, and its *barakah*—are of interest not simply because they were addressed to men and women of this or that culture in days of old. They are of interest because they address us here and now, because they deal with matters that are terribly real and have the deepest existential consequences for us. For example, Sufism teaches us how to be alone with God and be happy in this solitude. How many people today suffer from loneliness and become thereby depressed? The Sufi message can turn this state from one of misery to one of joy. What greater need is there today than being able to see the other as ourselves and not as the enemy? Sufism teaches us the means of breaking the walls of the ego and realizing directly that the other *is* us in the deepest sense. How many of us yearn for love? Sufism enables the spring of love for both God and His creatures to gush forth within our souls. And how many yearn for intellectual clarity and unity of modes of knowing in a world in which knowledge has become so compartmentalized? Again Sufism in its doctrinal aspect can provide the solution.

The journey to the Garden of Truth is not something that interested only men and women of old. It remains the supreme journey for us as human beings today even if so many of the external conditions of our lives are different from the patterns of that traditional world in which such teachings were first cultivated. Nothing is more timely than the timeless: surely this dictum applies to the message of Sufism, which being timeless is of pertinence to all instances of time and all loci of space wherein human beings have lived, live today, and shall live in the future, a message that relates to our ultimate future in the Beyond as the Now, and our final destination There as the Here.

SUFISM IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD TODAY

In dealing with Sufism today, it is important to say something about the state of this spiritual tradition in the Islamic world at the present moment. One has to avoid two extremes, both of which are erroneous:

first, that Sufism was a medieval phenomenon like medieval Christian mysticism and that even if Sufism survived beyond what the West calls the medieval period, classical Sufism died out, being replaced by so-called popular Sufism; and second, that the Sufi tradition has continued with the same strength as in centuries past. Actually, Sufism did not die in the Middle Ages, and even what is called classical Sufism in the West has continued to this day. Many great saints have continued to appear. Many important intellectual expositions have been written right up to today. Sufi poetry continues to appear in most Islamic languages, and Sufi music continues to be performed on the highest level. There is of course a popular dimension to Sufism, but it does not define the whole of Sufism today any more than it did hundreds of years ago. One can observe altogether a remarkable continuity in the Sufi tradition, which remains a living spiritual reality and which continues to be practiced by numerous people.

And yet Sufism has been weakened to some extent by attacks against it within the Islamic world since the nineteenth century. During that century one can observe the revival and even founding of certain Sufi orders, such as the Sanūsiyyah. Yet at the same time Sufism was opposed by two forces that were themselves totally opposed to each other but in the deeper sense were two sides of the same coin. These two forces, which are still present, were modernism and puritanical reformism, now called by many fundamentalism. The modernists were completely infatuated with everything modern and Western, and of course for them *Western* did not mean St. Francis of Assisi or St. Teresa of Ávila, but worldliness, power, and material gain. Reacting against the domination of much of the Islamic world by the West, the modernists tried to find a scapegoat for the defeat of Muslims, and many turned their wrath against Sufism, accusing it of preaching passivity and otherworldliness and therefore causing the weakness of Islamic society. Nowhere is this modernist opposition to Sufism more evident than in Turkey, where, after rising to power, the very modernistic Atatürk banned the Sufi orders and many Sufi masters were imprisoned and some killed. This negative attitude toward Sufism can be seen even in a figure such as Muḥammad Iqbal, the ideological father of Pakistan, who was a gifted poet and an admirer of Rūmī and yet who strongly opposed much of Sufi literature, doctrine, and practices.

The second force that began to oppose Sufism in the nineteenth century, an opposition that continues to this day, was that of the puri-

tanical reformism associated most of all with Wāhhābism, which arose in what is today Saudi Arabia, and more generally with what is called the Salafīyyah movement, that is, a movement that claims to return to the pure Islam of the ancestors (*salaf*). This movement was not confined to one country but spread in different forms to many Muslim lands, being more successful in some areas than others. Those who followed these ideas sought to overcome the weakness of the Islamic world by brushing aside thirteen or fourteen centuries of Islamic history, opposing traditional Islamic art, philosophy, and theology and cultural habits of Muslims that they considered the consequence of decadence resulting from luxury and wayward living in Islamic cities. But most of all they were opposed to Sufism. This is especially true of Wāhhābism, which opposed both Sufism and Shi'ism virulently, considering the visitation to the tomb of saints as "saint worship" and idolatry. For a long time Sufism was completely banned in Saudi Arabia, whose religious orientation has been Wāhhābī since the founding of the state. Only recently has there been a change of attitude on behalf of the government with some freedom given to Sufi orders to function in the kingdom.

These two forces were able to weaken Sufism to some degree but not by any means to destroy it. The Sufi orders remained strong and open into the twentieth century in such countries as the Sudan, Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, Caucasia, Persia, Central Asia (before Lenin), and Muslim India. If anything, after the Second World War Sufism made a comeback, especially among well-educated classes, who were becoming aware of the spiritual crisis in the modern West and sought to return to their spiritual roots. Of course, the situation is not like the thirteenth century, when, in one lifetime, you could have met Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī in Egypt, Ibn 'Arabī in Syria, and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī in Anatolia, as you could sit at the feet of St. Francis or St. Clare, Meister Eckhart, and St. Thomas during the same century in Europe. But the situation of Islam is not that of the West today as far as mystical and esoteric teachings are concerned. Probably there is no church in Germany today where one can hear an Eckhartian sermon any more than there is a university in France where one could study with someone like Hugh of St. Victor or St. Bonaventure. In the Islamic world, however, the mystical tradition continues to subsist, and there are still saintly figures, initiatic practices, and mystical teachings, as one sees in the vitality of such Sufi orders as the Qādirriyyah, Khalwatiyyah, Shādhiliyyah, and Naqshbandiyyah. (I shall deal with these and other

orders and some of the contemporary saintly figures of Sufism in the appendixes that follow.) Despite being weakened to some extent by the onslaught of modernism and fundamentalism, Sufism, which is the antidote to both, is still very much alive and accessible for those who seek. The saying of Christ, "Seek and ye shall find," still holds true in its esoteric sense for the world dominated by the Quranic revelation.

SUFISM IN THE WEST YESTERDAY AND TODAY

It is strange that during the European Middle Ages, when so many Islamic works in the sciences, philosophy, and even theology were translated into Latin, no Sufi texts were rendered into this language; at least none has been discovered so far. The case is different for several vernacular languages such as Provençal and Catalan, in which local versions of Sufi narratives can be found. Moreover, certain initiatic organizations in the West had contact with currents of Islamic esoterism, for example, the Order of the Temple and even the *Fedeli d'amore*, to which Dante, who used the architecture of the Nocturnal Ascent (*al-mi'rāj*) of the Prophet in his *Divine Comedy*, belonged. In Spain, contact with Sufism carried into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as one sees in the works of both St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Ávila.

All such contacts came to an end in Europe from the late Renaissance to the nineteenth century despite the presence of many Sufi orders in areas at the heart of Europe such as Bosnia and Albania. Interest in Sufism in the West in modern times had to wait for the translation of Sufi classics from Persian and Arabic into German, English, French, and some other European languages beginning at the end of the eighteenth century. With access to translations, some major figures of the Romantic period became attracted to Sufism. One needs only recall Goethe, who was so devoted to Ḥāfiẓ, Rückert, both poet and translator of Sufi literature, and many others. The translations of Sufi texts into German were also of special significance for the first contact of the United States with Sufism, for the school of New England Transcendentalism where this contact took place became interested in Persian Sufi literature mostly through German rather than English translations. New England Transcendentalists, such as Emerson, who were intensely interested in Sufism were called the "Persians of Concord," a remarkable phenomenon of American cultural history to which not enough attention has been paid. In any case, the influence of Sufism is quite evident

in the work of Emerson, such as his long poem "Sa'dī," as well as in the thoughts and words of Thoreau and Hawthorne.

One had to wait until the twentieth century for the Sufi orders to sink their roots into the soil of the Occident, for it was at the beginning of that century that a small number of eminent Europeans entered the Shādhiliyyah Order. In the 1920s a teacher of the Chishtiyyah Order, Pir Inayat Khan, came to the West and settled in Europe, where a group assembled around him, although many of his entourage were interested in Sufism only culturally and not as a spiritual path and did not even embrace Islam, which, as mentioned, is absolutely necessary for the serious practice of Sufism. In addition to the Shādhiliyyah and Chishtiyyah, other Sufi orders gradually spread to the West, including the Qādiriyyah, the Naqshbandiyyah, the Ni'malullahiyyah, the Tijāniyyah, the Murīdiyyah, the Khalwatiyyah-Jarrāḥiyyah, and many others. The twentieth century marks the first time that the Sufi tradition became part and parcel of the spiritual landscape of the Occident. During that period there appeared in Europe and America authentic masters with serious followers as well as pseudomasters with pretensions that would never be accepted in the Islamic world. There has even appeared in the West a so-called Sufism outside the framework of Islam, which is totally unknown to the followers of that religion. As I mentioned already, Islamic history includes a few who, being "attracted to God" (*majdhūb*) and in an "intoxicated" state of consciousness, did not practice the *Shari'ah* (although they were still Muslims), but these were rare exceptions. The wholesale marketing of Sufism divorced from the Islamic tradition is a modern, Western innovation having nothing to do with the authentic Sufi tradition.

Nevertheless, many traditional and orthodox Sufi orders have spread to the West and now have many followers, including those of Western origin, and an ever growing body of Sufi literature is being made available in European languages, especially English and French. How significant is this body of teachings and availability of methods of spiritual practice for the West? I believe that the impact of this major spiritual and intellectual tradition on the West can be seen on three levels. First, there are those who yearn for the knowledge of the Garden of Truth and the means with which to reach it and who, not having found such a possibility within their own tradition, turn to Islam and Sufism. They are those who enter Islam and the Sufi tradition and practice this spiritual path fully. Second, there are those who follow spiritual paths in

their own religion, primarily Judaism and Christianity, but draw from Sufism certain ideas, symbols, methods of meditation, inspiration, and so forth, as some Christians and Jews have done from Yoga and Zen. Third, there are those for whom the Sufi tradition is the occasion for recollecting elements lost in their own religion, aiding in the rediscovery and recovery of the integral reality of their own tradition.

All of these possibilities have been realized to some extent in both Europe and America and are bound to be realized even more in the future. In any case, the Sufi tradition makes available in the Occident a metaphysical doctrine and means of its realization, which have become less and less available in the West since the Middle Ages. This tradition also provides the most important means for the creation of understanding between various religions in general and the members of the Abrahamic family in particular as well as mutual comprehension between the West and the Islamic world on the highest intellectual and spiritual level.

ENTRY INTO THE GARDEN OF TRUTH: THE GOAL OF HUMAN LIFE

We were created to transcend the finitude and limitations of the human state. The mystery of our life on earth is not only that we are born, live, and die in a journey whose beginning and end we know not; it is also that within this horizontal journey we are given the possibility of wayfaring vertically beyond all the temporal and spatial accidents of our terrestrial existence. And it is essentially for the sake of making this second journey that we were put here on earth. This journey, which takes us to the abode of the One and the Garden of Truth, is the primary *raison d'être* of our existence in this world and the end of the journey, the ultimate goal of human life.

From one point of view, the journey considered horizontally seems to be long, but from the metaphysical point of view, which is based on the vertical dimension, it is nothing other than that single instant when we surrender ourselves to God and begin the path of ascent toward Him. We were created to know the Garden of Truth and ultimately the Gardener Himself, and to reach it through the full realization of this knowledge. Sufism is one of the major paths that the Gardener has created, within the framework of Islam, to the Garden. Surely there are other paths and Sufism would be the first to attest to the universality

of revelation. But we are concerned in this book with this particular path and have sought to say something on the basis of this particular path about the nature of the Garden and the Gardener, the nature of the path to the Garden, and the long and rich tradition that over the centuries has made possible journeying upon this path and still does today.

Let us then take advantage of the here and now to travel beyond all times and places, before the hand of destiny removes from us the possibility of that vertical journey, which begins here and now and finally returns to Here and Now. We travel to the There only to discover that it is Here, and to the future that is beyond earthly time only to see that it is Now. To make the journey to the Garden means to go from here to There, and the fruit of the journey is the realization that There is Here. That is why in the Quran, God addresses the Prophet, "If my servant asks thee about Me, truly I am Near." That Divine Reality, the Gardener, is Near; we have only to realize His Nearness. As for the Garden of Truth, like the Gardener, it resides at the center of our being. Happy are those who are able to reach this Garden while they are still in the human state and have the possibility of doing so.

O Saki, with the light of wine kindle our cup,
O musician, play, for the world has to our wish surrendered.
We have seen in the cup, the image of the Face of the Friend,
Oh how ignorant thou art of the delight of our constant drink-
ing.³

Ḥāfiẓ

wa' Llāh" a'lam
And God knoweth best

