

IRSHAD

WISDOM OF A SUFI MASTER

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Preface

THE LONG TRADITION of Sufism has witnessed a wide variety of literary expressions through which the wisdom of the Sufi masters and teachers has been formulated and crystalized in human language. The literary forms developed over the centuries in the Islamic world include poetry, didactic essays, aphorisms, metaphysical expositions of extensive length, systematic formulations of doctrine as well as table talks and informal discourses. The present work continues this long Sufi-tradition, using the last of these forms, namely discourses concerning various aspects of Sufism, both doctrinal and operative. These discourses seem to be addressed to immediate disciples but nevertheless also concern the world beyond the original intimate audience because the discourses deal with truths of universal import. They address in fact not only other Sufis, or Muslims interested in Sufism, but also men and women of other religious backgrounds who are attracted to the spiritual life and the truths which constitute ultimately the very fiber and substance of the human soul. The *Ishad* is a contemporary Sufi treatise in the form of discourses which remains faithful to the Sufi tradition. It addresses not only the traditional audience of such works, but also all those in the contemporary world who are in search of the Sacred amidst the flood of profanation and meaninglessness which has inundated the life of modern humanity.

The discourse vary in their subject from the sublime description of the Divine Names and Qualities to everyday social duties. The work begins, in fact, with two chapters on God and the Prophet corresponding to the two Islamic testaments of faith (*shahadah*), namely *La ilaha illa'Llah*, (there is no god but God [Allah]), and *Muhammad rasul Allah*, Muhammad is the Messenger or Prophet of God. Therein is contained the foundation of all that is to follow. As for the Noble Qur'an, the Sacred Book and the very Word of God, not only do its verses adorn the first two discourses, but the whole book in a sense flows from its verses and chapters. Many sections are devoted to elucidating and clarifying the more inward meaning of some of these verses while a separate discourse is devoted to the Spirit of the Sacred Text.

Throughout this long work, what is especially striking is the centrality of love and devotion to the Prophet, a love which characterizes all Sufism. To love God, man must first be loved by Him. No one can in fact sense the love for God unless God loves him. And in the context of the Islamic revelation, God does not love anyone who does not love His Prophet, who was himself the beloved of God, one of his names being *Habib-Allah*, the beloved by God. Many of Sheikh Muzaffer's discourses are devoted to the inner reality of the Prophet, the significance of some of the major events of his life, the benediction sent upon him and the importance of following his traditions and wons (*Sunnah*).

All aspects of Islam, from the Divine Law (*al-Shari'ah*) which muslims are required to follow in their daily lives to the most inward forms of contemplation and meditation, are rooted in the Noble Qur'an and the Prophetic *Sunnah*. Sufism which *is* Islam as seen though the perspective of *ihsan* (virtue) or *al-haqiqah* (truth), also draws from these twin sources of Islamic revelation, namely the Quran'an and *Sunnah*. It is likewise concerned with every

aspect of life from the loftiest metaphysical doctrines and contemplative states to everyday events. That is why throughout the history of Islam the Sufis have defended and promulgated the *Shari'ah*, while ultimately going beyond its external forms to the *haqiqah* which lies at its heart. Consequently, many of these discourses deal with *Shari'ite* practices and prescriptions, which, however, are viewed from the perspective of Sufism with the aim of bringing out their inner meaning.

The author also emphasizes over and over again the significance of virtues in the life of the *faqr* or practitioner of the path. He reminds the reader continuously that the real test of a *faqr* is the practice of the virtues such as magnanimity, generosity and sincerity at every moment of life and in concrete situations when God puts the soul through the tests for which, according to the Qur'an, man was placed upon the earth. Many of these discourses are reminiscent of earthly Sufi treatises such as those of Sarrajii and Qushayri, in which the discussion of Sufism is practically synonymous with that of the virtues. One must not forget the famous *hadith* defining *ihsan* or virtue: "*Ihsan* is to adore God as though thou didst see Him, and if thou dost not see Him, He nonetheless seeth thee." This *hadith* which is also a definition of Sufism reveals the centrality of virtue in any authentic exposition or practice of Sufism.

The Prophet has also said, "Die before you die". This initiatic saying is likewise central to Sufism, for one cannot follow the path until one has already died to the profane mode of consciousness which is based upon one's forgetfulness of God. Not only is one of the discourses of this book entitled "Die before you die", but , throughout the work, Sheikh Muzaffer remind his readers of the reality of death. The message of the Noble Qur'an is itself punctuated throughout with majestic versus reminding men of the eschatological realities; devout Muslims live all the years of their lives in awareness of this Qur'anic teaching. In Sufism the remembrance of death becomes even more accentuated. The very practice of Sufism involves a constant dying until the soul actually dies to the world and becomes resurrected in the world of the Spirit. It is in conformity with this reality that the theme of death and eschatological discussions occur over and over again throughout the discourses.

In discussing these and other themes, Sheikh Muzaffer draws from the Qur'an and *Hadith*, sayings of earlier Sufis, and stories and parables. The exposition contains at once what belongs to the most intellectual and spiritual form of Sufism of the "elite" (*khawass*) as well as popular Sufism. There is something of both present throughout, reflecting the actual structure of most Sufi orders. The discourses reflect the sum of teachings that usually permeate Sufi *khanaqahs* or centers, and much that is found in the pages which follow is based on the oral tradition of the Halveti-Jerrahi Order of Sheikh Muzaffer as well as on written sources. The great merit of the work is that, whatever type of discussion or discourse takes place, it issues from orthodoxy, from a living tradition, in great contrast to so much that appears in print today by pretentious "teachers" who speak for no higher an authority than their own individual egos and psyches.

The *Irshad* is a testament to the fact that Sufism is a living tradition. Despite the ravages which the events of the past two centuries have brought upon the Islamic world and the attack made against Sufism by both Western oriented modernist and the so-called fundamentalist and revivalists, Sufism continues to survive and in fact flourish to this day in many parts of the Islamic world, even in "secularized" Turkey from which the author of this book hails. To read such a work is to realize that it is still possible to find Sufi teachers with

kept alive the millennial spiritual teachings and practices of the Sufi tradition. Moreover, the fine translation, carried out with the great care and love by a person who is himself devoted to such teachings, reveals the possibility of presenting Sufism in a contemporary Western world language in such a manner that it will be at once authentic and appealing to those in quest of the Sacred and the spiritual life. The present work is an addition to the body of genuine writings on Sufism which have appeared during the past half century in European languages, mostly in French and English, by authentic authorities of the Sufi Tradition.

Like all Sufi Works, the goal of the *Irshad* is to guide man to the remembrance of God, to *dhikr Allah*. That is why all the discourses are interspersed with prayers and supplications. A sense of devotion and piety permits the whole work; but the piety is not only religious in the exoteric sense of the term, it is a piety which is combined with interiority. That is why all the prayers mentioned in the work point toward the *dhikr* or remembrance to which in fact a separate discourse is devoted. To read this work is to remember God, and to remember that we should always remember Him. We must be grateful for this gift of Great value which makes available so much of the doctrines and practices of Sufism in the context of a living and contemporary Sufi order. And we must ask for God's Mercy to be showered upon the soul of the author who has already departed from this vale of forgetfulness for the abode of the Beloved, and who has already reached the realm of those who are awake, for according to the saying of the Prophet, "Man is asleep and when he dies, he awakens."

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Introduction

Early in the morning of November 24, 1981, as I lay resting peacefully in the border zone between sleep and wakefulness, I found myself witnessing an unusually vivid dream or vision. The author of the *Irshad* was in New York at that time on a visit from Istanbul, and I related my experience to him on the evening of the following day. Sheikh Muzaffer listened very intently, showing signs of considerable animation as my narrative progressed. He then declared that my dream was from a noble source, a message of good tidings, and he urged me to record it while the details were still fresh in my memory, so that the account of it could eventually be published as a pre-face to the English translation of the *Irshad*.

To the many who enjoyed the loving fellowship of Sheikh Muzaffer, he was known simply as 'Efendi'. At the end of our last meeting in this whole lower world, Efendi expressed the hope that I would always remember him *as a friend*. With the prayer that his soulmate forever rejoice in the blissful fellowship of Allah's Friends in the Life Hereafter, I take great pleasure in the publication of this work, and in fulfilling Efendi's request by sharing this account of my dream-experience and Efendi's interpretation:

I was standing on the surface of the sun, where I witnessed a thrilling and awe-inspiring display. Vast sheets and waves of fiery lights were being blown about by hurricane winds, up and out into space.

After some time, I became aware of a change. I had not moved, yet the 'surface of the sun' had now become the head of an enormous being, so huge that I could not see beyond the top of his brow, which was like the horizon. The waves of light now appear to be luminous locks of this being's hair, streaming out in the strong breeze. They retained a fiery quality, and I saw a spark fly off from the end of a strand of hair.

The scene shifted. I saw the spark a light on a gloomy, forbidding old building. This was a high, menacing structure, with the atmosphere of a secret police headquarters. The spark quickly set the building on fire. I saw that there was a whole city there, all equally dismal and gloomy, apparently under some cruel tyrant's spell. All the buildings began to burn, collapsing as the fires reached out of control.

When the flames had subsided, I peered into the smoldering ruins. By the aid of some strange dream-optics, I looked through the ruins to see an unfolding vision of a prosperous new civilization. The people had evidently succeeded in combining a highly advanced technology with the preservation of natural ecology. The numerous machines and devices had a peculiar beauty of their own; they did not jar the senses. Curious architectural forms were in evidence. One of the building

materials appeared to be an ivory-like substance of delicate beauty. The air was clean and fresh. A network of 'roads' or transportation channels of unusual design passed through vistas of lush vegetation. There were many signs of lively human activity in pleasant settings.

Without having seen its location or outside form, I was suddenly within a spacious auditorium, kind of 'United Nations' assembly hall. Thousands of people were seated in comfort. Through an aperture in the front of the hall (possibly some kind of video-screen; the technology of it was unfamiliar), a figure emerged to address the meeting on some subject or other. I then saw myself come forward to give an address. My theme was the need to worship the One Almighty God and surrender my self-will to His merciful safekeeping, following the example of His Messengers, in order to achieve prosperity in the Next World also. As I left, I noticed that all the people present had acknowledged their Lord by humbling themselves in prostration.

As I left the great auditorium I was surprised by a shower of gold pieces falling right before my eyes. Then I realized that they were sewn together to form a curtain. For a moment or two I had the impression that the 'show' was over, and I prepared to drift off into a dreamless slumber. But a kind of curiosity made me ask: "What was the gold curtain?"

In response to my curiosity, the curtain reappeared before my eyes. As I drew back some distance from it, I saw that it was suspended from the Ka'ba in Mecca. In wonder, I drank in the beauty of the scene, feeling great joy of being back at the House of Allah. To my further delight, I noticed the face of my friend and fellow-Pilgrim, Nur (Lex) Hixon, beaming happily at me. We greeted each other warmly and thankfully. Then I beckoned to Nur to come and look at something very interesting I had observed. Part of the cloth covering of the Ka'ba appeared enlarged as if under a powerful microscope. One could see through the threads or fibers into a mysterious realm. It was as if the things I was seeing there were beyond my immediate comprehension, but that impressions were being taken by some special eye or inner camera.

"This is fascinating," exclaimed Nur, "Let us examine the stone walls of the Ka'ba with this same eye." The stones were also enlarged as if by an enormously powerful lens. So great was the magnification that the atoms or molecules stood apart. We found ourselves able to enter through the space between. Inside, we felt like atoms ourselves, in a universe of light. It was as if we *became* 'Praise to Allah - *Al-hamdu lillah!*'

Nur was like an excited little boy as we re-emerged from this amazing experience. "Let's tell Efendi," he cried. I turned to see Efendi standing nearby. He came toward us from his station in an arcade of the Sanctuary, looking young and happy. Efendi was dressed in a fine but simple robe. He smiled broadly as we

exchanged greetings. His rich chuckle conveyed the meaning: "Even when people suppose we are at opposite ends of the globe, our spirits are together, visiting the House of God!"

I heard a rustling sound, like the wings of doves gently flapping. When I look towards the Ka'ba, I saw beams or forms of light and many shades of color, too vast to identify as they moved around. After swirling around the Ka'ba, they gathered it up and bore it away into the heavens.

I looked down and recognized the pavement of Manhattan. Back in New York. I was smoking a fine meerschaum pipe, and noticed that I was wearing a handsome winter coat of expensive material. Then I became fully aware of my quite ordinary self lying on the bed at home.

As I reflected on this experience, I wondered if it was something I should, or even dare share with others. What kind of response might evoke? Whatever it might 'mean' if interpreted in some fashion – if translated into mundane language - it certainly felt quite genuine to me; but perhaps it was best to take it simply on its own terms, as a valid and real insight into whatever realms of experience I had glimpsed. A kind of stillness descended upon me as my hesitations were resolved. I slipped back into that border zone and found myself in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina the Illuminated City, where I heard a voice telling me: "Courage, Muhtar! Tell about the things you have just witnessed - wherever and to whomever it will feel right and necessary."

During the following day, the feeling grew in me that I should communicate the experience to Efendi during the evening gathering for a friendly conversation at the Masjid al-Farah, the mosque in New York City. Moreover, something indicated to me that I should tell the dream in Turkish. To my relief, suitable words, expressions and sentences kept coming into my mind as I drove into the city. With considerable effort, but supported by some special flow of energy, I told my story in Efendi's native language, in fact in the rather Ottoman style of his own writings! Efendi's evident interests encouraged me, as the expressions on the faces of Turkish brothers and sisters present, not to mention the patience and lack of protest on the part of those who did not understand the Turkish language.

As I mentioned at the beginning, Efendi declared his conviction that my dream was from a noble source, a message of good tidings. As interpreted by Sheikh Muzaffer, the dream had brought the good news that Allah would sweep away the dark tyrannies oppressing mankind, and lead us by the light of faith to 'True Democracy and Freedom.'