

Subject: Spiritual Human

Article: 10

Sufi Psychology

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Sufism is both a way of life and also a psychological theory of the human psyche. Sufism is not an observational theory of the human being, but considers the person as being an entity full of unlimited resources. Thus, the observable physical reality as well as the unobservable metaphysical reality makes an integral part the Sufi psychology. In this psychology metaphysics plays a central role. According to the Sufis the attainment of mental health is a never ending search in the realm of the metaphysical. The search and dedication for metaphysical truths frees the person from temporary gratifications and results in forming a balanced and "**completely aware**" personality.

Sufism could well be defined as a method for finding richness in poverty, protection in nakedness, fullness in hunger, freedom in slavery and sweetness in bitterness. The Sufi search for "reality" is defined by the great mystic **Muhiddin İbnül Arabi** (1165 – 1239) in three steps, which can be defined as: **Knowing, Finding and Being**.

First step: **Knowing**, meaning that the person has to acquire external as well as internal knowledge of the human psyche and try to understand the soul by introspection. Although the soul cannot be directly observed, it can be felt and intuitively grasped as an essential constituent of what is called "human". In the Sufi terminology this first step is called "**İlm-el Yakin**", where *ilm* means "science" and *yakin* means "proximity and participation". Thus **İlm-el yakin** means "Unbiased knowledge obtained from participation and unification". So the person has to obtain the required knowledge not from observation but from being in the proximity of the creative source, or equivalently metaphysical energy realm.

Second step: **Finding**, meaning that the person is now capable of finding happiness and satisfaction by participating in the reality of the **global soul**, which is the essence of 'all that is' in the universe. This realization should be more than simple logical acceptance and observational conclusion, but should be an unshakable feeling of participation and of connection. This level of realization is defined in the Sufi terminology as "**Ayn-el Yakin**", where *ayn* means "the eye" but also "the source"; so the person has to be in the proximity of the creative source –body and soul- and have a one-to-one experience of that energy.

Third step: **Being**, meaning that the person has reached the level of unification with the global soul and does not have any egotistical expectations. He/she has reached the level where the concepts of "individuality" and "independent object" have lost their everyday meaning and all that is, is pure energy and is metaphysical in its essence. Thus objectivity and positivism are not considered as being universal and solid guidelines for an understanding of the human being, as well as for an understanding of the external world.

This third level of realization is defined as "**Hakk-el Yakin**", where **Hakk** stands for both **God** as well as **the ultimate Truth**. The Sufi knows that all that is, is made out of interconnected energy fibers. He/she accepts that the universe is an unfathomable mystery and considers the human being as a *micro cosmos* of that global, macro energy structure.

Sufism accepts two sorts of **will**. One is the limited free personal will, which is called **Cüz-i irade** and the other one is **Kül-i irade**, meaning "engulfing will". "Cüz" means part and 'Cüz-i irade' means "partial will", which represents the power of control and action of the person. But the range of *Cüz-i irade* is limited since it is partial and can affect only a small part of that unlimited energy field, which is the creative essence of the entire universe. *Küll-i irade*, on the other hand, is impartial and is beyond the human control. The Sufi knows that the human will has its limitations and that **reality** is a matter of awareness. As one climbs the levels of awareness one will see new realities and become less individualistic. It is important to realize and emphasize that each of these levels have a clear meaning and are permanent **existential levels**. They are not temporary moods of feeling or intuiting.

The Sufi considers the human psychological structure capable in reaching seven different hierarchical levels, but only the first four levels will be discussed here. The first level is innate and is the natural instinct that exists within every person. All other levels should be attained through striving and dedication. Thus the Sufi approach to human psychology is more than a simple theory, but is deeply embedded in the practical everyday life.

The first level of the human psychological behavior is called **Nefs-i Emmare**, meaning the level of action-and-reaction. This level, which is common to all humans, is the level where the "**Id**" (libido) and the "**Ego**" are the masters of our actions. The libido, which is the source of all sexual impulses, and the selfish ego, which is the protector of the physical body are the deciders of almost all actions that we perform in this level of daily existence. In this level one generally acts according to innate impulses without thinking about their consequences.

But being "human" requires more than being a simple *automata*, reacting to external stimuli. Being human means "being able to **control** the reactionary impulses". This is the level called **Nefs-i Levvame**, meaning the *self controlling* or *self limiting* awareness. When this psychological level is reached, one can see that the external world is not independent of our actions and reactions. The external world, or the **other** person, is emotionally linked to our actions and decisions. The *other* is not totally independent from our limited will, but is deeply affected from our ego and our reactionary self. This is why small children are strongly influenced from the behavior of their parents and may keep this influence during their entire adult life. In this level of existence the person is aware of his/her responsibilities and questions every phenomenon that he/she encounters during the day-to-day life. This level is more than the "**Superego**" of Freud's psychology. The *Superego* is formed by the society but the *self limiting ego* gets its power from the *aware self*. The self controlling psychological level knows that 'what is out there' is not independent from our assumptions and preconceptions. Therefore, the person living in such a psychological level knows that reality and truth cannot be reached by simply observing nature, but should be grasped by becoming part of all phenomena affecting his/her daily life. Thus, objectivity, locality and positivism should be considered as being practical assumptions devoid of any deep value helping in unraveling the essence of the human psychology.

The third level of awareness is *the level of intuition*. This level is known under the name **Nefs-i Mülhimme**, meaning the *intuiting self*. A diluted form of such a level of awareness

can be found in many artists. They create their work of art by becoming one with their subject, but this connectedness is temporary, it is not a permanent way of life. While the Sufi, which has reached such a level, is in a permanent connectedness with the sublime creative energy. Every action performed and every word uttered has a link to the unifying, indiscriminating global metaphysical energy source. The person who has reached such a level of awareness lives in an ecstatic mood of existence and becomes an admirer, rather than an observer of nature. This is the level of contemplation, where separation of object from subject is no more valid.

The forth level of awareness is called ***Nefs-i Mutmain***, which is the level of purity and complete fulfillment. It is a level where the person desists from worldly material gains and futile expectations. It is a state of mind which transcends all dichotomies. Opposites do not exist in reality, but are simple constructs of the mind. The Sufi says:

"Nothing is mine or yours, but belongs to the **One**; all things are temporary and are not worth keeping. Minimizing worldly expectations is the way of obtaining happiness and total fulfillment during our short visit on this world."

In this philosophy we find the concept of an undivided One, which cannot be categorized or even defined. Because every definition, necessarily entail a limitation, a delimitation and an isolation from the background.

Such a level of unbiased magnanimity is not easy to fulfill these days. But one also has to realize that the Sufi psychology accepts that the human being has unlimited capacities, which can lead to an understanding of our duties and our mission on earth. This psychology points towards an advanced soul and a pure human being ready to serve, instead of being served. It claims that mental balance is obtained not from "individuality" and "free will" but from "belonging" and "connecting". According to the Sufi, having mental health does not correspond to having no intense feelings and acting at all times with the logical mind, but rather to grasp the instant and letting the emotions flow freely in every form of participation.

Today the modern human being feels alone, isolated, abandoned and unhappy. It is these negative feeling which are the source of frustration and depression. The Sufi psychological approach not only shows how a person can be mentally healthy, but also points the way to a better world with less friction, more tolerance and better mutual understanding.