

Cemalnur Sargut Anatolia, a Cradle of Sufism

Tasavvuf (Sufism) is a way of life going back to Adam, which enables each person to find his own truth, establish peace in his own body and share his peace through serving the people surrounding him.

Just as people's natures vary, each person's journey to his or her truth is different. Islamic *tasavvuf* means getting to know oneself by taking the manners of Prophet Muhammad, who represents perfection, as a model. People pursuing this goal soon realize that they need a «mirror» to be able to find their own truth. My teacher Kenan' er Rifai expresses this by saying, «one needs a mirror to see one's face. How can we not need a guide whose illuminated heart (*gönül*) is polished with God (*Haqq*) to help us to see our inner meaning?»¹ The journey to find this truth is called a *tariqa*, or spiritual path, and it starts with the choice of a «mirror». Even though one may think that one has chosen the master oneself, according to Sufis (*mutasavvuf*) the bond to a teacher is a blessing determined in pre-eternity. The solidarity between disciple (*murid*) and teacher (*murshid*) is an essential element in their travel along the path towards God. The teacher cleans the stream of our polluted water, that is, our ego (*nafs*), by making it flow into his or her own sea. Interestingly, this has also been noted by Nietzsche as the following statement shows: «It has been said that the human being is a polluted river, and to be perfect enough to embrace a polluted river without getting dirty, one must be a sea.»²

Tasavvuf, then, means not so much choosing the spiritual path (*tariqa*) but being blessed enough to find the right teacher. The Quran warns the believers and sets limits to the role of the teacher in the surah

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Ya Sin by saying «Follow such as ask no reward of you (for themselves)» (Surah 36:21). The same idea was emphasized in the words spoken by the Prophet during the Farewell Pilgrimage: «I am only a conveyer of Your message, O God, be my witness!» Likewise, because they know that they are responsible merely

for guiding the disciples and that only Allah has the power to change people, real teachers are devoted to serving others.

According to Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, Islam is synonymous with *tasavvuf* in Turkey. It is impossible to consider Turkish values stemming from Islam as separated from *tasavvuf*. In all institutions of Republican Turkey which offer religious education, *tasavvuf* is part of the curriculum of philosophy courses from the first day onwards. Likewise, in higher education, *tasavvuf* is a major field of study in the Faculties of Divinity. Besides, Turkish Faculties of History and Literature are known for the quality of studies on *tasavvuf* they have been carrying out.

Teachers and researchers in any field ranging from music to architecture or law and even economics somehow come across *tasavvuf*. Every intellectual is bound to show interest in this institution that has stamped its mark on Turkish society from A to Z.³

The flag of the great Sufi master Hacı Bayram Veli was laid on the speaker's desk at the opening of the Turkish National Assembly on April 23rd, 1923, and the Quran and the Sacred Hair of the Prophet placed on it, while recitations from the Quran and the Prophet's sayings (*hadith*) were performed.⁴ It is remarkable that in our country the opening of the

Assembly and the establishment of the Turkish State took place with an appeal to the spiritual presence of a great Sufi master.

In today's Republican Turkey, most of the *tariqas* (Rifais, Qadiris, Mevlevis, Jarrahis, Naqshbandis, Bektashis, Halwatis, Melamis etc) are still functioning.^{5,6} Some of them have unfortunately deviated from their proper purpose and degenerated, because sons have automatically inherited their fathers' positions, leading to a loss of true knowledge (*ilm*) and good manners (*adab*). But others have created paradises in this world, by living all the beauties that their teachers have sought to convey, with the pleasure of being a community. Turkey, which has long been a cradle of *tasavvuf*, must now live through a period of chaos where beliefs are concerned, owing to the sciences and education it has acquired from the West. On the one hand there are fundamentalists who measure the women's religiosity only according to whether they wear a headscarf or not and on the other there are the ignorant intellectuals who curse everyone wearing a scarf and discuss whether using the word «Allah» is a threat to secularism. In between are the Sufis, who show them the meaning of *akhlaq*, noble character or good manners, which are the point the two sides have in common. This group at the centre, adopting *tasavvuf* as its way of life, has been challenged from all sides, by fake sheikhs, government bans which cannot be implemented, fundamentalists who reduce religiosity to a question of dress and so-called progressive-minded people (!) who consider that everyone using the words «Prophet» or «Allah» is retrograde.

As my teachers Kenan'er Rifai and Samiha Ayverdi say, today's conception of *tasavvuf* – by people of oneness (*tawheed*) – as a spiritual knowledge and a lifestyle founded on noble character (*akhlaq*) should not be taught in dervish lodges (*tekke*) but in academic institutions. The true understanding of religion has not yet emerged in our country. Only the teachings of *tasavvuf* can enable it to develop and reach maturity, allowing religious life in the country to achieve a state of balance and moderation. Performing the ritual remembrance of Allah (*zikr*) merely by shouting makes no sense. Our real aim should be to try to attain Allah by truly comprehending the deep meaning of His names which we repeat during the ritual. When the importance of worshipping is pointed out, it is one of

the duties of today's Sufis to explain and live the true meaning of it and turn worshipping into a journey of love. Serving people as though one were serving Allah is the duty of a real Sufi, who knows that working ceaselessly means paradise. Such Sufis behave in accordance with the criteria of their Beloved, knowing that He is the All-Knower. They strive to behave with noble character (*akhlaq*), not forced to do so by laws but obliged by Divine Love.

Sufis are the roses of deep meaning in this materialistic world. No matter whether people want it or not, whether they love or not, they understand what paradise is when they smell the scent of a rose. May Allah grant us all such understanding. Amin

1 Samiha Ayverdi, *Dost* (The Friend), p. 62

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, Böyle Dedi Zerdüşt (Thus Spoke Zarathustra), p.21

3 Öztürk, Yaşar Nuri, *Tasavvufun Ruhü ve Tarikatlar*, p.151

4 idem, p.209

5 Şapolyo Enver Behnan, *Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar Tarihi*, p.134

6 Editors' note: Sufi brotherhoods have been banned in Turkey in 1925. After the ban, severe persecution led to the disappearance of many Sufi groups or to their going into hiding. Since the 1980's however, their official suppression has been relaxed and Sufi brotherhoods have been resurfacing. Today they are tolerated although they are still officially banned.

La question alévie: Notes

1 Note de la traductrice: On considère souvent les alévis actuels comme les descendants des kızılbaş du XVIème siècle. Signifiant littéralement «tête rouge», en raison de la couleur de leur couvre-chef, ce mot désigne les partisans des Safavides. Les kızılbaş ont été persécutés par l'Empire ottoman, en guerre contre les Safavides à cette époque.

2 Note de la traductrice: Un des préjugés les plus répandus à l'encontre des alévis stipule que ceux-ci s'adonneraient à des pratiques incestueuses lors de leurs rituels, une fois que toutes les bougies ont été soufflées.

3 Note de la traductrice: Le Milli Görüş (litt. idéologie nationale) est un mouvement politique fondé dans la diaspora turque en Allemagne par Necmettin Erbakan. C'est l'âme de l'islam politique turc. Il a l'avantage d'être une structure qui ne change pas tandis que les partis qu'il soutient sont interdits les uns après les autres en Turquie.

4 Note de la traductrice: Il s'agit d'écoles publiques confessionnelles, chargées de former des imams et des prédicateurs. Les matières religieuses y sont enseignées en plus du cursus normal. De nombreuses familles pieuses les considèrent comme une alternative aux écoles secondaires laïques.