

THE SECRET MEANING

Rumi's Spiritual Lessons on Sufism



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That which God said to the rose,
and caused it to laugh in full-blown beauty,
He said to my heart,
and made it a hundred times more beautiful.

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“Your task is not to seek for
love, but merely to seek and
find all the barriers within
yourself that you have built
against it.”

Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi
1207-1273 AD



Sema outside Rumi's tomb

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1. Introduction

Introduction

Islam as a religion has a great mystical tradition which can be found in the works of Sufis like Rumi. It is in need of reform to correct the interpretation that fanatics are making from the literal word as apposed to its mystical inner meaning. There are many verses and topics in the Koran which need *deep thought and guidance to avoid being misled* by one's own interpretation and imagination. There is also a need to put into perspective many laws and practices created for and relevant in a hostile desert environment thirteen centuries ago.

The current problem of world-terrorism has blighted the lives of many families and communities. Young boys and girls have sacrificed their lives in the name of God – a God that never preached intolerance or hatred for non-Muslims. This environment sharply underscores the need for a refocus on Islam's Sufi teachings which preaches the equality and tolerance of all religions, of man and woman, and regards *Jihad* as the purging of one's heart of all evils (the fight against ones nafs (ego)). This *infinitely tolerant* and open Sufi world-view currently runs the risk of fanatics suppressing it to the point of oblivion.

In India, the majority of conversions to Islam through past centuries happened because people were attracted to its peaceful Sufi teachings and the spiritual powers of its Saints – this needs focus on and Muslims must do it themselves.

Rumi and Sufism

There is tremendous spiritual depth in the teachings of Rumi and he is also widely accepted amongst non-Muslims as a great spiritual master - in September 2007 BBC called him 'the most popular poet in America' for many years. 2007 was declared as the 'International Rumi Year' by UNESCO. There is a *timelessness and universality* to Rumi's teachings making them relevant in a modern world even after a passage of 800 years.

Rumi's works are *spiritual works* – they are a reflection of him 'living in God' and being a mere instrument in his hands – it reflects God's brilliance. He says:

This poetry. I never know what I'm going to say. I don't plan it. When I'm outside the saying of it, I get very quiet and rarely speak at all.

Sufism as a discipline is largely Islamic Sufism but Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Jews can also be Sufis. Sufism is a philosophy, a spiritual discipline, a relationship between master and disciple, a spiritual path. *Sufi teachings are compatible with every religion and are for everyone*. God is like a picture being looked at by different people – depending on where you're standing you would describe it a bit differently and focus on different aspects – this is religion. This does not change the nature of the picture which is the exact same for all viewers. Rumi says that each religion has a different desire and design:

Christian, Jew, Muslim, shaman, Zoroastrian, stone, ground, mountain, river,
each has a secret way of being with the mystery, unique and not to be judged.

However, while the ways of different religions may vary, but the goal is one – all roads led to God (Allah in Islam or Parvardigar in Sufism). Rumi says that while the prayer of every religion is different, still, faith (knowingness) does not change from religion to religion. *The states that it produces, its place in life, and its effects are the same everywhere.*

Rumi's words underscore the universality of Sufism:

Why think thus O men of piety
I have returned to sobriety
I am neither a Moslem nor a Hindu
I am not Christian, Zoroastrian, nor Jew

While attempting to change the way we look at the world around us, the reader should adopt *ideas from the field of change management*. We need to *confront reality* and establish a compelling need for change; strongly believe in the path of Sufism as our chosen path to God notwithstanding our religion; and adopt the ideas, approaches, disciplines and decisions in this book to bring about real and total transformation in our character. For example, the student of the Madrassa - who has likely learnt the Koran by rote without understanding its inner meaning that Sufism brings out - needs to first and foremost establish the need for change before he can bring about any transformation in himself. Rumi says knowing the holy book by heart is of no use unless one understands its inner meaning. He believed that *the purpose is the root of the matter and the rest is merely a headache*. He asks us to break the barriers in our mind and look at things with an open mind – he believed that conventional opinion is the ruin of our souls. Baha'uddin says that beliefs which were due to our past experiences or education are minor ones, even though they were once of much use to us “they may become useless or even pitfalls”.

My re-introduction to Rumi was purely by accident. While I had heard of his name and had even read some of his sayings quoting them in an earlier book, I had never looked deeper into his writings and sayings. Yet, one day by accident while I was surfing the net for something, I found the word Rumi in one of the searches. I found I was drawn to it like a magnet and read some of his sayings. His words this time round had a *hypnotic effect* on me. Steeped as I had become over the last few years in materialism, it was like a sudden flash of divine light pulling me back to reality. Many people may *trip on a pebble, to most it would mean nothing, but to some the universe can change* by that very act. This is what happened to me. His complete works are accessible on the net and I undertook a detailed study finding to my considerable joy that many mystical truths were revealed by him with very few words. Rumi believed in conveying the message directly and said that where elaborate words are used their purpose is forgotten. He is indeed a perfect master.

There is no doubt that Rumi was a devout Muslim and many of his verses are direct translations of the Koran. However, he was a perfect master and looked for the mystical inner meaning in words. He had a refreshing tolerance of non-Muslims and intolerance of insincere pretenders of all religions including his own. *It would not be true to say that the true Sufi has to be a Muslim*. Yes, the Sufi has to be accepted by a perfect master and be obedient to his every word. Unless God wills it the master shall not accept the disciple. Perfect masters are very few.

Perfect Masters

My own spiritual master and perfect master is Sai Baba of Shirdi. Other perfect masters of his lifetime are Hazrat Baba Tajuddin of Nagpur, Upasni Maharaj, Narayan Maharaj, and Hazrat Babajan. There are said to be five perfect masters on the earth at all times. My master was the Chief (Qutub-i-Irshad) of the five perfect masters of his time. He used to quote Rumi to his Muslim disciple Abdul Baba. Another perfect master was Meher Baba. Other great Sufi saints and perfect masters from earlier centuries include Baba Nanak Shah (called Guru Nanak by his Hindu and Sikh devotees) the founder of the Sikh religion and Rumi of course. My master taught me to *respect all these saints* and drew me specifically close to Baba Tajuddin, Rumi, Baba Nanak, and a living perfect master Sri Sri Ravishankar who I have had the good fortune to meet. My master wanted me to learn from all these saints while having full faith and abiding by his instructions. As a devotee, I had to love my master whole-heartedly, surrender to him completely, and prostrate before him reverentially. To receive the divine grace of any of these perfect masters *no formal Sufi initiation is needed* – devotion alone (and the consent of God) is sufficient to win them over. No middle-man is needed.



Sai Baba



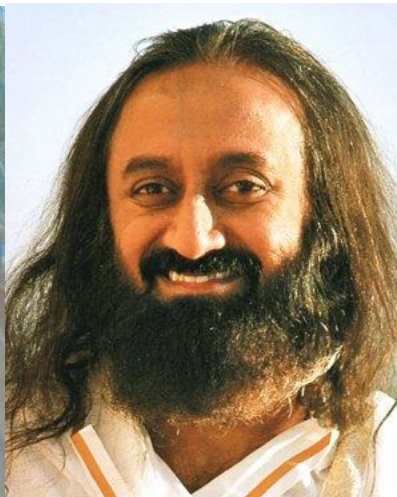
Baba Tajuddin



Rumi



Baba Nanak



Sri Sri Ravishankar

I have enjoyed the love of my master, been ruined by his indifference, been corrected by his wrath and saved by his compassion...*I am grateful for all these dimensions of his love.* He is the doer in my life not me. This quote of Rumi best describes my master:

The Sufi opens his hands to the Universe
and gives away each instant, free.

Unlike someone who begs on the street for money to survive
a dervish begs to give you his life.

My master never expected anything from his devotees - on the contrary, he always tries his best to lead them on the path of spiritual progress. He was born with this purpose.

My master although self-realised, lived his life interacting with people and teaching them how to act and behave in this world. Outwardly he laughed, played and cried like all other people, but inwardly he was wide awake to his duties and mission. He was beyond the pair of opposites of pain and pleasure – he was never dejected nor elated. He felt no pleasure because he was worshipped and no pain if he was disregarded. He lived in constant communion with God and other Saints in a state of ‘Existence, Knowledge and Bliss’ and was all-pervasive i.e., present everywhere. He was also all-knowing – he knew the past, present and future of every man. He knew their thoughts. It was a devotee’s good fortune and store of past merits that led them to become a disciple of my master. As a perfect master if he wanted his devotees to visit Shirdi, he could pull them there like sparrows on a thread, especially those who have an ardent desire to visit Shirdi (you realise your spiritual needs if you truly feel intently). He had extraordinary love for his devotees. His method of teaching was unique and varied. He wanted devotees to pray to him directly without any middlemen. His words always had some deep spiritual meaning and were never hollow. He lived by the begging bowl, was a celibate and was free from the desires of family, wealth and fame. He was the epitome of humility and detachment. His life was a living example of service to society. Even as he breathed his last breaths in sickness, he did charity with his own hands setting an example for all his disciples.

The spiritual path needs the guidance of a perfect master. Many people don’t understand this – some follow rituals without a change of heart, others search for knowledge and puff up their ego, and others try to follow God directly without a master. It is well-established fact, that though we try hundreds of means, we do not attain the spiritual goal of life, unless a perfect master blesses us with his grace. The master helps reduce dangers and makes the process faster. My master stated that to see God one has to surrender five things - the five vital forces, the five senses (five of action and five of perception), the mind, the intellect and the ego. The path of self-realization is 'as hard as to tread on the edge of a razor'. The qualifications for self-realization include ten elements – an intense desire to get free; a feeling of disgust with the things of this world and the next; introversion or looking within to inner self; purging away of sins; right conduct including a life of truth, penance, insight, and a life of celibacy; preferring the good over the pleasant; control of the mind and the senses; purification of the mind till there is discrimination between the unreal and the real and non-attachment to the unreal; the necessity of a master; and God’s grace which is the most essential thing. To know God a man’s mind must be free of attachment to wealth, family and prosperity – he must be desireless. If there is even a little trace of greed in the mind, all spiritual endeavors are of no avail. Purification of mind is absolutely necessary; without it, all our spiritual endeavors are nothing but useless show and

pomp. The *spiritual mind* is one that is clean and uncluttered in its thought process (not convoluted and devious), relies on intuition to see the truth of a situation, is free from greed and anger, and is completely humble. In the next paragraph my master's spiritual path for his devotees is touched upon.

My master says '*Meditate upon me, chant my name and sing my deeds – your devotion will increase and sins destroyed*'. My master always acted in the interest of those who were truly devoted to him, and hence he was in a way dependent on his devotees. Any devotee who loves my master whole-heartedly gets a response from him at any time and at any place. He is always by our side and could take any form and appear before his devout disciple to help him and satisfy him. He does not leave his disciples halfway and will be with them through all future lives till they become one with God. My master did not like devotees who found fault unnecessarily and raised trivial objections with others; he liked devotees who endured their suffering. *He always kept his word no matter what - his words were never untrue and unfulfilled, but turned out literally true.* His Udi - sacred ashes from the Dhuni (holy fire) - is known to have cured many illnesses and conferred material as well as spiritual benefits (Udi is to be applied on the affected area, on the crown chakra/ the forehead and a little of it drunk mixed in water). My master's life's stories have jewels of knowledge waiting to be understood by the devoted. Hearing his stories with faith and devotion transforms his disciples spiritually bringing them closer to God through their Guru. His stories help in both eroding the ego and destroying their sins saving the person from disasters. Reading the stories will help to *purify the devotees mind*. They should feel real love for him and do all their actions for his sake. He satisfied their genuine needs – spiritual as well as material. At the same time, wealth and prosperity are transient and the body is subject to decay and death. My master regarded *money as a danger or bar to spiritual progress* and did not allow his devotees to fall into its clutches. My master emphasised to me the importance of *control on the source of wealth and the use of wealth*. Source of wealth should be based on some gainful employment or doing some business but without the unnecessary stresses associated with the path of greed, and doing what you enjoy and are good at. And uses of wealth include charity in some form or the other and also to avoid taking unnecessary loans through leading a more simple life. By thinking of him all the time devotees ensure they do so in their last moments of life thereby ensuring his presence, grace and their spiritual future. Devotees should read *Chapter 37 of Shri Sai Satcharita* on the Chavadi Procession daily before sleeping – the devotee will experience a moment as part of Baba's life.

Here is what my master wanted from his devotees:

He who loves Me most, always sees Me. The whole world is desolate to him without Me, he tells no stories but Mine. He ceaselessly meditates upon Me and always chants My name. I feel indebted to him who surrenders himself completely to Me and ever remembers Me. I shall repay his debt by giving him salvation (self-realization). *I am dependent on him who thinks and hungers after Me and who does not eat anything without first offering it to Me.* He who thus comes to Me, becomes one with Me, just as a river gets to the sea and becomes merged (one) with it. So leaving out pride and egoism and with no trace of them, you should surrender yourself to Me Who am seated in your heart. If you practise this, you will realize all-pervasiveness, and thus attain oneness with Me.

Some of his devotees were so devoted that they would drink the water they used to wash his feet with. Here is an ardent prayer from one his devotees:

Ever be kind and merciful to me and protect me always. There is no other God to me in this world, except at your feet. Let my mind be ever rapt in remembering your greatness, your stories and your feet. Let your grace protect me from the miseries of the world and let me ever chant your name and be happy.

For Sufism, devotion is the cornerstone of the spiritual path. As Baba Nanak says in his prayer Japji Sahib:

One Universal Creator Being. The Name Is Truth. Creative Being Personified. No Fear. No Hatred. Image Of The Undying, Beyond Birth, Self-Existent. By Guru's Grace.

The devotee must be overcome with love and devotion to win the grace of his master.

Nanak's teachings are understood to be practiced in three ways:

1. Chanting the Holy Name and thus remembering God at all times (ceaseless devotion to God)
2. Earning/making a living honestly, without exploitation or fraud
3. Sharing with others, helping those with less who are in need

Nanak highlights that a change of heart is very important. If inner transformation has not occurred, indulging in any outward means of purification will not help. "False inside with a show of piety outwards are hypocrites in this world. They may bathe at sixty eight places of pilgrimage - their dirt will not be removed. Impurity will not be removed this way, only true (spiritual) knowledge will wash it away." Nanak had great compassion for the poor and needy – his life (and that of my master) underscored the need to feed the hungry including birds and animals as God is in all creatures. He who feeds the hungry feeds God.

The Guru Granth Sahib (Holy book of the Sikhs) says "False is friendship with the false and greedy. False is its foundation. O Mullah, no one knows where death shall strike. Without spiritual wisdom, the people worship ignorance. They grope in the darkness, in the love of duality. Without the Guru, there is no spiritual wisdom; without Dharma (righteous duty), there is no meditation. Without Truth, there is no credit; without capital, there is no balance."

A Sikh Guru declares "To hanker after occult powers or worldly treasures, is a false attachment, it shuts out the love of the name, a symbol of the love of God". Miracles that take place by the will of God and by his order are however accepted by Sikhs. "That alone is spirituality, and that alone is miraculous power, which the Lord spontaneously bestows." My master had many spiritual powers including control over the elements and the ability to heal by his touch and mere glance. In a well recorded incident, he left his body for three full days and returned thereafter. In his lifetime he cured various diseases permanently - his word and grace were enough - no medicines or drugs were needed. He could be in two different places at the same time. He never chased these powers – they came to him naturally as a result of perfection.

Sri Sri Ravishankar says "Those who don't care about happiness get Moksha (freedom from the cycle of birth-death-rebirth) and those who don't even care about Moksha get

Divine Love”. Sri Sri’s path works through daily yogic breathing practices that spiritually cleanse a person transforming him over time. This also helps the disciple to transcend the barriers of his life that the law of reciprocity creates.

On the Book

This book will summarise spiritual lessons in five books and other sources:

1. Rumi’s book ‘Masnavi-I Ma’navi’, by Winfield, E.H. 1887 (download available at <http://www.omphaloskepsis.com>)
2. Book on Rumi’s teachings ‘Discourses of Rumi’ (‘Fihi Ma Fihi’), by Arberry, A. J., 1961 (Marman’s version available at <http://www.omphaloskepsis.com>)
3. Rumi’s book ‘Divani Shamsi Tabriz’, by Nicholson, R.A. 1898.
4. Book on Sufism ‘Mystics of Islam’, Nicholson, R. A. 1914
5. Book on my spiritual master ‘Shri Sai Satcharita’, Dabholkar, G.R., 1916
6. Various other internet sources.

There are two other works of Rumi - Majāles-e Sab'a (Seven Sessions) and Makatib (The Letters) which I am not actively referring to in this book. I will also quote Hafiz and other Sufi saints where relevant.

This is not an academic work – it is based on the sources mentioned above and also my own understandings related to Sufi practices built off years of my own spiritual quest. The book is written in a “101” style and seeks to share key lessons found in Sufism. It will not specifically quote the source of each quote but readers can easily Google it to find which specific book of Rumi’s it came from. This book will contribute through focus and clarity in each lesson.

While this book will make references from the Koran, this is to the extent that Sufism draws from the Koran. However, it is still on Sufism and should not to be viewed as a traditional Islamic book. *Sufism is in fact influenced by the mystical traditions of many religions* including Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Hinduism and pre-dates Islam.

I have been disciplined and only included content that can either be directly traced to or is fully compatible with Sufi teachings. My task and indeed challenge in this work, is to say things simply and in the least words needed to share spiritual knowledge...and only to say as much as the reader can immediately use. This book is focussed primarily on *traditional Sufi teachings by Rumi*. Treat this book as the starting point of a great journey in Sufism.

The term man in this book also covers women.

This book is an act of worship – according to my master writing on spirituality and spreading the word is a powerful form of devotion and worship. Different works are assigned to different devotees – my role is that of an author. The author is not naming himself as this is a spiritual work in which there is no role for his ego. Spiritual works in which the ego are absent have the blessings of the master and succeed in their purpose. They also have great rewards although anyone seeking these ceases to be doing a spiritual work.

It is recommended that this book be *read periodically* to completely benefit from its lessons many of which will be understood over the course of time – this will also help to reinforce the key messages. Remember that the failure rate on the spiritual path is very high – most people fail and very few remain.

The author makes no claim to being either an Islamic scholar or a spiritual master. Take what you need from this book.

2. Key Sufi Principles

Sufi's believe that Sufism is a divine knowledge bestowed by God upon a selected few for the benefit of humanity. Here are some key principles:

**God is found in the heart
– paradise lies within.**

- I. Attain God through your spiritual master – your master is God.
- II. Devotion to your spiritual master – constant remembrance (“Dhikr”) is the path.
- III. You may use devotional music to help strengthen your devotion.
- IV. God lies within you - you must kill your animal spirit (“Nafs” or ego).
- V. Knowledge is not as important as direct spiritual experience.
- VI. Control your anger, lust and materialistic greed - control your mind.
- VII. Devotion and faith are the corner-stones.
- VIII. As you start evolving your suffering initially increases to cleanse you.
- IX. Good and Bad mean different things as you evolve – the same rules don't apply.
- X. An evolved man will experience the results of his actions much faster (he who rises higher falls harder).
- XI. Your powers are not your own, they are as a result of the Grace of your spiritual master.
- XII. Tremendous courage is needed to be a Sufi.
- XIII. Ultimately, you must conquer lust if you want to achieve God.

Instead of focusing on the legal aspects of Islam (fiqh), Sufism focuses on the internal aspects such as perfecting the aspect of sincerity of faith and fighting one's ego.

The journey of the Sufi will usually consist of four stages – the first is gradual removal of the ‘nafs’ or the animal spirit so that our higher qualities come to the fore, the second is the cleansing of the heart and the creation of love for God alone, the third is constant remembrance of God and the last stage is illumination in God or “Fana” (the passing-away of the self and living in God). As Rumi says:

The heart is nothing but the sea of light...
the place of the vision of God.

Fana happens through the spiritual master – so first is the union with the spiritual master and then through him ultimately with God. In God's presence two I's cannot exist.

Rumi says:

That which God said to the rose, and caused it to laugh in full-blown beauty,
He said to my heart, and made it a hundred times more beautiful.

In this book the term spiritual master and perfect master will be used interchangeably.

The spiritual stages are brought about through the Grace of a perfect master.

3. God's Nature and Will

There is only one God. He has no beginning, he has no end. He has no gender. All beings arise from him and into him they return. He is formless and everywhere. He is in everything (animate and inanimate) and beyond. He is the inner controller

Not even a leaf can move without the Grace of God.

and ruler. He fills all space. He controls both Good and Evil. There is none like him. He is fully aware of everything that happens in the universe, *including private thoughts and feelings* and nothing can be hidden from God. God is wholly free of form and words – his speech is beyond letters and voice - yet, he *delivers his message by any letters and voice and tongue* he desires. Hence, see God in all things and all people.

Rumi said that God is all-pardoning, all-forgiving and terrible in retribution. He controls both good and evil in this world. Good and evil exist for man although from God's perspective all are good as he controls both forces. God in actuality has no opposite. 'I was a hidden treasure,' God says, 'and I wanted to be known'. So he created this world of darkness for his light to become visible. The affairs of this world are an illusion - Rumi says 'This world is the dream of a sleeper'. So while all things appear in opposition, but to the wise they all work together and are not opposed. As Rumi says 'Show me an evil in this world without good, or a good thing without evil.'

God gives us life, difficulties, helps us, and teaches us where necessary through pain. It's his decision and discretion and it is based on what we need spiritually at that point of time in our lives. The good things that happen to us are not because of our ideas and plans but are our rewards as Gods blessings. Our ego makes us imagine that we are the cause of action – we need to control our arrogance and vanity because what God gives us he can also take away in a flash.

Being wealthy does not imply happiness. Happiness is a state of mind that is free from the negative emotions of fear, guilt, sorrow and anger that wealth cannot purchase ('that is our abode and place of rest where the mind is most pleased and charmed' – this is in the presence and influence of a perfect master). Each of us is born with a Cup of Happiness and a Cup of Sorrow – we add or subtract to this with our good and bad deeds. For example, even for normal materialistic experiences, just because a man has the money and even if he has the time, it does not mean that he can set out on a splendid vacation every other month – he may thoroughly enjoy one and for strange reasons including personal tension, the others may be total failures even if he goes to the best of resorts. So his money cannot buy him these repeat experiences because they are not blessed by God. In this example, God did not allow him to drink from his Cup of Happiness as it was not due to him at that point of time. *In a more spiritual context, God working through our master can make us drink from our Cup of Sorrow faster so that we become more spiritually mature and our desire for God increases.*

God has only one aim – to help us on the Spiritual path to return back to him. Everything else in this world is immaterial and is only a spiritual illusion. Our body is perishable – our soul is not. The only reality is God Himself. He wants us to see this Truth alone. The more we go away from this the more difficulties he creates for us.

God teaches man through the opposites – pain and pleasure, happiness and sorrow. Rumi says:

God turns you from one feeling to another and teaches by means of opposites, so that you will have two wings to fly, not one.

Our degrees, position, titles and other worldly achievements are a spiritual illusion designed to distract us from the Path. If we clamour for these he tries to show us their impermanent nature through highs and lows in our life. If we give in to evil ways, he lets evil harm us. So this is the reality that we depend on him for everything.

If you want something from God then shed your ego and beg for it. If you are genuinely a changed man, God will forgive you and grant you your wish.

The path of the Sufi requires demonstration of inner strength through the spiritual choices made by the disciple. In this sense it remains true for the Sufi:

I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Rumi says that the prophets did not attain prophethood through personal effort—they gained that fortune through *Divine Grace* (a love and a certainty which spring from direct knowledge and experience of God). Yet God still requires the prophets to live a life of personal effort and virtue and set an example to others. The prophets and the saints forsake their own desires and follow the desire of God. Whatever God commands, they do. Whoever God denies grace, to them the saints are indifferent - indeed in their eyes such a one is an enemy.

Rumi says “The people of the world lie unconscious, with veils drawn over their faces, and asleep” and are ruled by “the sickness of your heart.” The Sufi must sacrifice his “I” in order to live in God similar to the moth that is drawn to cast itself into the flame in order to become part of the flame. There are no time frames for achieving God – its dependant on the cleansing of the heart by Divine Love. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) says “Everything needs a kind of polish to cleanse it, and the polish for the Heart is the *remembrance of God*”. Obedience to God through *obedience to our master and prompt compliance* is essential – a fall from grace is the response of disobedience and cleansing of the spiritual heart is the reward for obedience.

In summary, not even a leaf can move without the Grace of God – so first, you must be deserving, and second he must select you.

4. Direct Spiritual Experience

For Rumi, spirituality was mostly a personal experience and was not limited to logical arguments or perceptions of the senses. He says:

In the screaming gale of Love, the intellect is a gnat.

How can intellects find space to wander there?

By the time intellect has deliberated and reflected, love has flown to the seventh heaven.

**Bookish Knowledge
cannot match direct
Spiritual Experience.**

Rumi says that intellectual proof, and the proof itself is not permanent. The pleasure that comes from such proof does not last. When the memory of the proof passes, its warmth and thrill pass away as well. Rumi says that the heart of knowledge lies with God and this can be acquired only through *direct spiritual experience*. This knowledge is also within ourselves but we cannot see it due to the veils. Direct spiritual experience helps to lift these veils. When such spiritual knowledge is revealed then *all our other forms of knowledge (e.g. sciences,) acquire a soul* like an empty body that springs to life.

Hafiz says:

I have a thousand brilliant lies for the question:

What is God?

If you think that the Truth can be known from words,

If you think that the Sun and the Ocean

Can pass through that tiny opening called the mouth,

O someone should start laughing!

Nonetheless, spiritual books are important to read for the ideas and direction they give you. However, the only way to truly understand Good and Evil is to experience both forces through direct spiritual experience – this process is setoff and controlled by your spiritual master. The first brings ecstasy the second brings deep fear and uncertainty. *Note that knowledge of Evil and its ways is never as difficult to obtain as the knowledge of the Truth is.*

A positive spiritual experience transforms not by any intellectual process rather in a flash almost like intuition. *There is instant spiritual realisation, there is understanding and there is strength - these coincide.* Rumi says that True Sufi's eat little, sleep little, speak little and their tongues are empowered with the truth. True Sufis learn in silence and should avoid giving in to their ego's need to discuss and get external confirmation or adulation. However, a person new on the path may in fact need to talk to someone to deal with his fears or even understand his experiences. Nonetheless, classifying the different kinds of experience or interpreting them can end up in just intellectual debate or worse with the wrong interpretation being concluded. Hence, pick the teacher carefully who you ask these questions to. Spiritual experience shows up in a series of improbable coincidences, strange situations and visions (while awake and asleep). These are directed by the perfect master to the disciple's weak points. Ultimately these experiences - good and bad, both - serve the grander spiritual purpose of eroding ones ego and creating devotion/ faith and patience - in good times and more importantly in

bad times. *The path may not reduce a problem but may in fact make a situation worse in order to bring out its true nature.* As Rumi says – “These pains that you feel are messengers. Listen to them.” At a later stage of spiritual experiences, the master will directly transform the spiritual aspirant purging him of his negative tendencies – this is a reward for devotion. Spiritual transformation also helps to increase his intelligence.

God must choose you before you have any spiritual experiences. You must be worthy. You must be brave. You must be strong. You must have faith. You must want God. And finally you must have his Grace. *He alone opens, closes, widens or seals the door of an aspirant's heart and removes doubts in it.* God works through a perfect master who manages a disciple. God does not push negative experiences on the disciple only the positive. But being Man we inevitably fail and that's what sets off the negative spiritual experiences. Rumi says that evil is only relevant where man desires evil not knowing its true nature. *In the ultimate analysis both experiences are equally important and critical.* We cannot overcome our spiritual weaknesses without exposing them to us and seeing them for what they actually are.

The end result of such experiences is the returning back to the world. The Sufi becomes a perfect man - in the world but not of the world.

5. Spiritual Organs

Drawing from the Koran, Sufis distinguish six spiritual centers or organs (Lataif-as-Sitta or "the six subtleties") as Nafs, Qalb, Sirr, Ruh, Khafi, and Akhfa. These are psychospiritual "organs" or, sometimes, faculties of sensory and suprasensory perception. They are parts of the self in a similar manner to the way glands and organs are part of the body. These coincide with similar beliefs in Hinduism.

There are six spiritual organs.

Sufism involves the cleansing/ awakening in a certain order of these spiritual centers of perception that lie dormant in every person. The help of a perfect master is considered necessary to help activate these centers. After undergoing this process, the spiritual aspirant (dervish) is said to reach a certain type of "completion" or becomes a Complete Man.

These six "organs" or faculties, and the purification activities applied to them, are the basic Sufi philosophy. The purification of elementary passionate nature (Tazkiyat-an-Nafs), followed by cleansing of the spiritual heart so that it may acquire a mirror-like purity of reflection (Tazkiyat-al-Qalb) and become the receptacle of God's love (Ishq), illumination of the spirit (Tajjali-ar-Ruh), fortified by emptying of egoic drives (Taqliyyat-as-Sirr) and remembrance of God's attributes (Dhikr), and completion of journey with purification of the last two faculties, Khafi and Akhfa.

1. *The Nafs* is located slightly below the navel. The central aim of the Sufi path is transformation of Nafs ("purgation of the soul") from its deplorable state of ego-centeredness through various psycho-spiritual stages to the purity and submission to the will of God.
2. *The Qalb* (spiritual heart) is located in the left of Chest. It is the seat of beatific vision and the gate of Ishq or Divine Love. It is the battleground of two warring armies of Nafs and Ruh or spirit. Cleansing of the Qalb or heart is a necessary spiritual discipline.
3. *The Ruh* is located in the right side of the chest and is our higher spirit or the God within us. We need to make this active to achieve illumination.
4. *Sirr* is located in the solar plexus. Emptying of the Sirr is basically focusing on God's names and attributes in perpetual remembrance or Dhikr.
5. *Khafi* is located in the middle of the forehead (between the eyes or third eye position) and represents intuition.
6. *Akhfa* or ikhfa is on center-top of the head. It's the point of unity in every human where the beatific visions of God are directly revealed. It has information about the hidden knowledge of the universe and is associated with deep perception.

Qalb and Nafs form the "Rooh-e-haivani" (**Animal Soul**). Sirr and Rooh form "Rooh-e-Insani" (**Human soul**) or Ayan. Akhfa and khafa form "Rooh-e-azam" (**the Great soul**), also called sabita. "Great Soul", "Human Soul", and "Animal Soul" are actually levels of functioning of the same soul and are not three different souls. Man gets acquainted with them one by one by introspection (muhásaba), remembrance of God (Dhikr), Sufi meditation (Muraqaba) (in Rumi's order both dhikr and meditation are done through Sema) and thereby purification of one's psyche/life from negative

thinking patterns (fear, depression), negative emotions (hate, contempt, anger, lust) and negative practices (hurting others psychologically or physically). Loving God and loving/helping every human being irrespective of his race, religion, or nationality, and without consideration for any possible reward, is the key to spiritual evolution according to Sufis.

The key spiritual organ is the heart in Sufism. When the spiritual heart gets sick, it loses its desire and ability to do right and good deeds. This affects the morals and manners as well as the general behaviour of a person. In Sufism there are seven major diseases of the spiritual heart:

1. Arrogance and conceit
2. Ostentation
3. Jealousy or envy, hate and deceit
4. Suspicion
5. Anger
6. Stinginess
7. Love of power, position, and fame

These lead to major sins if they are not controlled and cleansed.

Sufism focuses on cleansing of the heart as the gate to Divine Love.

6. The Three Souls

Rumi uses a metaphor to describe a human being as having a donkey's tail and an angel's wings underscoring the coexistence of good and evil within every man. He says that we are half angel, half beast. If our spiritual conscience overcomes our sensuality, we are higher than the angels. If our sensuality overcomes our spiritual conscience, we are lower than the beasts. He says:

God is not just outside us but we ourselves are also God.

The angel is saved through knowledge,
The animal - through ignorance.
Between the two struggle the people of this world.

According to Sufism, the human soul is composed of three souls - the first is the *Great soul*, the second the *Human soul*, and the third the lower level spirit or the *Animal soul* (Qalb and Nafs (ego)). These should not be thought of literally as three souls but more in terms of the propensities and related states of mind of good and evil.

God is within us in both the Great soul and the Human soul. God has been part of us from time immemorial – his original splendour and brightness is ancient - his original light was altogether purer and brighter and more humble than what we are. God is reflected in our grace, love, forgiveness, compassion, humility, intuition, esoteric knowledge. He is all-knowing and is the source of our wisdom. As Rumi says:

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.

Every man is bound by his animal spirit to life creating bondage and desire for sense objects leading to attachment for them. He thinks he is the doer and enjoyer and entangles himself in endless miseries. There are various types of attachments – with human happiness and knowledge, with action, with recklessness, sloth and sleep. The animal spirit makes a man believe that the present state of being bound is good for him.

The animal spirit is mainly the Nafs with the Qalb or the spiritual heart needing cleansing from the influence of the Nafs to open the gate to Divine Love – the intrinsic evil however is found in the Nafs and not the spiritual heart which is the battle-field for good and evil. Anger, lust, ignorance, pride, envy, uncharitableness and materialistic greed all come from the animal spirit which makes our minds restless and discontented.

Jihad, according to Sufi beliefs, is purging one's heart of all evils i.e., the fight against a person's nafs (ego). Hafiz shows the link in Jihad (holy war) and the pursuit of Divine Love clearly:

You have done well
In the contest of madness.
You were brave in that holy war.
You have all the honorable wounds
Of one who has tried to find love

Rumi believed that thoughts have real effects and we need to control what we think to drive out our negative and destructive thoughts. He regarded this as the true holy war:

We have returned from the lesser holy war
To fight the Greater Holy War.
Rumi says that God says:
Cleanse your thoughts, O human,
for they are My abode and dwelling place.

*In Sufism, the primary task for the Spiritual aspirant is to remove the animal spirit.
This is usually done with the help of a Sufi master.*

7. The Five Pillars and Sufi Lifestyle

The Shariah or Islamic law deals with many aspects of day-to-day life. Many of its laws were created for and relevant in a hostile desert environment thirteen centuries ago. These need updating to bring them in line with a modern multi-religious society where nationhood is a key idea and equality/ respect for all religions and gender equality are universal ideals and aspirations.

The Five Pillars and Sufi Lifestyle are requirements for self-discipline.

We must remember the *example of marriage* whenever we look at any laws. Marriage is a man-made institution created to further the spiritual values of love, fidelity and to control lust outside marriage. If we can achieve all these without the institution of marriage (as *undoubtedly* it would some day), then the entire institution of marriage would become redundant and any laws built up around this institution would also become redundant. So laws always have a reference and relevance to a point of time – they *cannot be timeless* in application and need updating over time.

Sufis believe that faith based on coercion, is slavery. God created man with mind, free will and love. Therefore, the *mainspring of Sufism is love and not fear* and not obedience to narrow and prescriptive religious laws. Nonetheless, Sufis do adopt the inner meaning of these laws as self-discipline without making these a source of fear. As Rumi says:

Out beyond ideas
of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

This world and the next are a single substance;
in reality, there is no unbelief, religion or faith.

The Five Pillars

The Shariah also covers the five pillars of Islam or religious duties of every Muslim. These have a *sound discipline* ingrained within them. Given below is my interpretation of these pillars from a broader modern Sufi spiritual perspective in which Sufi's may be Muslims or non-Muslims:

1. Accepting that there is **only one God** who has no beginning and no end and controls good and evil. Nothing can be hidden from him. There are many perfect masters in this world from different religions – they are all God's agents. Any of these agents can take you down the path of Sufism since they all are in unison with one another. My own master Sai Baba of Shirdi taught people from different religions using Sufism as the foundation – he was all-knowing and lived in God.
2. **Prayer is important** – whether it is five times a day or just once, is a matter of your choice and readiness. How you do the prayer is again a matter of choice although cleanliness of the physical body and the environment is required. Importantly, prayer must be done from a clean heart with full and unconditional

surrender to God through your master. Love and devotion are needed. Rabia advises that we should not worship from fear of punishment or for the promise of reward, but simply for the love of God. There must be the *pain of separation and hunger for unity* with God. More important than ritualistic prayer is to constantly remember God by remembering your master through the day – if you can do this, formal prayer is not even needed because you're always in a state of prayer.

3. **Charity** is critical for all men who are part of this world and also for ascetics. Sufi saints ask us to give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, and clothes to the naked. Islam advocates an annual payment of 2.5% of a family's yearly (lawfully earned) earnings after expenses ie, savings. We need to do this within our means.

The Koran also stresses voluntary charity that includes caring for the needy, the orphans, the destitute and the unfortunate members of the society. Voluntary charity (Sadaqah) is very wide covering in the words of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) - 'Your smile for your brother is voluntary charity. Your removal of obstructions from the paths of people is voluntary charity. Your guidance of a person who is lost is voluntary charity'. Speaking kind words to old parents is voluntary charity. The poor start with themselves, their dependants and relatives and then outside of this. Even the poor can offer this through good conduct - acts of loving kindness, even cheerful greetings to others. Every good deed is a form of voluntary charity.

The belief is that the reward for giving voluntary alms in secret is seventy times that of giving it publicly (provided that this in itself is not a motive). Hence, charity must be done in a *state of humility and we must never talk about it*. This is gratitude to God and this is compassion.

Even ascetics need to do charity by taking on the suffering of others onto themselves.

4. **Fasting** is helpful in controlling our egos and creating humility. Whether you do 30 days a year or break this up is a matter of choice although 30 days is certainly more difficult. The 30 day Muslim fast includes avoiding all food, drink, sex, anger, and smoking from just before first light until sunset (other bad deeds are prohibited all through). This is regarded as a training time for Muslims to learn to control their gluttony, anger and bodily needs and understand that their mind is stronger than their urges, weaknesses and desires. Some Sufi saints state that Gods quest cannot be carried out successfully on an empty stomach. What may be more powerful than fasting is to consistently eat plain vegetarian food, eating little of it almost like a patient. This is a much stronger lifelong devotion in which food is only for mere sustenance of the body. Other forms of abstinence should in any case be a regular discipline for all Sufis. As far as sex is concerned, it should be kept dominantly as a procreation function and not become a dominating passion while remembering that satisfaction of both partners is also a key ingredient to a successful marriage.
5. **Pilgrimage** to your perfect master's tomb is recommended once a year wherever possible. This helps to enhance love and devotion to the master. The Muslims annual pilgrimage includes wearing only simple, white clothes with no status or titles. It helps Muslims to remember the real poverty of this world and the omnipotence of God. However, more importantly, keep God in your heart

constantly as the sole objective of all thoughts and motivations. Reflect your spirituality through your behaviour – without this everything else is redundant.

In addition there are two other key practices in Islam known as *Da'wah* and *Jihad*. *Da'wah* in my interpretation would mean encouraging others to find the path to God i.e., Sufism - irrespective of religion and not seeking to convert people. This must be done in a subtle rather than an overt manner by talking very briefly about your own experiences with Sufism – almost like pointing your finger in the right direction. Importantly, if you can see that the other person is not interested in the topic then do not pursue. Rumi says “*it is wrong to reveal beauty to those who do not love beauty*”. Also, keep such discussions outside of the workplace – they have no place in it unless you’ve got a personal rapport with someone who is keen to find out more. *Jihad* is purging one’s heart of all evils i.e., the fight against a persons nafs (ego). That struggle can be physical (e.g. fasting), spiritual or mental – but ultimately it’s only through Divine Love that one can win over ones nafs.

Sufi Lifestyle

An Islamic lifestyle covers all aspects of living. Given below is a slightly modified version of key ideas and sayings relevant to all Sufi’s irrespective of religion. Other than a handful of ascetics, most Sufis are part of this material world – so they need to live their lives with discipline – this is what I’m highlighting below. Much of it is *simple and intuitive*. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) says that the three best things are:

- to be humble amidst the vicissitudes of fortune;
- to pardon when powerful;
- and to be generous with no strings attached.

The points below should be practiced and when you fail practice them again. Don’t obsess over them - don’t be fanatical, puritanical, or self-righteous over these disciplines. *Be silent in your practice* – this is your most key discipline.

Greetings

1. There are six good qualities which a Sufi should display to everyone irrespective of religion - he should visit him when he is ill, be present when he dies, accept his invitation when he gives one, greet him warmly when he meets him, and act sincerely towards him whether he is absent or present.
2. When you meet your own family, greet them with happiness and joy. It will bring blessings on you and your family.

Human Relations

1. Whoever does not express his gratitude to people will never be grateful to God.
2. If you have hatred in your heart against others, this is a clear barrier to achieving God.

3. A persons parents especially the mother, are the most deserving of respect from their child.
4. A child should look to his loving parents for guidance and listen to them since they will always keep his best interests in mind.
5. If you tread the path of God then it is your duty to help others to also adopt it.
6. Those who are merciful have mercy shown on them by God
7. Do not wrong or abandon your friend – true friends give up their lives for each other. If you truly care for your friend’s needs then God will care for you.
8. Show mercy to the young and respect to the old, recommend what is good and pure and prohibit what is impure.
9. Adopt as a means of doing good to others – treat the adopted child well to get God’s blessings. God loves those who adopt.
10. A true Sufi is not one who eats his fill when the neighbor beside him is hungry.
11. All creatures are God’s children, and those dearest to God are the ones who treat his children kindly.
12. Touch an orphan's head affectionately and feed the poor.
13. No person should fight with his family or friends for more than three days. The better of the two is the one who is first tries to make up controlling their own ego.
14. Avoid envy, for envy devours good deeds just as fire devours fuel.
15. Never harm a believer of God or act deceitful towards him.
16. To hold good thoughts about another person is a part of well-conducted worship.
17. The girl child is especially important to God and we get his blessings if we take special care of them as they grow up.
18. Sufi’s help to support and keep each other on the path – they are like pillars to a building.
19. A good or bad companion is like someone carrying perfume and someone who blows the bellows – the latter can burn your clothes and also give a bad smell.

Good Character

1. He who is deprived of gentleness is deprived of good.
2. Righteousness is good character, and sin is that which revolves in your heart and which you do not want people to know.

3. Man has been sent to perfect good character.
4. Modesty is part of faith and faith is God, but obscenity is part of hardness of heart and hardness of heart is evil.
5. Sufi's whose faith is most perfect are those who have the best character.
6. Consuming alcohol or drugs is an act of giving in to weakness and hiding from reality – these are signs of evil.
7. Sufism encourages dressing modestly (both men and women) without requiring traditional Islamic practices such as *hijab* for women.

Profession

1. Financing or investing in an alcohol or drug related business is a sin.
2. Investing in prostitution houses and linked businesses, or any other business that promotes exploitation, cruelty and deceit is a sin.
3. Giving loans that exploit a person's situation (loan sharking) or taking such loans out of obsessive greed for wealth – both are sinful.
4. Gambling of any form which exposes the person and his family to the risk of significant financial loss is a reflection of greed and is a sin.
5. Do not engage in unethical practices such as charging excessive prices, taking advantage of naive customers, tax evasion and lying.

Hospitality

1. Honour your guest, do not annoy your neighbour, and say what is good or keep silent.
2. A person should accompany his guest to the door of the house when he leaves.
3. Honour your guest. Provisions for the road are what will serve for a day and night; hospitality extends for three days; what goes beyond that is charity; and it is not allowable that a guest should stay till he makes himself an encumbrance.
4. Eat together and not separately, for blessings are associated with the group.

Visiting the Sick

1. Feed the hungry, visit the sick and free the captive.

Humble Living

1. Remember that objects get dirty... the more the objects the more the dirt! – so control your materialism, you will need to do less cleaning.
2. Don't look at the wealthy and famous in envy - think of all those you know who have much less than you and keep yourself free of envy.
3. See God in the poor and the weak, and do good deeds.
4. God loves the poor man on the path who refrains from begging and yet manages his family responsibilities.
5. Poverty – the absence of the material and of desires for it – is important for the ascetic. For the Sufi who is part of this world he surrenders the decisions that make or use the wealth, to his master's spiritual influence. To the Sufi, wealth is to be used for furthering a spiritual purpose – a Sufi must give to receive.
6. Take complete rest on one day in every week – do nothing (do not use the computer or see TV or listen to non-spiritual music or do any activity that create anxiety). Be with yourself.
7. Observe seven things - love the poor and be near them, be humble and control our ego, keep up with our family even if they are far away, do not beg from anyone, speak the truth whenever needed even when it is bitter (be careful not to be unnecessarily hurtful to others – be silent if needed), do not fear another man, believe that God is the only almighty power.

Acting Wisely

1. A Sufi learns from his errors and does not repeat them.
2. Man has two characteristics which God likes - gentleness and discernment (forethought and judgement).
3. Consider how a matter will turn out - if you think its result will be good carry on with it, but if you fear going astray then hold back
4. A good way of acting, a good manner of conduct and moderation are all needed on the path.
5. Respect things told in confidence and do not share them with others.

Food and Table Manners

1. Think of God before you start the meal and first offer God (through your master) the food before eating it.
2. Do not eat reclining.

3. Do not blow into the food – you will pass germs into it for others.
4. Eat what you like and what is healthy for you and eat less.
5. Eat non-vegetarian if you like in moderation but try to move to vegetarianism and supplement it with nuts that make up the loss of nutrition.

[Comment - Muslims eat Halal meat where the slaughter drains out the blood – they consider this healthier meat. They avoid pork which they believe is unhealthy and creates lowliness in character, destroying the moral and spiritual faculties in man.]

Sins of the Tongue

1. Control your tongue – do not use harsh and bitter words or spite and fight with others.
2. Do not slander others and do not unnecessarily criticize, compare or interfere in others matters.
3. Do not say false things to make people laugh at or mock someone or to create ill-feeling against someone.
4. Adhere to truth, for truth leads to good deeds and good deeds leads to God. Falsehood is wickedness and wickedness leads to evil.
5. Say what is good, and promote good.
6. Coarse talk is a disgrace and control of ones tongue is a beauty.
7. Six things - speak the truth when you talk, keep a promise when you make it, when you are trusted with something fulfil your trust, avoid sexual immorality, lower your eyes and restrain your hand from injustice.
8. God loves the pious who constantly think of him.
9. Be humble – do not boast over another, or oppress another.

Avoiding Sin

1. Two hungry wolves let loose in a flock of sheep do not cause so much damage to the flock as does the love of wealth and vanity to one's spirit.
2. When a person sins, his spiritual heart gets covered with dirt which can be removed only if he repents and abstains. So sins corrode the heart.
3. Both the taker, the agent and the giver of bribes are committing serious sins.
4. When abuse of trust becomes rampant in a people, God overwhelms their hearts with fear which could be anything from war to natural calamities.

5. Excess love for materialism and being a captive of lust takes one away from the path. Lust brings with it fear, suspicion and anger – all signs of evil.
6. A sincere repenter of sins is like one who has not committed sins.

It's quite clear that Rumi believed in the value of discipline for the spiritual path. Adopting the five pillars and the practices/values above helps in this. However, to be clear, Sufism did not consider the need for any inflexible set of laws to be *imposed* on anyone - rather it recognized the need for inner discipline by those starting on the path. Moreover, Sufism focuses on *love for God rather than fear for God* and as such laws that inspire *repression and fear* can only be anti-spiritual in their consequence in the Sufi grand scheme of things.

The Five Pillars and the Sufi Lifestyle highlighted in this lesson are a good starting point for the spiritual journey and this discipline needs to be maintained no matter how close we get to God. At an advanced stage it would come automatically.

8. The Path

The path of Sufism requires repentance or awakening and giving up of all old sinful ways and resolving not to go back – this is the starting point. Genuine repentance overcomes evil and God may choose to forgive us for our actions and end our suffering. Failure requires putting yourself to the mercy of God and repeating the process until one succeeds. *One Sufi fell back into sin seventy times before he made a lasting change to his ways.* Rabia taught us that *repentance was a gift from God* because no one could repent unless God had already accepted him and given him this gift of repentance.

Repentance is a difficult starting point of the Sufi path.

The Sufi ‘path’ consists of the following seven ‘stages’ – repentance, abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, trust in God, and satisfaction. There are similarly ten psychological ‘states’ corresponding with this discipline which are - meditation, nearness to God, love, fear, hope, longing, intimacy, tranquility, contemplation, and certainty. The former requires ones own effort while the latter are spiritual experiences over which man has no control:

They descend from God into his heart,
without his being able to repel them
when they come or to retain them
when they go.

Looking at the above in more Islamic terms, there are four principal degrees of spiritual perfection in a human being, all of which are interdependent:

1. of ‘Shariah’, i.e., of strict obedience to all the 5 pillars and lifestyle as described in this book covering unity of God, prayer, charity, fasting, pilgrimage, and other beliefs, which is the lowest degree of worship, and is attainable by all
2. of ‘Ṭariqah’, the mystical path coming out of the first stage which is accessible only to a higher spiritual class of men who, while strictly adhering to 5 pillars as described earlier, rise to an inward perception of mental power and virtue necessary for the nearer approach to God
3. of ‘Haqiqah’ (Divinity), the degree attained by those who, through continuous contemplation and inward devotion, have risen to the true perception of the nature of the visible and invisible; who, in fact, have recognized the nature of God, and through this knowledge have succeeded in establishing an ecstatic relation to it; and
4. of ‘Ma’rifah’ (Gnosis), in which state man communicates directly with God. This is the mystical intuitive state in which spiritual truths are revealed in a flash as part of this ecstatic state.

Saints having achieved the highest state return to normal consciousness from time-to-time to help them execute their spiritual role interacting with society, while periodically going back into a state of complete absorption in God where divinity and ecstasy exist. The light which gleams in the heart of the illuminated mystic endows him with a supernatural power of discernment (*firasat*). Even when they have normal consciousness they *live in God* and can understand the spiritual reality of a situation in an intuitive flash. A saint can at his will, give any disciple the experience of the highest states of spiritual consciousness.

For the Sufi ascetic who has renounced the world, poverty is the highest of riches and a thousand times superior to a king's wealth. Poverty is both the lack of wealth and more specifically lack of any desire for it – both essential for the ascetic. *The path of the ascetic is at an advanced stage of the path and you will know if God wants this from you. Being a true ascetic includes celibacy at the right point of time.*

The path must be undergone under the guidance of a perfect master. A perfect master would accept a disciple only if the person was in the first place chosen by God.

The path is not easy. As Rumi says:

You've been walking the ocean's edge,
holding up your robes to keep them dry.
You must dive naked under and deeper under,
a thousand times deeper!

At the end of this process, the Sufi is permanently raised to higher planes of consciousness where knowledge, knower, and known are one.

9. The Veils

Sufis believe that in coming to earth the soul passes through seventy thousand veils - the inner half of these are veils of light while the outer half are veils of darkness. For every one of the veils of light passed through, in this journey towards birth, the soul puts off a divine quality and for every one of the dark veils, it puts on an earthly quality. The soul is now, in the prison of his body, *separated by these thick curtains* from God.

There are only two basic veils – health and wealth.

Rumi says that between one person's fantasy and another's are great differences. "They say there are seven hundred veils of darkness and seven hundred veils of light. Well, all the worlds of fantasy are veils of darkness, and all the worlds of realities are veils of light. But between those veils of darkness, there is no knowledge that can grasp their extreme subtlety, and despite the vast and enormous variation between the worlds of realities, those differences can never be comprehended by the mind. An expert architect pictures building a house. Another person who is not an architect also imagines a house. However, the differences are great because the architect's fantasy is closer to reality. It is the same in the world of realities and vision, there are differences between one person's vision and the vision of others".

Rumi says 'Some people say that in the human soul is an evil not found in animals and wild beasts, but this does not mean that people are worse than beasts. Rather, this evil character and darkness of soul in the human being hides a secret essential element. *The more precious and noble that element is, the greater the veil to hide it, and such veils cannot be removed without great effort*'.

Rumi says that between a man and God there are just two veils - health and wealth - all other veils come from these. People remember God when they are sick and when they lose their wealth. God says:

Drunkenness and poverty brought You to me, I am the slave of Your drunkenness and need!

Greed for money drags the greedy man to the lowest level and ultimately brings destruction on him and others.

Rumi points to "self-interest" as the origin of a "hundred veils":

When self-interest appears, virtue becomes hidden:
a hundred veils (Hijāb) rise from the heart to the eye.

Rumi points out that 'selflessness is cloudlessness'. As long as a disciple lives within the limitations of the self, he remains under the veil of clouding blocking the divine light and causing the mind 'to conceive fantasies'. Lust is found in the intrinsic evil in our soul which is our nafs and working through the spiritual heart it also clouds our mind reducing our control over it and increasing our desire for and attachment to the pleasures of the senses. Our negative thoughts attract negative energies and lust becomes a vicious circle giving us pleasure and pain together. *Lust kills our compassion*. Hence, a man whose spiritual heart is clouded with lust cannot experience God.

Between the material world and the spiritual world the veils help to preserve an empire of logics and proofs. As the veils are lifted the Sufi knows answers to complex questions effortlessly through his intuition. *Strong intuition is always a sign of God.*

Miracles are granted or manifested to the Sufi on the path in spiritual ecstasy (e.g. during Sema) when the Sufi is entirely under divine control. A master observed that reliance on miracles is one of the 'veils' which hinder the elect from penetrating to the inmost shrine of the Truth – remember that the only real miracle is achieving God realisation. Another master says that during his training:

God used to bring before me wonders and miracles, but I paid no heed to them; and when He saw that I did so, He gave me the means of attaining to knowledge of Himself.

The light of intuitive certainty (*yaqin*) by which the spiritual heart sees God is a beam of God's own light cast in the Sufi's heart by himself; else no vision of him is possible. For this the spiritual heart must be purged of sin and evil thoughts.

When the veils are lifted the Sufi 'lives in God' and does his spiritual work.

10. Overcoming the Nafs

The Nafs (ego or animal spirit) is both the cause of and causes the experience of sorrow. *It is at the centre of 'veiling' and is the evil within us.* It is the 'root cause' and our animal behaviour is merely a reflection of the nature of the nafs. (The nature of evil would be discussed more clearly in the next chapter.) So temporarily controlling our behaviour (e.g. controlling our lust and thoughts associated with lust) are superficial and we need to treat the nafs more directly and thoroughly. Rumi tells us that so long as there remains in us a single trace of self-love, God will not show His face to us. Baha'uddin says "You want to be filled. But something which is full has first to be emptied. Empty yourself so that you will fill properly."

Self-reflection, constant remembrance, unconditional surrender, Sema and meditation – all are critical.

Rumi says that while working towards the removal of the *nafs* remember that '*People are passionate for whatever they are denied*'. Those who have in them the natural quality not to do evil, whether you prevent them or not, they will proceed according to their good temperament and pure constitution. If they are the opposite, they will still go their own way; trying to stop them in reality does nothing but increase their eagerness. Also remember that as you get enlightened, your self-control will increase automatically. You will also become more sensitive and things will affect you and become visible, just as a little blackness shows on a clean white gown. An ordinary man in the grips of his nafs is like someone who wears a black gown that has become black with grime for many years - if a thousand kinds of filth should trickle on it, it would make no difference. Rumi reminds us that God gave us an intelligence of our own separate from our parents' intelligence, a sight of our own other than our father's sight, a discrimination of our own. He asks us why we nullify our sight and our intelligence by following an intelligence (our nafs) that would mislead and destroy us? Rumi says that a bilious person finds sour things agreeable, and sugar disagreeable, because their taste has become changed by their own distemper. Similarly a man in the control of his nafs exhibits an attachment to the pleasures of the senses and *that which is evil and actually causes him sorrow can seem to him to be a source of pleasure* - he can experience an acute desire for lowly base pleasures.

Removal of the nafs (ego) is mainly through *devotion to God* through devotion to the Sufi's spiritual master. The master creates the environment in which the ego of the person is shattered – the person is pulled out of their comfort zone and is taken through experiences that expose the fallacy of their ways and they recognize their base reality (they drink faster from their 'Cup of Sorrow'). As Rumi says:

These pains that you feel are messengers.

Listen to them.

He says that 'In prison, suffering, and toothache, when pain comes it tears away the veil of forgetfulness'.

Rumi says that as long as we find pain and regret within ourselves that is a proof of God's love and guidance – *when we reprimand our own child it is a proof of our love.* The whole objective of pain is to create a series of spiritual tests – God expects us to find solutions in difficult situations without losing our cool, by looking within ourselves to our inner strength and innate wisdom. We have to negotiate and achieve

the “win-win” space which recognises and reconciles conflicting needs and priorities. We have to deal with injustice with calm forgiving at the right time and using pain where needed to teach the person the wrong of their ways first - *the anger is feigned and actions derived from love*. So pain is a prompt to make better spiritual decisions.

Rumi says that the true Sufi is a mirror for other Sufi's. When they criticize others the fault they see in them is within themselves. Similarly the other Sufi can also unconsciously know the first Sufi's true self and real feelings. A mirror shows no image of itself. Any image it reflects is the image of another. Rumi says that all evil qualities - oppression, anger, hatred, envy, lust, greed, mercilessness, pride - when they are within ourselves, they bring no pain. When we see them in another, then we shy away and feel the pain.

Rumi says that whoever criticizes a Sufi in reality does the Sufi a good turn, for the Sufi shies away from praise. The Sufi is an enemy of vanity, hence whoever speaks evil of the Sufi's ego, speaks evil of the Sufi's enemy, and therefore helps them. “Things become clear through their opposites.” So the Sufi knows *the critic is not really their enemy, but their friend*.

The Koran highlights that the Nafs passes through three stages to reach perfection – initially the disciple is prone to evil and ruled by his Nafs (The complete lack of the ability to forgive is always a mark of a man in the grip of his nafs – such a man can be hypocritical and self-righteous), then is the self-critical stage where they reject bad deeds and work on good deeds and the final stage is when they have total control over the Nafs – they do not struggle to avoid bad acts and good deeds come naturally to them.

Rumi says that people think they can drive away evil by great effort and striving. After struggling and exhausting all their powers and means, they fall into despair. God asks us to take all efforts in his name then only his grace will supervene. Our success will ultimately be a gift that his love will bestow. Fishermen do not drag out a fish all at once. Once the hook has entered the fish's throat they reel it in a little so it will lose strength. Then they let it out, and draw it in again, until it weakens. When the hook of Love falls into our throat, God draws us gradually so those bad attributes will leave us little by little. So as a starting point, *great courage and hard work is needed*. Rumi says:

Until the juice ferments a while in the cask,
it isn't wine. If you wish your heart to be bright,
you must do a little work.

So self-effort - fasting, silence, solitude and constant remembrance of God helps in this. However, and more importantly, the spiritual master *also directly influences his disciple spiritually purging his evil nature – this is Baraka* or his divine grace or divine blessings, representing his spiritual power. ***(Of the two, the latter (Baraka) is ultimately more important but it is forthcoming only for the deserving.)*** This is a moral transformation in which all the soul's passions and desires cease to exist. There is now a passing-away of the mind from all objects of perception, thoughts, actions, and feelings through its concentration upon the thought of God i.e., contemplation of the divine attributes. This process carries on till the disciples will is surrendered to God and is concentrated on him - the Sufi now 'dies to self' (fana) and 'lives in God' in whom he has full faith and depends on for everything. The highest stage of *fana* is reached when

even the consciousness of having attained *fana* disappears. This is 'the passing-away of passing-away' (*fana al-fana*) and is the cessation of all conscious thought. The mystic is now wrapped in contemplation of the divine essence. This stage is a prelude to *baqa*, 'continuance' or 'abiding' in God. *He is filled with love, forgiveness and compassion. He becomes all-knowing like God in whom he resides.* He is a *Qutb* and has the right to guide others to God - he is now a director of Souls.

Rumi says:

If you could rid of yourself just once,
The secret of secrets
Would open to you.
The face of the unknown,
Hidden beyond the universe
Would appear on the
Mirror of your perception.

Introspection

In Sufism, self-reflection or introspection (*muhásaba*) helps the disciple in his spiritual growth by looking deep into his inner self, examining and evaluating all past actions and thoughts, studying his dominating fears and desires. He needs to be patient and objective. The aim of this is to cleanse the heart from negativity and cultivate and strengthen divine attributes. The disciples mind must be watchful and attentive focussing on the here and now. This practice leads to ever-increasing mindfulness and awareness. The mind grows calmer, over time, since its own greed and silliness embarrass it. Rumi regarded this practice as essential to screen evil emotions, thoughts, passions, and acts, and thereby to submit ourselves to Gods supervision. This should be done daily.

Dhikr

Sufi masters whose nafs have been purged keep themselves engrossed in the remembrance of God ("Dhikr" or "Zikr"). As part of this process, Sufi's repeat the name of God or a short phrase e.g. 'Glory be to God', *with intense concentration of every faculty upon the single word or phrase* while enjoying the communion with God. While this can be spoken or silent, many prefer the spoken. A perfect master can be so absorbed that they find it difficult to communicate with anyone who wants to talk to them and return into absorption in a short while. Rumi says that true absorption is when God creates in saints the fear of separation that is a result of revelation and experience.

Rumi encourages *constant remembrance* of God. He says "After all, the purpose of prayer is not standing, bowing and prostrating all day, for those moments of spiritual union that possess you in prayer should always be with you. Whether asleep or awake, writing or reading, in any moment, you should not be far from the remembrance of God. Therefore bring your needs to Him constantly, and never be without His remembrance, for the remembrance of God is strength, feathers and wings to a bird of spirit. Through remembrance of God, little by little the inward heart becomes illumined and detached from the outward world. Just as a bird that tries flying to heaven, even though it never reaches that goal, yet every moment it rises farther from the earth and outsoars the other birds." For an aspirant, constant remembrance of his perfect master is

the same as constant remembrance of God. It saves him from sins and bad tendencies and takes him to self-realisation.

Rumi says that if the heart is totally absorbed, then all the other senses are obliterated in it, and there is no need for the tongue. Take the case of Laila: She was not a spiritual being, but of flesh, fashioned of water and clay. Yet passion for her produced such absorption, and so utterly seized and overwhelmed Majnun, that he had no need to see Laila with his eyes, no need to hear her voice. He could not separate himself from the thought of her, causing him to cry:

Your name is upon my tongue.
Your image is in my sight.
Your memory in my heart,
Where can I send these words I write?

Rumi highlights the *early morning as a spiritual time* which we should spend in the remembrance of God as the *mind is quiet and clear* at this point:

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you; Don't go back to sleep.

Dhikr has three stages - Dhikr of the tongue, Dhikr of the heart and Dhikr of the "innermost being" (sirr). The whole being of the disciple must be devoted to the utterance of the dhikr. This will make him arrive at a state of fana (annihilation) in God. He now sees with the 'eye of knowingness'. *Dhikr can be done alone or as part of the Sema prayer ceremony – both are important.*

Sema - Overview

The word Sema comes from a root meaning to listen, suggesting an occasion when music is used to uplift the soul. Sema can be described as a prayer ritual and a physically active meditation.

There is a rule which is followed respectfully by all dervishes at the place designed for the Sema ceremony. The reunion begins with conversation and discussion, followed by a prayer, followed by a zhikr (only the name of God), then the Sema and immediately after the Sema, staying alone in a cell or a room in meditation (tefekkur) for as long as the social obligation of the participant person permits.



Rumi firmly believed in dance and music as his path to God (followed today by the *Whirling Dervishes* of the *Mevlevi Order* in which women also have an important role) albeit he also clearly acknowledged that there could be other paths. Sema helps *achieve more than long enduring penance (repentance)* for ones sins. Love devours repentance. In Rumi's whirling dance, the seeker turns to God (remembrance or Dhikr) abandoning the ego in unconditional surrender. The objective of Sema is for the soul to shed the ego, achieve annihilation in God and return to its *former state of subservience*. Rumi says:

Listen to the reed flute

Sema is the food of the lovers of God,
for within it is the taste of tranquility of mind.

Dance when you're broken open.
Dance when you've torn the bandage off.
Dance in the middle of fighting.
Dance in your blood.
Dance when you're perfectly free.
Struck, the dancer hears a tambourine inside her,
like a wave that crests into foam at the very top, begins.
Maybe you don't hear that tambourine, or the tree leaves clapping time.
Close the ears on your head that listen mostly to lies and cynical jokes.
There are other things to see, and hear.
Music. Dance. A brilliant city inside your soul!

O Lover of God, when you start whirling you leave the two worlds.
This world of whirling is out of the two worlds.

The ceiling of the seventh heaven is at considerable height.
But the ladder of whirling reaches and exceeds this ceiling.

Those who know the secret power of the whirling, live in God:
Love is slaying and reviving
Them - they know it

This is a gathering of Lovers.
In this gathering there is no high, no low, no smart,
no ignorant, no special assembly, no grand discourse,
no proper schooling required

The parable of the moth who casts itself into the flame to 'become flame' is important and is an inspiration for whirling. Rumi identified with the moth being irresistibly drawn into the pain that is transformation. Sema helps to obtain these insights and recognizing that if one is, one is in God. He says:

Lovers don't finally meet somewhere.
They're in each other all along.

This is love-to fly upward toward the endless heavens.
To rend a hundred veils at every moment.
At the first breath, to give up life;
At the final step, to go without feet.
To see the world as a dream
and not as it appears.

Passion and desire bind your heart.
Remove the locks-
become a key, become a key . . .

The goal of the Sufi is not to lose consciousness or to fall into a state of ecstasy. Instead, by revolving in harmony with all things in nature - with the smallest cells and

with the stars in the firmament - the Sufi testifies to the existence and the majesty of the creator, thinks of him, gives thanks to him, and prays to him. The aim of Sema is not unbroken ecstasy and loss of consciousness, but the realization of submission to God. A Sufi says

If you are quiet and in a state of prayer when you turn, offering everything of yourself to God, then when your body is spinning, there is a *completely still point in the center. The heavens respond*; and all the invisible kingdoms join in the dance.

An important characteristic of this seven-centuries-old ritual is that it unites the three fundamental components of human nature: the mind (as knowledge and thought), the heart (through the expression of feelings, poetry and music) and the body (by activating life, by the turning). These three elements are thoroughly joined both in theory and in practice as perhaps in no other ritual or system of thought.

Sema is a ceremony of worship, a meditation in movement, in which the human being becomes pure axis, integrating all levels of being within himself, including the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual levels. To perform the sema is to be centered on the timeless and spaceless, and to experience the meaning of these words from the Koran: 'Wherever you turn is the face of God'. It is to be unified with others who are compelled by the same spiritual longing. It is to be emptied of all distracting thoughts and to be filled with the presence of god. It is itself a journey taken in a direction opposite to that of temporal time, a journey of return to the Source, through our innermost center, where we are closest to the Divine.

If done right, the seeker is not conscious of anyone or anything other than God. Sema helps the Sufi to achieve a mystic's state of mind. *Deep listening is needed for this mystical experience.* Great truths were revealed to Rumi in this state of Divine Love and he made spontaneous utterances of poetry. In this state prayers create miracles. Spiritual intoxication ("Wajd" or spiritual ecstasy) confers significant long-lasting spiritual benefits and also enhances the deep listening. Sema must be done correctly with a clean heart for it to be effective.

Sema itself teaches its secrets over time – over years - and no two ceremonies are experience in the same way. The individual semazen, or dervish, must be able to expand his awareness to include several dimensions at once: He or she must focus on his or her own physical axis, which in this case is the left leg and foot, revolving three hundred and sixty degrees with each step, inwardly pronouncing the name of God, keeping an awareness of exactly where he is in space and the narrow margins of error in this tight choreography, feeling a connection through the shaikh of the ceremony to the whole lineage and also the founder of the order, Mevlâna, and most of all turning with a deep love of god. The sheer impossibility of accomplishing these tasks through one's own will can push one toward another possibility: that of letting a deeper will take over. In this way, the Sema becomes a lesson in surrender. The body spins around the spiritual heart which is the source of Divine Love and Divine Grace and submits to it.

Sema is mostly conducted with men and women in separate groups although some orders have started practicing the Sema in a mixed group since the 1970's. While Sema is a group activity, ultimately achieving God is 'of the alone with the alone'. You have to experience God – this is a personal experience which is in your heart alone even

when you achieve this in Sema. *There is also nothing preventing a person from performing whirling when he is alone by himself* – it can't be said that the spiritual benefits would be any the less – key is the extent of desire for and absorption in the Divine Love of God.

Onlookers also have spiritual benefits - the circular movements and music instil feelings such as humility, reverence, tranquillity, and awe from the experience of such spiritual beauty.

The Seven Parts of Sema

In the symbolism of the Sema ritual, the semazen's camel's hair hat (sikke) represents the tombstone of the ego; his wide, white skirt represents the ego's shroud. By removing his black cloak, he is spiritually reborn to the truth. At the beginning of the Sema, by holding his arms crosswise, the semazen appears to represent the number one, thus testifying to God's unity. While whirling, his arms are open: his right arm is directed to the sky, ready to receive God's beneficence; his left hand, upon which his eyes are fastened, is turned toward the earth. The semazen conveys God's spiritual gift to those who are witnessing the Sema. Revolving from right to left around the heart, the semazen embraces all humanity with love. The human being has been created with love in order to love. Rumi says, 'All loves are a bridge to Divine Love. Yet, those who have not had a taste of it do not know!'

The Form of the Ceremony

The Sema ritual consists of several parts with different meanings:

It Naat-i Sherif is a eulogy to the Prophet, who represents love. To praise him is to praise God Who created him and to praise all of the prophets who preceded him.

This eulogy is followed by a drumbeat (on the kudum) symbolizing the Divine command: "BE" (Kun).

The Naat is followed by a Taksim, an improvisation on the reed flute (the ney). This expresses the Divine breath, which gives life to everything.

The Sultan Veled Walk, accompanied by the peshrev music, is the circular procession three times around the turning space. The greetings of the semazens during the procession represent the salutation of soul to soul concealed by shapes and bodies.

During the Sema itself there are four selams, or musical movements, each with a distinct rhythm. At the beginning and close of each selam, the semazen testifies to God's unity.

The First Selam represents the human being's birth to truth through feeling and mind. It represents his complete acceptance of his condition as a creature created by God.

The Second Selam expresses the rapture of the human being witnessing the splendor of creation in front of God's greatness and omnipotence.

The Third Selam is the rapture of dissolving into love and the sacrifice of the mind to love. It is complete submission, unity, the annihilation of self in the Beloved. This is the state that is known as nirvana in Buddhism and fana fillah in Islam. The next stage in Islamic belief is the state of servanthood represented by the Prophet, who is called God's servant, foremost, and subsequently, His "messenger." The aim of Sema is not unbroken ecstasy and loss of consciousness, but the realization of submission to God.

In the Fourth Selam, just as the Prophet ascends to the spiritual "Throne" and then returns to his task on earth, the whirling dervish, after the ascent of his spiritual journey, returns to his task, to his servanthood. He is a servant of God, of His Books, of His Prophets of His whole creation. At the end of this salute, he demonstrates this again by his appearance, arms consciously and humbly crossed, representing the unity of God.

Afterwards follows a recitation from the Koran, especially the verse:

To God belong the East and the West,
and wherever you turn is the face of God.
He is the All-Embracing, the All-Knowing.

The ceremony ends with a prayer for the peace of the souls of all prophets and believers.

After the completion of the Sema, all the dervishes return silently to their rooms for meditation (tefekkur).

Role of Teacher in Sema

You cannot "know" what it is to turn in the mystical contemplation of the divine. For this you need a teacher and a guide. You also need a sincere determination, as well as physical, emotional, and spiritual strength to achieve the states of enraptured absorption that the Dervish experiences.

The turn is challenging in both technique and endurance. The training takes about a year of practicing every day to gain insight into what it is one is actually doing, and a lifetime to refine and perfect it. The teacher (Sheikh/Sheikha) must be able to transmit the unspeakable to the student. The student, in turn, must surrender parts of him/her self that the ego guards fearfully. The Sheikh must be patient, cunning, intuitive, inspiring, and demanding for the student to 'leap over his shadow'.

Here is an important prayer that is done internally by the Sheikh at the beginning of the third period of whirling:

May God grant you total soundness, O travelers on the Way of Love.
May the Beloved remove the veils from your eyes
And reveal to you the secrets of your time and of the true center.

The steps themselves are few and simple, but like a top, unless you are perfectly centered, you cannot disappear into an infinitesimally thin axis so that everything you take yourself to be is whirling around you, and you are that existence which has no

physical residence. This is the way of the Dervish. This is what Dervishes call 'True Love'.

Meditation

In prayer, we ask God for something (a better form of prayer is just remembrance without any motive), and during meditation, God speaks to us.

Sema is one key way to meditate but the disciple can also meditate by himself. There are many ways to meditate. This book is advocating the '*thoughtless, feelingless and soundless*' form of meditation i.e., concentrating on nothingness.

The disciple should meditate on the formless nature of his spiritual master (or initially on the form of his master) which is knowledge incarnate, consciousness and bliss. By fixing his thoughts on one point the distinction between meditator, act of meditation, and that meditated upon is lost and the disciple will be one with his master and will experience Divine Love.

Such meditation will help the disciple overcome hunger, thirst and worldly issues. The consciousness of worldly pleasures will disappear and his mind will attain peace and happiness.

Here are the steps to meditate:

1. Keep your eyes closed.
2. Chant the name of your master initially.
3. Meditation is not thinking - its total surrender and absorption in your master and through him to God.
4. Leave the impression of your master in the depths of your mind in a state of submission to your master, trusting in him. With the energy that it creates there, the manifestation of his Divine Love spreads throughout your whole body.
5. Now see your master through the eye of the heart. Do not look for his face. Instead, concentrate on his aura, his spiritual form. Greet your master and ask for his permission to connect your spiritual heart to his light and his spiritual heart to your light. Imagine a ray of light extending from your master's heart to your heart and another extending from your heart to his. This creates a powerful spiritual connection.
6. Now, do not think anything – if you do this other ideas and thoughts will come into that thought and some mistakes will be born through the influence of your nafs (ego). Having established the connection with your master's heart stop thinking of anything. It is only in this state that the true energy of Divine Love will cleanse your heart.

Divine Love

Spiritual realisation starts with self-discipline and effort but is ultimately a result of Gods grace and his Divine Love. The disciple must have hunger and thirst for God and treat everything else as unimportant. Divine love is a gift from God where there is real yearning and feeling.

The state of Divine Love according to Hujwiri is:

A quality which manifests itself, in the heart of the pious believer, in the form of veneration and magnification, so that he seeks to satisfy his beloved and becomes impatient and restless in his desire for vision of Him, and cannot rest with anyone except Him, and grows familiar with the recollection of Him, and abjures the recollection of everything besides. Repose becomes unlawful to him, and rest flees from him. He is cut off from all habits and associations, and renounces sensual passion, and turns towards the court of love, and submits to the law of love, and knows God by His attributes of perfection.

The Mystics of Islam

Rumi says:

I want a heart which is split, part by part,
because of the pain of separation from God,
so that I might explain my longing and complaint to it

Iqbal adds:

When the lover fails to possess any love-fire
He is like a bird without wings and desire.

Rumi says that reason is like a moth, and the Beloved is like a candle. No matter how much that consuming flame and agony may hurt, the moth cannot fly from the candle. The true lover is never free from striving, they revolve restlessly and ceaselessly around the light of God. And God consumes them, making them nothing, destroying the veil of their reason.

Saints have been known to transfer their spiritual insights and state of God realisation through one kiss on the forehead of the disciple. Here is what Rumi says on the *divine kiss*:

I would love to kiss you,
The price of kissing is your Life.
Now my loving is running toward my life shouting.
What a bargain, let's buy it.

So, what is Divine Love? Bayazid says:

Love, is in its essence a divine gift, not anything that can be acquired. 'If the whole world wished to attract love, they could not; and if they made the utmost efforts to repel it, they could not.' Those who love God are those whom God loves. 'I fancied that I loved Him,' says a Sufi, 'but on consideration I saw that His love preceded mine. Love signifies the passing away of the individual self; it is an uncontrollable rapture, a Godsend grace which must be sought by ardent prayer and aspiration.

The Mystics of Islam

Rumi says that Divine Love is the root of all obedience; all else is mere adornment. If you do not sacrifice, how can you gain your heart's desire? Giving up everything leads to annihilation, the source of all pleasures where no separation exists. To be wholly

without desire - that is not a natural desire, since a person must empty themselves and cease to be. But to allow not even an itch of desire to enter the heart—that is not within the scope of anyone. *Only God's love can take that out.*

Rumi says that the human mind churns with doubts and difficulties. The mind can never be rid of these except when it is truly in Divine Love - then all its doubts and difficulties vanish. *'Your love renders you blind and deaf.'* Divine love is vastly superior to bookish knowledge as it brings with it devotion, dispassion, peace and spiritual liberation. In fact people who experience the grace of Divine Love will find that all their real problems in this world seem to be solving themselves almost on auto-pilot mode.

Hafiz says:

I am happy even before I have a reason.
I am full of Light even before the sky can greet the sun or the moon.
Dear companions,
We have been in love with God
For so very, very long.
What can Hafiz now do but Forever Dance!

While pain is the normal process of removing ones spiritual weaknesses, *Divine Love does away with the need for pain* by remove the Sufi's weaknesses in a flash. Similarly, any Sufi in the rapture of Divine Love can bless someone else and miracles will happen.

A truly spiritual man who lives in the rapture of Divine Love is *secure from harm and lives in safety*. His confidence and reliance on God is tremendous – God brings him his food and keeps him safe. For those who God loves truly (his saints), no ordinary man has the capacity to bring harm to even a hair of a saint's body.

As a normal person's devotion and love for God increases so does God's love, care and attention to the persons cries for help. Rumi says that once the believer surrenders to God, why should they give a thought to distress and danger:

Poison is good to sup
When the fair one fills the cup.
Bitter words are sweet to hear
When the speaker is most dear.
Full of pleasure is my love
With that salty wit I know of.
Very pleasing is its smart
Rubbed into my wounded heart.
And God knows best.

More generally, listening to any spiritual music (e.g. the Islamic call to prayer), helps in spiritual cleansing and achieving higher states of mind. A perfect master who sings in praise of God does not need any background music.

Rumi highlights that the mark of a spiritual man is his silence – this is the state in which God is experienced:

Silence is the language of God, all else is poor translation.

Rumi says that True Sufi's *eat little, sleep little, speak little* and their tongues are empowered with the truth. They are closest to God and are ahead of all in remembering him.

11. Evil

While Nafs is the evil within us, Evil also exists out of us and is Satan (Iblis). This is a force of negative energy that is ultimately under the control of God who controls both good and evil – not even a leaf can move without God's will. While evil is limited and relative in nature, God is absolute and infinite. God is light, Evil is darkness and has the exact opposite qualities.

Spiritual Illusion is a huge obstacle for the Sufi.

Consistent with the Islamic belief that 'All things come from God and all things return to Him', Rumi states that evil is a creation of God which he permits to exist in this world and in man for certain purposes. We know good because evil exists – this relativity is important. Therefore evil indirectly works for the realisation of good.

Thou does not know evil till thou knowst good: (only) from (one) contrary is it possible to discern (the other) contrary, O youth!

Rumi says that while God wills both good and evil, he only approves of the good. The divine command to man is to do good and the divine prohibition is against doing evil – this is only relevant where man desires evil. As such man invites evil onto himself through his spiritual weaknesses. Nonetheless, Evil is subject to God's will and God can choose to be merciful to the deserving, changing the nature of events and their intensity to make them more acceptable – get rid of your weaknesses and pray fervently for his mercy and his miracle. God can snatch you away from death in a flash at his divine will. Devotion is key – chant God's name and remember Him at all times.

Evil is the willful rejection of the 'signs' of God and defiance of the divine's commands. Satan represents the despicable qualities of anger, arrogance, pride, envy, disobedience and spiritual blindness. Evil uses fear and accompanying doubt and suspicion to spread sorrow and discontent. *With fear, the body, the spiritual strength and knowledge of a person get destroyed* – not only is he affected spiritually but also in his professional and personal life he will not achieve his full potential by making numerous errors of judgement out of fear. Sloth, complete lack of forgiveness, hypocrisy and being self-righteous are also reflections of evil in a more subtle way. *Forgiveness has great power in overcoming fear and breaking its vicious destructive cycle.*

Satan's temptations are many and take us on a path of materialism and sensuality – neither match the spiritual ecstasy of being one with God. All sensual experiences gratify us temporarily and leave an emptiness inside us when we are satiated. Periods of highs are followed by periods of lows – this is certainly not the road to permanent happiness. The more we accumulate material objects the more our desire for them grows and the more we get distracted into *growing them and maintaining them*. This road has no end. The prayers of such a man are for the material and have no value to God. As Rumi says:

The smell of pride and greed and lust
will betray you when you speak
as much as the onions you have eaten.
Many prayers are rejected because of their smell;
the corrupt heart reveals itself in the tongue.

But if your meaning is pure,
God will welcome even your clumsy expression.

Satan knows our innermost base desires. Greed for money drags the greedy man to the lowest level and ultimately brings destruction on him and others. Fame is another of his temptations – with it come's a path of vices and super-ego's that cannot manage a reversal in fortunes. However, of Satan's temptations *lust is the hardest* to conquer. To some degree, sexual experience (and therefore knowledge) is necessary, to avoid developing a furtive desire for the forbidden and the unknown. However, lust is never satisfied by gratification - it only flares up more and more, like a fire fed with oil. Those who display lascivious behaviour will find that their destinies are marked with turmoil – be very careful about your behaviour. With every round of excess you're essentially dissipating energy that could have been used for your higher spiritual purpose. *In the ultimate analysis, if we can't conquer lust we cannot achieve God.*

It is important to note that the negative reinforces the negative. What works is always repeated easily. People who are deceitful and use their position seem to succeed and this reinforces the use of negative means. Those who have sought and won power, prestige and influence will tell you that the road was never clean. Cover-ups for errors, false statements from a false morality, transactions based on give and take and on blackmail, and even on open threats. The end defines the means for them. These people have had their share of sleepless nights torn with guilt and fear at the thought of their *deceit being uncovered by some means - as it inevitably does by the law of reciprocity.* Hafiz says:

Forget every idea of right and wrong
Any classroom ever taught you
Because an empty heart, a tormented mind,
Unkindness, jealousy and fear
Are always the testimony
You have been completely fooled!

A man under the influence of Satan has ill luck including bad health (*health is true wealth*) and behaves in a self-destructive way under the *influence of anger* – anger is a key force of evil. Under the influence of this force, a man is very likely to curse his near and dear ones and even harm them and himself during his bouts of anger. Ultimately the person's intuitive clarity is eroded and the person becomes devious, conniving and calculating.

Satan torments the soul with feelings of loneliness and the desire for human company. *We are made to look outside for the answer to our loneliness*, whereas the answer is inside us, since we have God within us. When a man is in the clutches of this negative force, time seems to move slowly enhancing the experience of suffering.

Satan creates spiritual illusion where the true reality is concealed from the Sufi. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) says:

Lord, show me things as they are,
You show a thing as fair, and in reality it is ugly,
You show a thing as ugly, and in truth it is beautiful.
Show me everything just as it is,
So that we will not fall into the snare.

Spiritual illusion is the biggest barrier on the path. It deceives you into giving up your spiritual master and the quest for God as a meaningless non-practical pursuit. It will try to convince you that your master is powerless. It can show itself in happenings or in negative psychic experiences that mislead. Rumi makes the point that Satan not only instigates man to commit sin, but sometimes also persuades man to perform a virtuous act in order to deprive him from earning a higher reward – this is a difficult spiritual illusion to see through.

Rumi says of Shams his master:

From submission to Satan's will
Your prophetic soul emerged through this mill
Satan himself, God's will fulfil

Here Rumi highlights that every Sufi has to deal with the force of evil and overcome it. While Satan is anti-God in nature and is *man's enemy seeking to prevent the union of man and God*, his actions cannot be outside our destinies i.e., he is subject to the will of God. Each of us has a destiny that we are born with, so if we try to make more money than was destined, then while we may make it, it comes with a lot of hurdles and pain – this is Satan's work. Even lust which needs to be overcome by the Sufi to achieve God has a divine role – if there were no lust then the very existence of man would cease.

While man cannot totally eradicate evil from this world, he is capable of removing the evil within himself (his nafs) which separates him from God. Man should find beauty in nature and not in material things and this will bring him closer to God.

As the Sufi treads the spiritual path this negative force becomes stronger in its attempt to distract, delude and ultimately detract the Sufi from the path to God. Only the deserving succeed in 'living in God'.

In the ultimate analysis, love starts where the desire to inflict pain disappears.

12. Devotion

Rumi says:

My master and my morād!
 My affliction and my remedy!
 Let me divulge the secret:
 My Sun (Shams), my God!
 Until thou gazest at me, I am
 bewildered by love,
 for thou art the king of the two worlds; my Sun, my God!
 I will become extinguished before Thee so that no trace of me remains:
 such is the requirement of decorum; my Sun, my God!"

**Without Devotion
 Spiritual Knowledge is Useless
 And cannot take you to God.**

The above lines show Rumi's intense devotion to his spiritual master – Shams and his love and desire for annihilation in his master. Hafiz tells us what devotion is *not*:

What do sad people have in common?
 It seems they have all built a shrine to the past
 And often go there and do a strange wail and worship.
 What is the beginning of happiness?
 It is to stop being so religious like that.

There are three kinds of disciples. The best kind of disciple is he who guesses what his master wants and immediately carries it out and serves him without waiting for an order from him. The average disciple carries out the orders of their master to a letter, without any delay. The third kind of disciple is he who goes on postponing the carrying out of his master's orders and makes mistakes at every step.

Sufism requires unconditional surrender and love (adoration) for the spiritual master - this is the foundation of the spiritual path and transformation. To express devotion, no elaborate worship is needed. The master is dependent on the devotee who thinks and hungers after his master and who does not eat anything without first offering it to him. The master will draw out such a devotee from the jaws of death. The devotee should constantly think of the life, stories and sayings of his master - *this is the cure even for disease* and helps a devotee to transcend the law of reciprocity through spiritual transformation as a result of the 'Baraka' of his master. He should remember his master and chant his name at all times. He should *see his master in all beings and all things* – this will help him to avoid anger, hatred, infatuation and grief.

There are nine forms of devotion – hearing praises, singing praises, remembering form and name, serving the masters feet, worship of master or his photograph (seeing a perfect master's picture earnestly is equivalent to seeing him in person), bowing (reinforces surrender), service (involves some spiritual work), friendship, and complete surrender of the self (giving up attachments, surrender of the intellect and ego). If any of these is faithfully followed, the master will be pleased (hence, there is significance to the number nine also). All other acts such as chanting, penance, Yoga and studying the scriptures/expounding them are useless unless they are accompanied by devotion. Sufi masters say that we should be anxious to harness and cultivate these nine types of devotion in order to attain stability and peace of mind. Of all the forms of devotion, if a devotee were to bow to his master's feet and worship it with mind and soul, then this is

a sufficient starting point - *his master would increase other forms of devotion*. The devotee's faith would increase and he would soon take to remembering and chanting his master's name – this would remove his negative qualities, increase his positive qualities and bring to him discrimination, dispassion and knowledge.

Our mind is fickle by nature and it should not be allowed to get wild. The senses may get restless, the body, however, should be held in check and not allowed to be impatient. Senses run after objects, but we should not follow them and crave for their objects. By slow and gradual practice restlessness can be conquered. We should not be swayed by the senses, but they cannot be completely controlled. We should curb them rightly and properly according to the need of the occasion. Beauty is the subject of sight; we should fearlessly look at the beauty of objects. There is no room for shyness or fear. Only we should never entertain evil thoughts. *Making the mind desireless, observe God's works of beauty*. In this way the senses will be easily and naturally controlled and even in enjoying objects you will be reminded of God.

Discrimination between the unreal and the real is needed to establish control over our senses and mind and *establish non-attachment*. Practicing this is important. Perfect masters advise that before the senses, mind and intellect enjoy any material or sensual experience (even food), the master should first be remembered, and if this be done, it is in a way an offering to him. The senses look for sensory experiences, but by first offering these to the master, the attachment for them will naturally vanish. In this way, all the thoughts regarding desire, anger, avarice etc. should first be offered and directed to the master and if this practice is followed, the master will help the disciple in eradicating all negative thoughts. When before enjoyment of such experiences, the disciple *thinks that the master is close by, the question whether the experience is fit to be enjoyed or not* will at once arise. Then the experience that is not fit to be enjoyed will be shunned and in this way the disciple's vicious habits or vices will disappear and his character will improve. *In a nut-shell, we should not enjoy any object with our senses without first remembering our master*. Then devotion and non-attachment will grow and pure knowledge will sprout up taking the disciple closer to his master spiritually. He will realise that his master is the only reality – he will enjoy bliss and contentment in his masters Divine Love. For all this to take place, the person must make a genuine offering from his heart. He must open himself to Divine Love. If the offering of the experience is of something of an evil nature it would naturally be done superficially and would not have any positive spiritual value and in fact attract evil – hence *never do evil by taking Gods name first*.

The master tailors the specific practices of devotion to the disciple's spiritual attainment and linked needs – *the prescription is always in line with the disease*. The devotional practices required by the master, seek to increase the disciples devotion and faith leading to constant remembrance of the master. They enable the disciple to gain control over his own mind thereby gaining control over anger, lust and materialistic greed. The practices could cover reading, writing, singing, listening, dancing, preaching, meditation, taking specific actions (e.g. feeding the hungry, giving clothes to the naked and shelter to the tired), long-periods of silence, exercise etc. Importantly, what is read must be *practiced and lived* - mere reading is of no use. The disciple should meditate on the *inner meaning in his master's words*, take this to heart and practice it. To get the grace of the master both *practice and loving devotion* to the master are essential. *Obedience and prompt compliance are both necessary as is faith,*

patience (as perseverance) and gratitude. Lastly, worship must be done with mind and soul and *total surrender of all senses* – we cannot lead a parallel life in worshipping the master and being under the control of unbridled lust.

Patience is manliness - it removes all sins and afflictions, gets rid of calamities in various ways and casts aside fear, and ultimately gives the disciple success. Patience is the mine of virtues, consort of good thoughts. *Faith and Patience are twin sisters, loving each other intimately.*

Rumi believed that while prayer without faith gains nothing (as in the case of hypocrites - if a hypocrite performs only the form of action, such as prayer or fasting, it gains them nothing, since the sincere desire for true action was not present.), *faith without prayer is valuable.* Rumi's use of the word 'faith' is more in the context of having experienced something that changes our perspective on life rather than being sold on some doctrine. The power of discernment (to see the reality of something) and wisdom is true faith. This is always stronger with direct spiritual experiences rather than bookish knowledge. *Many people who read sacred books daily still have impure minds and unbridled passions.* This is due to their self-pride (ego) and lack of total surrender. They lack direct spiritual experiences as they are not worthy of it. Rumi says that while the literalists take the Holy Mosque to be the Kaaba in Mecca. However, lovers and the elect of God take the Holy Mosque to mean union with God - such discrimination and wisdom is true faith. When the master says 'have faith' what he means is 'I've shown you that God exists, now trust this truth alone and use it to bear your sufferings with strength and learn from them'. Faith will surely be tested. *Spiritual qualities flower automatically through faith.* Rumi says that *until a thing passes away, its true meaning cannot be known.* No one's life can be judged until it is finished, because what starts evil can turn out good. For example, until words pass away into speech, who can know their purpose? Hence the disciple should have faith in his master's decisions without argument even when he has not understood these fully. (In terms of the doctrine of faith, this is in the context of actions taken based on the decisions of a perfect master. Whilst not impossible, it is difficult to find a living perfect master. Also, remember that *actions that cause any significant harm and pain to others* would never be recommended by a perfect master – so when this happens this is likely a negative spiritual experience.) True faith – those who truly believe that their master is God - has the power to overcome the law of reciprocity with the divine intervention of the master.

The disciple must be grateful for their master's graciousness and also his wrath. As Rumi says - gratefulness changes wrath to grace. The disciple must accept sorrows as a test by God and be patient. Rumi says

When God loves people He afflicts them.
If they endure with fortitude, He chooses them.
If they are grateful, He elects them.

Rumi says that God says

Do not dwell in my house of wrath and anger.
Move into my house of grace and compassion.
Do something in praise of me, and enter my house of love.

Rumi says that the true lover and seeker needs to have the will to put up with many *spiritual tests of his faith* by his master designed to give him both advice and discipline

- to his heart, dung should become honey and sugar. Key amongst these tests are those focused on the desire for women and for wealth.

Rumi emphasises the importance of discipline. The first discipline is the 'Greater Holy War' or *Jihad* of slaying the self that is controlled by desires and lusts so that the seeker can discern between wrong and right. Yet the seekers struggle continues and the Saints see this and endure it. God bestows on the saints a great and mighty capacity to endure and *out of a hundred wrong acts by the seeker, they mention only one*, so that it will not become difficult for the seeker to overcome.

In a more day-to-day context, Rumi says that if God so wishes, there is no comfort or joy even with all the means of ease, bread and luxury provided - everything becomes pain and affliction. This highlights that people who have more wealth are not necessarily happier than others – *hence when we look at people, the extent to which they are free from the negative emotions of fear, guilt, sorrow and anger is the only real test of their happiness and their spiritual stature.*

Sufi saints get their piece of bread delivered by God into their hand – they don't run behind it. Rumi says "I know well the way God provides our daily bread. What use is there in running about here and there with no purpose? *Truly, when I forget about money, food, clothing and the desires of lust, my daily portion comes to me.* But when I run after those desires, they only bring me pain and wear me out. If I sit where I belong, with patience, my needs are fulfilled without pain and distress. For truly, my daily supply is also seeking me and tugging at me. When it cannot pull me it comes to me, just as when I cannot attract it I go after it." The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) says "If someone is plagued by ten cares let them worry only about that care for the other World, and God will untangle those other nine knots without any effort." Of course this will work only for those who possess *genuine devotion and total surrender* to God which needs full faith.

We should be contented with our lot in the belief that whatever happens is ordained by God and is ultimately good for us. This does not imply inaction which is a sin, rather it implies right action i.e. we should avoid chasing materialism and focus our energies on the spiritual. Rumi also says that we should not grieve for what does not happen as it may be the best thing and may have brought with it unknown troubles that were prevented.

Burdens are the foundations of ease and bitter things the forerunners of pleasure.

Don't grieve. Anything you lose comes round in another form.

Ultimately, our feelings of pain and pleasure depend upon the attitudes of our mind.

The disciple must be grateful to God for his blessings. Rumi says:

Giving thanks for abundance is sweeter than the abundance itself...

An imperfect man may not be grateful to God. Rumi says that this is because of:

Inordinate greed, for no matter how much people have, greed wants more. Since they get less than what their heart is set upon, they cannot be grateful. But people are unaware of their own defect...

Hence, the master creates special incidents or events to create the context for these spiritual experiences to show the disciple the baseness of his nature (to remove the

‘nafs’) and at the same time takes the disciple through a direct spiritual communion in which subtle truths related to the incidents or events are revealed to him in an intuitive flash – this is an expression of a perfect masters divine power. This can even happen through psychic experiences or visions in dreams and even when awake – this changes the person’s mental attitude. The master’s grace (‘Baraka’) also directly spiritually transforms the aspirant purging him of his spiritual weaknesses – this is always a reward for devotion.

A spiritual masters grace increases as the disciple’s devotion, reverence, desire for the Truth, obedience and prompt compliance increases. His grace also increases devotion.

13. Spiritual Master

In Sufism, the primary task for the Spiritual aspirant is to remove the animal spirit. This is usually done with the help of a perfect master who can be living or dead. In this book the terms spiritual master and perfect master are used interchangeably although to attain God the grace of a perfect master (living or dead) is essential – anything short of this creates too many risks. Yet learning Sema for example, will likely be at the hands of a master who may not be a perfect master but operates under his grace. *Hence, the perfect master can accept a disciple either directly or through another disciple who is at a more advanced stage.* Nonetheless, the perfect master controls the disciple's spiritual process from end-to-end and ultimately attaining God is with the Grace of the perfect master and no one else. Being accepted by a perfect master as a disciple is a very fortunate event.

Without the help of a Perfect Master we cannot attain God. One's sins will not cease till one falls at the feet of Saints.

To receive the divine grace of a perfect master *no formal Sufi initiation is needed* – devotion alone is sufficient to win them over. And no middle-man is really needed – they teach according to the “seek of the seeker” – for example, (metaphorically) if you are in the secondary school of spirituality they will not give you PhD level experiences which can make you unstable. Anyone can beg a perfect master for acceptance as a disciple *at any point of time in their evolution* – there are no conditions other than devotion. A perfect master accepts a disciple with God's consent. Spiritual experiences – strange coincidences, strange events and visions (while awake and while asleep) follow a disciple who they accept. More traditional Sufi schools believe in the need for living masters to teach disciples and also formal initiation. *This book shuns both requirements as unnecessary.* Many other Sufi groups have similar views – for example, the Rose Sufi Crescent believes that the master does not have to be a living person.

Generally we find different ways of behaviour, different modes of living and different outward paraphernalia with different perfect masters – however, these outward signs should never be our standards to judge their worth. A perfect master is a God-realized person (one whose limited individualized consciousness has merged with God) who can use his divine attributes of infinite power, knowledge and bliss for the spiritual upliftment of others – *he can be from any religious tradition* – all perfect masters are in constant unison with God and with one another (Saints love each other with a fraternal affection) so they can train a disciple on any path including Islamic Sufism or Sufism applied in the context of some other religion. Conservative Islam only recognises a perfect master as someone who has a direct lineage to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) – however, since there is only one God and many paths (religions) to him, in a spiritual sense all perfect masters have this lineage irrespective of religion. Perfect masters can be male or female. Perfect masters *provide the inspiration for the spiritual quest* – without this man cannot rise above his mediocre propensities.

A perfect master is an agent of God. Rumi says that if a person is hostile to the saint, they are acting hostile against God. If they befriend the saint, they have made friendship with God.

Whoever has seen them has seen Me.

Whoever finds them has found Me.

A perfect master knows the past and the future. He is always aware of everything his disciples do. He encourages good thoughts and action on them. He is an abode of peace - never restless nor ruffled. The master has no pride of his learning. Friends and foes, the rich/powerful and paupers are all the same to him - he is unbiased with no prejudice. His grace is for those who are devoted to him - these can be poor and simple people (the rich and scholars are more likely to fall into pits of egoism. Wealth and scholarship do not mean that they are spiritually evolved). He has powers over life, death, pain and disease - he 'lives in God' so *miracles can happen at his will* although this remains subject to the will of God. He is everywhere - not just in his tomb - the best place to find him is in your heart. If God is willing, he will draw his disciple from the remotest part of the world to his spiritual influence. For a perfect master a simple glance, a pronouncement, a thought or a touch, is enough to carry out his work. One touch of a perfect master's hand can transform a person spiritually - cleansing his thoughts, past sins and calming his mind. He will not leave his disciples halfway and will be with them till they become one with God. A perfect master does the work of God so his *actions cannot be judged by appearances and conventional standards of morality* - of right and wrong. For a Saint the Law of Reciprocity does not apply - Rumi says:

With them, sin is not sin, and crime is not crime, since they are absorbed.

The saint is consumed in God, and therefore their actions are God's actions.

The perfect master is a permanent source of power as he lives in constant communion with God and other Saints. This power is like a magnet drawing people to it. A saint's blessing is all that is needed - the miracle works itself through magnetising the things that are needed, and the people, situations and circumstances to support the blessings of the saint all fall into place. Rumi says that within us there are many '*silent ones*' - those who have attained union with God but their names are not known to us to avoid human jealousy. He says that a perfect master often chooses to *remain anonymous* - out of deep compassion, he concentrates his energy and charges a place so that Divine Love constantly manifests itself there.

There are many spiritual masters. Whose influence you're attracted to is less a result of your own choice but more a result of who God appoints for you. Without God's grace the master will not accept the disciple. *In fact without God's grace, we do not even get the desire to listen to the stories of Saints.* You will have only one *primary master* but may believe in and be spiritually influenced by other masters (some saints had as many as five perfect masters to guide them in total). You will feel it and know it when you have the Baraka or 'divine blessings' of your master. Constant remembrance of your master is recommended. Visiting his holy Shrine is also recommended. *Rumi says that it is possible by merely gazing at God's saints to find the spiritual path.* Without words, without questioning, without speech, the purpose is achieved. This is absolutely true - by just gazing constantly at the photograph or a painting of a perfect master you can be completely spiritually transformed. The master removes the sense of duality - removes darkness and reminds the disciple that he himself is God.

The choice of our master is important. If we are under the influence of an imperfect master, Rumi says we will become as bad as him. He says:

Do not believe in an absurdity no matter who says it.

However, once the Sufi has been accepted by a perfect master, which is an important process in itself contingent on the will of God, the disciple must make unconditional surrender to his master. As Rumi says “Reason is fine when you are sick because it brings you to the physician. After that, reason is of no use to you, since you must surrender yourself to the advice of the physician”. The disciple must not feel that he is free to offer or refuse service to his master. He must feel that his body belongs to his master and exists merely to render service to him. His *surrender must be total* – he is there to serve his master – *his hard work is a reflection of his faith*. He must have full faith in his master and *remain steady* in union with him. The specific form of devotional service will depend on the spiritual needs of the disciple. The disciple should never fail in his service to his master be it in whatever form he undertakes/ the master assigns to him. He should give it his *mental presence*, sincerity, hard work and of course love and devotion. Also, there are no elaborate rituals needed to worship the master and each disciple can worship him in his own style (and nobody should interfere in this).

The disciple will know that he is experiencing *spiritual emotion* when he is overcome with tears in his eyes when worshipping his master – he may get goose bumps, may choke with emotion, or even faint. The three main obstacles in awakening spiritual emotion are ignorance, a sense of doership and ego. His masters grace is needed to experience spiritual emotion. Here is a prayer that every disciple should make to his master with heart and soul and total surrender:

Introvert my mind, turn it inward, give me discrimination between the unreal and the real and non-attachment for all worldly things and thus enable me to get self-realisation. I surrender myself, body and soul (body-consciousness and ego). Make my eyes yours, so that I should never feel pleasure and pain. Control my body and mind as you will and wish. Let my mind get rest in your feet.

The disciple must look for the *inner meaning* of his master’s words. The disciple should not question his master’s decisions and only ask questions with genuine intentions with the aim of spiritual progress – *his master is God for him – he knows best what is most suitable for the disciple*. Rumi says of Shams his spiritual master:

You are either the light of God or God.

Rumi says that anyone asking a question must first come to the awareness that their knowledge is incomplete, and secondly that there is wisdom they know nothing about. Hence, the saying, ‘*Asking is half of knowing.*’ On worldly issues, the master’s answers may not be instantaneous, so the disciple needs to have patience. The master will not say ‘Yes’ to everything, but the disciple must remember that every ‘No’ has its purpose that will eventually reveal itself. He must have faith and patience - his aim should be to always remain steady in union with his master.

A perfect master expects his disciple to do charity for the poor and needy. What is needed are not huge donations against his own wishes. Rather even a small amount given with love, devotion and appreciation would bring him more merit. He must give generously according to his means. Over and above this, if he does not wish to give any more, he should not lie and claim that he has nothing. Instead he should decline politely saying that circumstances or his own desires prevent him.

The master may also ask for an offering – the disciple should give this open-heartedly – whatever his master takes from him will be returned tenfold. Offerings are not just in money – for example, the master may want his disciple to read a specific spiritual book and lodge its lessons in his heart. It is said that saints ask for such an offering from their disciple only where spiritual debt, enmity and murder have to be atoned for. The disciple gives and becomes free. The master wants his disciple to learn the lessons of *detachment* and *purification* – to thereby strengthen his devotion and increase his knowledge. Also, whatever small thing a disciple feels like offering (e.g. flowers), as long as he does this with love, devotion and humility, his master will accept it with pleasure (if given with pride and haughtiness it will be rejected). It is believed that offerings in a holy place to a master's tomb, brings significant spiritual benefits. *Nonetheless, implicit obedience to and prompt compliance with the masters orders is the real offering that will please the master most.*

The perfect master ultimately decides the fate of events, both successes and failures. Hence a disciple should not blame himself for his inadvertent failures. *The disciple should not entertain the sense of doership in doing good, as well as for failures as a result of inadvertent negligence.* He should be entirely prideless and egoless in all things and then his spiritual progress will be rapid.

A Sufi lives in adoration of his spiritual master. Love and devotion to the master is the spiritual path. The stronger the devotion the better is the learning and speed. The disciple can achieve more through his masters Divine Love than any books can teach him. The master does not expect any profit from his disciple - on the contrary he wishes to serve him. The master takes his *true* disciple's suffering onto themselves. As Rumi says 'This is a hand accustomed to give, it is not accustomed to take' - saints attract people to them in order to bestow spiritual gifts on them, not to take anything away. The master loves his disciple as his son and treats him like an equal. *At an advanced stage of devotion both are one, and one cannot live without the other* – they love and serve each other, as one. After serving his master, Rumi himself became a perfect master 'living in God' – he says:

The universe and the light of the stars come through me.

The process of becoming a perfect master involves years of efforts – some disciples have done it in as little as 12 years. Rumi says that the state of union with God has a finality about it – no mature fruit ever becomes raw again.

A perfect master has divine powers to create specific situations that help the devotee to gain control over his nafs or ego, hastening this process. The master can create any spiritual states of mind and provide positive or negative spiritual experiences directly while the devotee is awake or sleeping. Using simple expressions they are able to transfer knowledge of great truths to their followers – *this is the spiritual power of the master where his words in an instant, pierce the heart and find its place there.* Even without any words if a devotee just visits a perfect master's tomb, he will have a spiritual experience – his mind will be calmed and a joyousness will spring up in his heart (for some, a visit to a masters tomb proves path changing and they experience a huge spiritual transformation – they are not the same after the visit). The master's grace ('Baraka') can directly spiritually transform the devotee purging him of his negative tendencies – this is a reward for devotion. The master confers the spiritual fruits of discernment and detachment on his disciple and knowledge sprouts up even in his

sleep. They are an epitome of compassion although their wrath is also waiting for the negligent. *Beg for grace at the sacred tomb of a perfect master.*

Unfortunately, a disciple being human will at some point *get distracted from the path* for reasons that all appear rational to him. *His service to his master will deteriorate* – he won't want to pray as much, will think less of his master and his overall devotion and effort will wear thin. He will start asserting his will and desires. This means that in reality the disciple *has not been egoless* while doing his duties as a disciple – he has not accepted every word of his master *unconditionally*. The master will warn his disciple once or twice but he will not heed his masters advise (it may seem that the master is *cursing* the disciple but actually he is simply warning him about the law of reciprocity). This is when the influence of evil becomes strong and the tests become severe and painful. In the clutches of pain and chaos the disciple reaches the point where *he thinks that his master has abandoned him* – in reality it is he who has forgotten his master and invited evil upon himself. His master will save him in the 11th hour but the disciple must first shed his ego and beg for forgiveness and be genuinely repentant. For a disciple to make overcome his situation he should ask for his masters blessings and *listen carefully to his masters prescription* – his master may want him to abstain from something or to do something – visiting his masters tomb is the right way to complete act of penance. *In fact if his devotion had been perfect no harm would have come to him.* The lesson here is that a disciple should have self-realisation as the goal of his life and be ever cautious not to go astray – this needs hard work and discipline. Also, sometimes material losses in money, position and fame, are because the devotee is distracted from the spiritual path, and a significant change in environment is needed to bring him back on track – what may seem to be a curse may actually be a blessing.

A perfect master is always with his devotee night and day, monitoring every action and reaction, correcting them like a mother corrects her child, and also warning them/saving them from danger (e.g. losses due to speculation) and calamities. His abode is in the heart of the devotee. *A perfect master gives according to the seek of the seeker.* They believe that spiritual revelation must be proportionate to a person's capacity to deal with it – this is the master's way of protecting his devotee and also ensuring that the devotee does not abandon the spiritual path. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "God inspires wisdom in the tongue of the teacher according to the aspirations of the student":

I am a cobbler: the leather is plentiful,
but I cut and stitch according to the size of the foot.
I am your mirror,
I am your measure;
As much as your stature is,
So much my treasure.

Accordingly, the master's *prescription for discipline and devotional practice is different for each devotee* and is tailored to their level of spiritual attainment. To some meditation on the master, chanting his name, reading his stories and expressing his love and devotion in unconditional surrender is sufficient. Others may need to study spiritual texts blessed by their master and to meditate. Yet for other, living by the begging bowl as a mendicant and celibate, is needed. These instructions can be given by the master in the devotee's dreams as visions. The master will increase the devotion of any devotee who truly succeeds in faith and patience. The master is the epitome of compassion. Key

is to *fix the mind in remembering the master* always so that it will not wander elsewhere.

The disciple must, mystically, always bear his murshid (the spiritual master) in mind, and become mentally absorbed in him through a constant meditation and contemplation of him. The teacher must be his shield against all evil thoughts. The spirit of the teacher follows him in all his efforts, and accompanies him wherever he may be, quite as a guardian spirit. To such a degree is this carried that he sees the master in all men and in all things, just as a willing subject is under the influence of a magnetiser. This condition is called 'self-annihilation' in the murshid or sheikh (the spiritual master). The latter knows, through his own visions, the degree which the disciple has reached, and whether or not his spirit has become bound to his own. This process is repeated through his spiritual master's master and so on until the spiritual aspirant is led to God. 'He becomes united with the Deity and sees Him in all things.'

The Mystics of Islam

A disciple says:

My master became my all-in-all, my home and property, mother and father, everything. All my senses left their places and concentrated themselves in my eyes, and my sight was centred on him. Thus was my master, the sole object of my meditation and I was conscious of none else. While meditating on him my mind and intellect were silenced and I kept quiet and bowed to him in silence.

The disciple would do well to use his *master's photograph or painting* to create a strong devotional bond. Having conversations with it, as if his master was alive with him, is a good idea. From such a connection devotion will get strengthened and spiritual experiences will follow.

Ultimately the disciple becomes one with their master and has the exact same personality. As Rumi says:

Why should I seek? I am the same as He.

His essence speaks through me.

I have been looking for myself!

Without the help of a Perfect Master God cannot be attained.

14. Law of Reciprocity

The idea of reciprocity (or Karma) is recognised in every religion ie, ‘As you sow so shall you reap’. Islam accepts the idea that every soul has to face the consequences of its actions. Sufi’s believe that if we wish to be happy we should think of the happiness of our fellow human beings. Rumi says that the troubles and depressions that come to us are the effect of some injury and wrong we have committed. Even if we cannot remember in detail what we have done, still *from the results we can know the deed*. Rumi says that *whatever we keep hidden in our heart, God manifests in us outwardly* – hence even evil thoughts ultimately invoke the law of reciprocity. We must have control on both our thoughts and our deeds.

**Introspection is critical –
look within yourself to
understand yourself.**

Sufi beliefs include the fact that Good and Bad mean different things as a person evolves – *the same rules don’t apply to a perfect master as they apply to a spiritual aspirant*. Initially as a person goes on the path, his suffering initially increases to cleanse him (he drinks faster from his ‘Cup of Sorrow’). An evolved soul also experiences the results of his actions much faster (he who rises higher falls harder). To the evil man, the law will, often, not appear relevant because it slows down when the spirit has deteriorated substantially so that the time gap between cause and effect actually increases.

Pain has an important spiritual role as it shatters our assumptions about life and people and exposes our weaknesses to us. It helps us to grow spiritually. *Pain is always relative* – the same situation may not cause pain to a person from the West as it may to someone from the East – it has a cultural context. Also, the same situation can cause more pain to a spiritually immature person and little pain to a spiritually mature person.

Introspection is necessary for us to understand why we’re experiencing pain and to overcome it. Rumi illustrates the idea of introspection through a story in which a hare holds a mirror up to a cruel lion showing him his true face by making him look into the water of a well. Seeing his reflection the lion thinks it is a rival and attacks his own reflection, drowning in the well.

We are often unaware of our positive and negative characteristics. Others act as “reflectors” in our lives and reveal them to us. We can resent this but if we try to learn from it we will become more aware through self-reflection. Rumi says that we should look into ourselves, examine our actions by self-reflection and not judge others:

Oh, many wrongs that you see in others,
is your own nature reflected in them, o reader!
You are that evil-doer, and you strike those blows at yourself:
you curse yourself at that moment.
You do not see clearly the evil in yourself,
You held a blue glass before your eye:
this made the world seem blue to you.

Hence we judge people by our own shortcomings. We should not rush into blaming others but first search within our soul to see what is in us that is causing the problem.

Spiritually transcending the law of reciprocity can be achieved through spiritual cleansing at the hands of your Sufi master. Devotion to a perfect master through adoption of the spiritual practices in Chapter 10 (Overcoming the Nafs) are essential. A perfect master has the ability to *fast-track an aspirants spiritual transformation* through enabling him to drink faster from his 'Cup of Sorrow' (through experiences that expose and help him to overcome his spiritual weaknesses) and also by helping him transcend his weaknesses through direct spiritual cleansing ('*Baraka*') – he does this as the aspirants devotion to him increases i.e., it is a reward for devotion and is given at the right point of time.

The law of reciprocity requires us to spiritually transcend our weaknesses. Otherwise the same weakness is exposed through other events until this happens.

15. Reincarnation and Transmigration

In Hinduism the idea of reciprocity (or Karma) is also linked to reincarnation and transmigration of souls. Our spiritual understandings gets carried over in the act of rebirth as our propensities while our memory of bookish knowledge acquired is wiped out. Hinduism believes that people and related events are connected to relationships and connections from past lives. It also believes that those who commit suicide will get their suffering for their past deeds in another birth.

Live in the present for Sufism and don't think too much about whether reincarnation is true or not.

The common Islamic interpretation is that the soul faces its spiritual report card in the afterlife that takes a person to either heaven or hell. However, many Islamic Sufis (e.g. The Rose Sufi Crescent) do believe in reincarnation and transmigration – from the inanimate to the living form, human, angelic and God. The quotes below highlight this.

Rumi says in the Masnavi:

I died as a mineral and became a plant,
 I died as plant and rose to animal,
 I died as animal and I was Man.
 Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
 Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar
 With angels blest; but even from angelhood
 I must pass on: all except God doth perish.
 When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,
 I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.
 Oh, let me not exist! for Non-existence
 Proclaims in organ tones, To Him we shall return.

Why then do you turn your face from death?
 As the second stage has always been better than the first, then die happily and
 look forward to taking up a new and better form.
 Like the sun only when you set in the West can you rise again with brilliance in
 the East.

Further, in 'Fihi Ma Fihi' Rumi says that even if a person has seen this whole world, if he/ she has not seen it with God in mind, then he/she must make the trip again. "That journey was not on My account, it was for the sake of garlic and onions. Since you did not go about for My sake, but for another purpose, then that other purpose became a veil to you, not allowing you to see Me."

A great mystic, Mansur al-Hallaj, was famous for his words 'Anal Haq' (I am God) said:

Like the herbage
 I have sprung up many a time
 On the banks of flowing rivers.
 For a hundred thousand years

I have lived and worked
In every sort of body.

The Koran also suggests reincarnation in two verses:

The Archangel Gabriel in Surah 2: 28 revealed:

"How can you reject faith in God? Do you not recall that you were once without life, and Allah gave you life; then God will cause you to die, and will again bring you to life; and finally to Allah will you return."

Koran Surah 18: 45 is another passage that hints at reincarnation:

"Set forth to them the similitude of the life of this world: It is like the rain which we send down from the skies: the earth's vegetation absorbs it, but soon it becomes dry stubble, which the winds do scatter: It is Allah Who prevails over all things.

Also see - http://rose-sufi-crescent.blogspot.com/2007_02_01_archive.html

However, there are other verses that contradict the above in the Koran. Hence, more orthodox Muslims strongly contest the Sufi view. I believe that everyone who dies comes face to face with their maker in every life. Evil souls (and indeed all souls that have not achieved God in their lifetime) do spend time after death in a sort of purgatory (or Hell equivalent) before they are reincarnated with the balance of their sins that they could not work out. In today's time and age, there have been numerous scientific studies done on actual cases that have proven the theory of reincarnation. So reincarnation and transmigration are spiritual laws dependent on both - our deeds and development of our minds.

Nonetheless, Inayat Khan believed that the idea of reincarnation is unhelpful to the spiritual seeker's quest for unity with God, as it focuses the aspirant's attention on the past and the future, rather than *achieving spiritual transcendence in the present moment*. **There may be some truth in this!** If the Muslim or Catholic chooses to disagree with this chapter, this is not a hurdle for the path of Sufism.

Inayat Khan says "Every Sufi is free to believe what he or she understands as right and what he or she can understand. One is not nailed to any particular belief. By believing in any doctrine the Sufi does not go out of their Sufism, just as by not believing one does not go out of the Order of Sufis. There is perfect freedom of belief."

Rumi says that the path of the Sufi is only in the present – so live in the present.

16. Equality of Man

Sufis do not believe in discrimination based on beliefs, races, classes and nations. Sufis believe that Sufi teachings are the essence of every religion and of the evolution of humanity. Sufism prohibits taking the life of an innocent person being just because he is a non-Muslim. Sufism preaches infinite tolerance irrespective of religion.

Sufism preaches infinite tolerance irrespective of religion.

Rumi expresses this beautifully:

Come, come, whoever you are.
 Wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving.
 It doesn't matter.
 Ours is not a caravan of despair.
 Come, even if you have broken your vow a hundred times.
 Come, yet again, come, come.

One of the greatest Sufis Ibn Arabi, who lived more than 700 years ago says:

My heart has become capable of every form:
 It is a pasture for gazelles
 And a convent for Christian monks
 And a temple for idols
 And the pilgrim's Ka'ba
 And the tables of the Torah
 And the book of the Koran.
 I follow the religion of love:
 Whatever way Love's camels take,
 That is my religion and my faith.

Jihad, according to Sufi beliefs, is purging one's heart of all evils i.e., the fight against a persons nafs (ego).

17. Equality of Women

Rabia was the first woman Muslim mystic in the eighth century A.D. who was awarded the rank of sainthood by male Sufis (she set forth the doctrine of *Divine Love*). A few centuries after her death, Fariduddīn ‘Āttar urged in his *Tazkhirat al-Auliya* (Memorial of the Saints) that saint-ship may be found in a woman as naturally as in a man.

Sufism recognises man and woman to be complete equals spiritually.

Rabia made the greatest contribution of any woman towards the development of Sufism. However, there were other women of her time, and many more after her, who were regarded as saints and made contributions - Hazrat Babajan is one example. The dervish order that granted the greatest opportunities and freedom for women was the Bektashīyya in Ottoman Turkey.

Rumi believed that woman were the most perfect example of God's creative power on earth. Rumi calls a woman, 'a ray of God'.

She is not just the earthly beloved,
She is creative, not created.

Rumi says:

The Prophet said that women totally dominate men of intellect and possessors of hearts. But ignorant men dominate women, for they are shackled by an animal ferocity.

Rumi states that God has put more love and affection into women's hearts than into the hearts of men. God created women with this divine nature so that they may endure the difficulty of childbirth and motherhood inspite of being physically weaker than men.

Rumi had female disciples which was rare in his time. His own life is an example of giving a special status to women and treating them as sacred. The unity of being or oneness of existence is at the core of Sufi beliefs. Rumi did not consider the soul of a woman inferior to that of a man and believed that both man and woman can be spiritual aspirants.

Womanhood and the ability to give life and nurture the young were sacred qualities as life itself was not possible without women and their pain and sacrifices.

Women therefore have a divine role.

18. The Perfect Man

Living in God is achieving sainthood. The idea of a perfect man in spiritual terms is one who has lived in God and returns with an understanding of the divine and with the capacity to control his nafs or ego. He now does Gods work for the benefit of society without barriers of race or country and *without the wish to get returns*. He experiences Divine Love and does Gods bidding spontaneously and in joy. He is no longer constrained by time, worldly worries and his own fate. Iqbal says:

The Sufi who has gained control on his *nafs* is the Perfect Man.

Raise your self-being to the stage where God, before writing your fate may ask you tell me my beloved what is your will?

Rumi says that God will never abandon a perfect man and will protect him and be in union with him in his work.

The Sufi become a perfect man - in the world but not of the world. He is forced to return to this world by God to help others. Outwardly the Sufi may be indistinguishable from a normal man but inside of him his soul is *awake and mindful* in knowledge and Divine Love of God. Only when he has completed his duties will he be allowed to complete his spiritual journey. He now does not have to struggle to avoid bad acts and good deeds come naturally to him. Since he is filled with Divine Love, *he has no fear of death, time or worldly worries*. As Rumi says:

Although in our life there are many a snare,
Since you are with us then why should we care?

The perfect man is the epitome of compassion which he uses to help others find freedom from suffering. In the service of society he is prepared to give up even his own happiness. He shares his knowledge and encourages others to lead a useful life and devote themselves to God. In his service to others he is not only selfless but he does not look down on the weak nor feel any disgust for them. He treats every living thing whether human or animal coming to him - with care, love and respect. Rumi believe that our love for our spiritual work is a reflection of God's blessing – if our love weakened, it would be a sign of grace denied as God leads only those who are worthy into those right attitudes that will earn spiritual rewards. Rumi says that where there is *generosity and compassion with genuine knowledge (knowingness)* such a person is incomparable.

The perfect man is a holistic personality who knows how to both exist and coexist, to love and to lead. He is fair and just in his dealings and is unselfish – people respect him for these qualities. His love and devotion to God make him like a magnet to people. He follows the three R's: respect for self, respect for others, and responsibility for all his actions.

The perfect man knows that happiness can only be found in the present – he does not waste his time thinking about the past or the future. As Rumi says:

My friend, the sufi is the friend of the present moment. To say tomorrow is not our way.

Forget the future. I'd worship someone who could do that.

Rumi says that “God looks not at your form, nor at your deeds, but at your heart.” This does not mean that our evil deeds will not attract consequences merely that to achieve God focus on the spiritual heart is key. Keep it clean of any negativity so that the mind is focussed on *here and now*. Rumi says that *whatever we keep hidden in our heart, God manifests in us outwardly*. Whatever the root of the tree feeds on in secret, affects the bough and the leaf. That is why they say that if a snake has seen no human for forty years it becomes a dragon, since it has seen no one who could stop the growth of its own evil nature. Hence, key to our spiritual success lies in *controlling our thoughts* through cleansing of our spiritual heart. Rumi says that everything we possess whether it is skill, wealth and other material things, were originally only a thought and a quest. The perfect man understands the importance of keeping the mind free from evil thoughts (includes anger, greed, lust, arrogance, pride, envy) while constantly remembering his spiritual master. He is especially focused on keeping it clean from sexual thoughts. He regulates his reading, conversation, and the whole intake of mental 'food'. *He is constantly alert in this*. He is well aware that sloth is an evil and a lack of cleanliness of himself (especially before prayer) or his environment is also a reflection of sloth (many saints who are completely absorbed in God don't bathe for months but that is a different situation). As Rumi says:

Whenever you entrust your heart to a thought,
something will be taken from you inwardly.
Whatever you think and acquire, the thief will
enter from that side where you feel safe.
So busy yourself with that which is better, so
that something less may be taken from you.

The perfect man understands the superiority of the intuitive mind which has experienced Divine Love, over the logical mind. As Rumi says:

Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment.
Cleverness is mere opinion, bewilderment is intuition.

Rumi says that we must realize that in this world things happen as God wills it – it's his design and all purpose comes from him. We make so many plans and think through so many ideas, and not one turns out according to our desire. Yet even with all of that, we continue to rely upon our own plans and choices.

Ignoring Fate, people plot their little plans.
God's Will does not consult with the plans of man.

The perfect man accepts the will of God and does not challenge it. He does not clamour for that which God denies – he knows that *there is a divine purpose behind God's decision and his silence*. He knows that *obedience and prompt compliance to his master's orders* is essential as are strenuous efforts and noble actions. He knows that if he challenged God's will he would have tremendous trouble associated with the consequences even if the material objects were what he wanted and were achieved with much hard effort. This paragraph should not become a pretext for laziness – it's with specific reference to wealth and position. The next paragraph explains this better.

While the Dervish leads the life of an ascetic which requires a state of poverty (having no material possessions and also the lack of desire for these), the perfect man's God given role is to live in society and lead in it. Thus while he may have material possessions his heart is free of any desire for these. He knows that focusing on wealth is a distraction and barrier to those on the path – we only need to earn enough to keep

our body in good health, that's all. If he has wealth then he also has a deep humility to go with it (plants bend when they bear fruit). *He surrenders the decisions that make or use the wealth*, to his master's spiritual influence. The perfect man understands clearly that money and wealth are irrelevant – a perfect master can give this in a flash and take it away in a flash. Rumi says that not every gallows consists of wood - *high rank and worldly fortune can also be a gallows*, and a very high one. Only the extent to which material fortunes are free from the negative emotions of fear, guilt, sorrow and anger - are they gifts from God rather than a gallows for the hanging. Rumi says that *when we are desire-less (neither wanting nor experiencing aversion (hate or fear) for our desires) then God grants us his gifts*. Rumi says that with God's gifts the original desires come to pass and yet the detachment remains so that the desire cannot harm the perfect man. The perfect man knows that only the gifts of God give us happiness through our lives – everything else comes and goes, or if it stays - with it come problems and pain. *Wealth is really a means to work out our role in this world and not to dissipate it in personal enjoyment*. The perfect man's attitude is that of being well-fed when feeling hungry and being cheerful even in the time of sorrow. He accepts what God drops in his lap and does not ask for more. He knows that destinies are not comparable – each person is unique – so he does not make comparisons and lives cheerful and content with his lot in life. Instead his real desire is to complete his true spiritual destiny of union with God. Rumi says that even the perfect man needs to remind himself that *eventually he must turn away from the pleasures and delights of this world and even the gifts of God*, that are the rays and reflections of God. We must not become content with this much, even though this much exists through God's grace and the radiance of God's beauty. Eventually, even the perfect man has to adopt the path of the Dervish i.e. the ascetic path and embrace poverty willingly and depend on God for each meal. This path leads to countless mystical and spiritual experiences one greater than the other.

The perfect man shows love and respect for everyone irrespective of race, creed, colour, sex or religion. The perfect man avoids greed in any form including being careful, of a too easy acceptance of other people's generosity and hospitality. He avoids invitations from worldly people i.e., the rich and powerful preferring the company of other Sufi's instead. *The company we keep has a powerful influence on us*. Rumi says that “whoever desires to sit next to God, let them sit with lovers of God”. He regards the intellectual pursuits of *argument and controversy as a game* and a waste of life, compared to the spiritual experiences of the dervishes. Those who keep the company of dervishes would find a change of heart and they would turn against debate instead finding deep meaning in silence and few words. Rumi says “The believers are like a single soul. Dervishes are joined as if by a single body. If one member feels pain, all the others are distressed.” A true Sufi is a true friend till the end, through thick and thin – and would give his life for his friend. Rumi says a person who spends his whole life in the company of people who lack discernment will find his own faculties becoming weak and he won't have any true friends. If a Sufi made friends with the rich and powerful God would turn away from him and *give these people power over him*. The true Sufi does not look up to the wealthy and powerful and refuses to accept any kind of rewards or gratifications for his maintenance. He does not judge the stature of a man from his clothes, but instead from his character. Rumi says that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) once said:

The worst of scholars are those who visit princes, and the best of princes are those who visit scholars. Wise is the prince who stands at the door of the poor, and wretched are the poor who stand at the door of the prince.

Rumi says that it is best not to be excessively in love or hatred towards others - *moderation is best*. The perfect man has the maturity to not let a small dispute injure a great friendship. He recognises that all friendships have good times and bad times that test it. He is careful about what he says knowing that words cannot be taken back and can be sharper than a sword. He understands that *differences of opinion should not lead to difference of mind*. Rumi says that “the best words are those that are few and telling.” The best words convey a lesson without going on and on. A few words that convey a lesson are like a lit lamp that kisses an unlit lamp and then departs. Rumi also says “An unkindness from the wise is better than the kindness of the ignorant.”

Rumi says that ‘Friends are enemies sometimes, and enemies friends.’ In Sufism the belief is that one should *befriend ones enemies*. What this means is that we should not react to every act of apparent injustice – there is no need for a bitter reply (no tit for tat) and certainly not more than a simple word or two – rather we should look within ourselves to see our own defects. What is it about us that make’s people react in this manner? How can we change ourselves and make friends of our enemies. We must open our arms to change while not letting go of our values. *Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer*. Be ashamed of your hatred. Do not slander others and do not unnecessarily speak-ill, criticize, compare or interfere in others matters. Also, we should feel joy in our friend’s good fortune – celebrate with him and learn from him if needed. *A perfect man has all these aspects of personal maturity*. His approach is captured in this modern day quote on maturity:

- Be able to stick with a job until it is finished.
- Be able to bear an injustice without having to get even.
- Be able to carry money without spending it.
- Do your duty without being supervised.

Rumi says that Jesus was asked, “What is the most difficult thing in this world and the next?” He said, “The wrath of God.” They asked, “And what can save us from that?” He answered, “Master your own wrath and anger towards others.” When the mind wants to complain, do the opposite—give thanks. Exaggerate the matter to such a degree that you find within yourself a love of what repels you. Pretending thankfulness is a way of seeking the love of God. Do not feed our hatred and rage. Rumi asks us to chase away evil with something good in order to triumph over our enemies – when we cast out our hatred by thanking our detractors for their feedback it will inevitably be cast out of our enemy as well as he is left with nothing to fight against and now sees us in a different light. *Rumi even asks the perfect man to praise those who criticize him* – people around him will then correctly perceive that the fault is not with him since he always speak well of others. This does not mean that he does not resist evil where he sees it – a perfect man has the strength of character to stand against all odds in a non-violent fashion in pursuit of the truth. Also, he will also not follow untruth to get worldly success.

While the perfect man has control on his *nafs* and the thoughts that come into his mind, he is not puritanical in his approach. He recognises that any man who develops an absolute taboo on certain persons and topics goes down the path of self-righteous pride

and develops a furtive desire for what is forbidden. The perfect man has a control on his anger – he knows that *anger starts with ignorance and ends with repentance*. He does not retaliate in a reactive manner. He is calm under provocation and avoids bringing bitter words to his mouth. He avoids indulging in scandalous gossip or slandering someone who has hurt him as this brings on hatred and ill-will. Yet he is an *assertive person* reflecting his knowledge of self – he is clear on what he will accept and what he will not.

The perfect man is perfect in spiritual decision making – he understands the spiritual purpose of pain and is an expert at finding solutions in difficult situations without losing his cool. He looks within himself to his inner strength and innate wisdom – to negotiate and achieve the “win-win” space which recognises and reconciles conflicting needs and priorities. In case an injustice has been committed, he deals with the situation calmly making the other person recognise his errors and also commit him to compensating for these in order to ensure that he learns from his pain – if needed he feigns his anger. Hence, when a perfect man forgives, he may first use pain to teach the person the wrong of their ways before he forgives – so he times this correctly. *His anger is feigned and his actions derived from love* - this is not the same as an eye-for-an-eye. Avoid anger and hatred and sort out difficult situations with as much grace as is possible. *In summary, be like the rose with the thorn knowing when to use it and how to use it.*

The perfect man understands the value of *being one with nature* in the pursuit of God. He tries to do this whenever possible by visiting new places to view nature in its many dimensions of beauty. As Rumi says:

Observe the wonders as they occur around you.
Don't claim them.
Feel the artistry moving through, and be silent.

Being one with nature means that you spend time *all alone with nature* (even if you go with your family) – wake up early to achieve this. Blank out your mind or read a spiritual book if you must, shut your mobile, make sure there is no TV or internet, avoid sex, avoid non-vegetarian food, and then enjoy the gifts of God which is nature at its best. *If you do it this way, your holiday will be the equivalent of meditation or a pilgrimage to a holy place.*

The perfect man follows a profession that his heart is in – he is not motivated by greed in deciding his profession. Rumi believes that every man has been made by God for a specific task and has a desire for that within his heart – if he does not do this task then he has wasted his time on earth. Hence, man must look within their hearts for their true calling and immerse themselves fully in this work striving to excel in it. Rumi says:

Let the beauty you love be what you do. There are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the earth.

When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.

Rumi says that *God bestows contentment and happiness on everyone in the work that is theirs*, so that even if their life should last a hundred thousand years they would still find love for their work. *Every day the love for their craft becomes greater, and subtle skills are born to them, which bring them infinite joy and pleasure.* This is being truly competitive not with others but with ourselves. When a perfect man undertakes to do something he does it thoroughly – *he would rather decline than do a shoddy job.* He

works sincerely from his heart and leaves the end result in God's hand. In his professional life he charges a fair fee for his labour – not working for free but not cheating anyone either. He similarly pays his workers their dues promptly and liberally.

Today's man competes in a negative way, is obsessed with degrees and with one-upmanship with others strengthening their own egos and weakening the call of the God within them. Their pretense of perfection is a veil of veils and an invitation for pain to shake them up from their self-complacency. Rumi asks us to be humble and respect others as that is when we ourselves would be respected. *The perfect man is humble without the slightest tinge of pride or vanity.* When he is wrong he acknowledges it, takes steps to correct it and even apologies where needed – he does not try to cover up his errors by justifying them.

Rumi says that “The best place to live is wherever we feel at home. If that is in the bowels of the earth, then that's the best place. If it's in a mouse hole, then that's the best place.” The perfect man knows this and accepts the journeys that God takes him on with a sense of detachment with both places and people (travellers) who he has met on his journeys.

The perfect man knows that that true knowledge is not of the bookish sort but is rather the power of the intuitive mind which is beyond logic and reason and is experienced when we are blessed by God's Divine Love.

The perfect man avoids comparison with others, images of perfection and looking for the small faults because he knows that he would miss the larger good. He is *grateful to people and to God* – without this he knows that happiness is not possible. The perfect man *looks at the good things he has* and does not chase after the mirages of false treasures. He appreciates the gifts of God – his home, his loved ones, friends on whom he can really count, the knowledge he has gained, his good health. And all the beautiful things of life, that are truly his most precious treasure. He knows that he cannot shower kindness on those he loves after they have passed way. He understands that it is useless to want to re-do the work that he may have done negligently. It's best to appreciate and do things well now. He asks of God at every moment that his problems and concerns never degenerate into feelings of sadness and anxiety. He does not isolate himself because of weakness or failure - rather he seeks to invest in true and constructive friendships in his life. His faith in God helps to strengthen his self-esteem in dealing with daily problems.

The perfect man has the power to discern when to give advise and when not to. Rumi says that with many people, when anyone out of pure compassion offers them a piece of advice, they see it as envy. He says “*Do not impart wisdom to those not worthy lest you do wisdom wrong. And, do not withhold from the worthy, lest you do them wrong*”. He asks us to give advise only if we believe that the recipient wants this in the first place and will benefit from it. He also asks us to do things gradually and not “lay it on” (Rumi says “We must act the same way with friends and enemies, doing things gradually. For instance, with an enemy, first we offer them our advice, little by little. If they do not listen, we show some force. If they do not heed that, then we drive them away.”). If the remedy increases the disease then we should not offer it. Other Saints add that we should not stay for even one second at a place where people are speaking disrespectfully of a saint.

The perfect man is disciplined. He is a part of society and respects the laws of the land. Beyond the laws, he fulfils all promised made by him. Since he knows the inner reality of a situation or object he has a detachment to it – he experiences no desire for it and is able to accept any outcome. He is similarly not bound by aversion to anything – he knows that we are tied to what we hate or fear.

The perfect man keeps a control on his material needs and in this sense limits any personal debt. In a modern context, uncontrolled consumer debt is a means of fostering unbridled materialism which is against Sufism (this does not mean that companies don't borrow money to manage their cash-flows). Yet this has to be put into perspective and there can be many situations in a modern householders life that some consumer debt will be essential e.g. to buy a house or a car – but these should be within a man's means. Specifically, the perfect man never goes on a pilgrimage with borrowed monies. He knows that people who highly leverage are simply giving in to the temptation of good times - bad times are always around the corner once the bribe has been accepted.

The perfect man has an equanimity which helps him to look at joys and sorrows as passing phases. As Rumi says:

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house empty of it's furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.
The dark thought the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

The perfect man understands how evil works and does not make proclamations on how happy he is as this would only attract the evil eye. *He also does not dwell on his pleasures and his pains – both are spiritual obstacles.* He uses his divine knowledge to avoid the pitfalls of materialism and sensuality. He knows that in order to get the flight of the Hawk, he has to kill four birds in him as Rumi's suggests:

Cut these four birds heads to gain your immortal bread
The duck is your greed, and your ego is the crow
The cock is lust, and the peacock is your show

The perfect man is not beyond succumbing to temptation but he has the benefit of Divine Love to protect him, correct him and put back on the path. God will pull him out of the deepest of traps of Evil in the blink of an eye, *spiritually cleansing him once again with his Divine Love without the need for the pain* that a normal man would go through.

The perfect man's expression of love is not just in the sense of devotion to his spiritual master, but in the sense of doing active service to society – giving without the expectation of any return and taking on the suffering of others.

A Sufi master stated that the one who feeds the hungry is dear to God. God fulfils a thousand wants and frees such a person from his sins.

The lover of God should be charitable like the river, generous like the sun and hospitable like the earth.

He indeed is close to God, who is ever steeped in His submission,

Who interprets every event as coming from God,

And who is content with it and who takes it as a blessing.

This is the main object of all prayers and worship.

The perfect man always keeps the words of Rabia at the back of his mind. She advises that we should not worship from fear of punishment or for the promise of reward, but simply for the love of God. She says:

I want to put out the fires of Hell,
and burn down the rewards of Paradise.

They block the way to God.

I do not want to worship from fear of punishment
or for the promise of reward,
but simply for the love of God.

Sufi saints ask us to give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, and clothes to the naked. Food is regarded as the best form of charity - even if we give other forms we should also do this (particularly for the handicapped and the diseased, especially the noon meal). The perfect man actively does charity to help the poor and the needy. He is *generous but not extravagant*. This is essential for everyone who lives in this world. Even the ascetic who has renounced the world and has no material possessions, living on absolute trust and reliance upon God for every need, can still do charity by taking on the suffering of others onto himself. This is gratitude to God and this is compassion.

Some Sufi saints regard fasting as a means to control the passions and desires of Nafs under the pain of hunger and thirst. They recommend that this be done for at least thirty days in a year as a means of regular training and practice for a disciplined life. Hunger also creates humility in one's behavior. These saints believe that hunger is a form of devotion and generates a devotee's spiritual force which kindles divine light in the heart and develops will-power. *Other Sufi saints state that Gods quest cannot be carried out successfully on an empty stomach.* My personal view is that controlling the nafs includes control on all forms of greed including food. So anything that helps achieve this is likely to have a good end result. However, the other form of devotion is that a person eats bland vegetarian food and eats little of it consistently, almost like a patient - this *approach of moderation* is a much stronger devotion.

The perfect man experiences love and devotion for his spiritual master. *He is obedient to his masters every command and executes them promptly.* If his master is dead, he tries to visit (pilgrimage) his master's sacred tomb at least once a year without this being an obsession. After all, his master dwells in his heart night and day. He follows all spiritual practices including introspection, remembrance, Sema and meditation to be one with God by keeping his spiritual master as the sole objective of all his thoughts and motivations.

The perfect man eats little, sleeps little, speaks little and his tongue is empowered with the truth. He is closest to God and is ahead of all in remembering him. He sleeps as little as possible in order to save time for his devotional duties. He regards the early morning as a spiritual time to spend in the remembrance of God. Since he has control on his ego, he prefers silence over speech. Accordingly he prefers introspection to meeting people. He does not indulge in intellectual arguments which are just reflections of the ego – Rumi was once asked by a Muslim dignitary:

You claim to be at one with 72 religious sects, but the Jews cannot agree with the Christians, and the Christians cannot agree with Muslims. If they cannot agree with each other, how could you agree with them all?

To this Rumi answered:

Yes, you are right, I agree with you too.

The perfect man understands clearly that lust is a spiritual barrier that he has to cross eventually. While he is not a celibate, he does try to wean himself away from this over the longer term as he knows that *lust kills his compassion*. Nonetheless, he knows that satisfaction of both partners is also a key ingredient to a successful marriage at least in the initial years. In his marital relationship he showers love on his wife and is both trusting and forgiving while always being true to her in body and spirit. He knows that for a householder having peace and love in the house is like having heaven on earth and is the foundation for his life. He knows that he cannot be happy if she is not happy. So in his marriage he is both loving and kind and asks his wife how he can further improve himself. Hafiz says:

It happens all the time in heaven,
 And some day It will begin to happen again on earth
 That men and women who are married,
 Often will get down on their knees
 And while so tenderly holding their lover's hand,
 With tears in their eyes,
 Will sincerely speak, saying,
 "My dear, How can I be more loving to you;
 How can I be more Kind?"

The perfect man lends a hand in all household activities and treats his wife with respect as an equal. When he has differences with her, he does not bring up the past and only deals with the current situation. In his relationship with his spouse their love for each other exceeds their need for each other. On a practical basis, to control lust and also to reduce worldly issues that come with an enlarged family, it is not recommended that a man have more than one wife unless his first wife dies.

The wife has a spiritual role in making a man fully understand himself and a child has a spiritual role in opening a man's heart and teaching him about love and compassion. *Despite his love for his family the perfect man loves God above all human relationships.* He knows that no one is really his – he came alone into the world and will go out alone. *His love for God also leads to waves of love for his own family.*

The perfect man ends every day with the prayer:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
 Courage to change the things I can; and Wisdom to know the difference.

Lastly, where there is love and devotion there compassion will also exist. So serve God with awe and veneration and have faith and patience.