

Remembering the Beloved: *A Course in Miracles* and Sufism

by DJ Andrews

A Sufi teaching story tells of a young girl on her way to see her beloved. She passed by a Mullah (holy man) who was saying his prayers. In her ignorance, she walked in front of him, which was forbidden by the religious law. The Mullah, his prayers having been disturbed, became upset. Later, upon returning, she again passed near him. He scolded her for her mistake saying, "It was not right for you to cross in front of me while I was offering my prayer. I was thinking of God, the Lord of heaven and earth." She replied, "I'm sorry. I don't know yet of God and His prayers. I was on the way to see my beloved and, thinking of my beloved, I did not see you praying. I wonder how you, who were thinking of God, could see me?"

Sufism, by its nature, tends to elude definition. The word "Sufism" is variously traced to an Arabic source ("Saaf") which means "purity" or to the Greek "sophos," meaning wisdom. Inayat Khan, bringer of Sufism to the West in 1910, describes Sufism as a path of the heart, a path of love, and a path of oneness.

Although of ancient origins, pre-dating Islam, Sufism is also an active, contemporary path. The Sufi Ruhaniat International (the Way of the Breath) is one of a dozen or so Sufi Orders in the United States. This Order draws inspiration from the roots, branches, and flowers of Sufism within and beyond historic Islam. "Ruh" is spirit or breath of God, thus this is a path of remembering God with every breath.

This article reflects an experience of association with the Sufi Ruhaniat International and *A Course in Miracles*. Both paths, *A Course in Miracles* and Sufism, will speak in their own voices throughout to convey the flavor of the experience. It was the mystical poet, Kabir, who said, "Kabir talks only about what he has lived through. If you have not lived through something, it is not true.

Sufism is not a path of a Book and is primarily an oral tradition, "based on experiences not premises" (Al-Ghazali). There is no text to reference, per se, though some study the Qur'an. It is more about a way of living, a way of being in the world but not of it. This concept is exemplified in *A Course in Miracles* when it talks of living within this world of illusion, the world of separate bodies, but learning to see with the vision of Christ, seeing with "true perception," and as the Sufi poet, Rumi, suggested, "seeing One with two eyes." Then God takes the last step Himself, and that is what finally awakens us from the dream entirely (ACIM T-11.VIII.15:5) and we then experience, as the Sufi would say, union with the Beloved.

What are we remembering?

Ibn Hasan told of prophets who were sent to encourage people to say "Allah" and devote themselves to Him. Those who heard this word with the ear alone, let it go out by the other ear; but those who heard it with their souls, imprinted it on their souls and repeated it until it penetrated their hearts and souls, and their whole being became this word. They were released from the sound and the letters. Having come to experience the spiritual meaning of this word, they became so absorbed in it that they were no longer conscious of their own non-existence.

Inayat Khan writes that the main ideal of all of the Sufi schools has been to attain that perfection which Jesus taught in the Bible, "Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect," and that the method of the Sufis has always been self-effacement. This effacement is "of the false self, on which man depends, priding himself on being something, but not of the real self which is eternal, and to which all power and beauty belong."

The Course, too, reminds us, "The Bible enjoins you to be perfect, to heal all errors, to take no thought of the body as separate and to accomplish all things in my name" (T-8.IX.7:1). It invites us multiple times to repeat the Name of God and reminds us that "to call upon His Name is but to call upon your own...God has no name. And yet His Name becomes the final lesson that all things are one, and at this lesson does all learning end...Experience must come to supplement the Word. But first you must accept the Name for all reality...One Name we use to unify our sight" (Lessons 183-184). Lesson 67 teaches, "Love created me like itself and perfection created me perfect... If love created you like itself, this Self must be in you. And somewhere in your mind [not to be confused with the physical brain] It is there for you to find."

How we remember

"Know that when you learn to lose yourself [your self], you will reach the Beloved. There is no other secret to be learned" (Al-Ansari). In Sufism one aid to remembering God or recovering our memory of Unity is simply the repetition

of the name of God, referred to as “Allah” in the Middle East, originally meaning the Source, the Oneness. A more extended form of this remembrance, a practice called *zikr*, uses the words, “la illaha illa’llah” (“There is no god but God” or “There is no reality except the One Reality”). One can Remember silently, in chant, song, music, movement, or in dance form.

The learning that is the goal of The Course is summed up in the introduction which says that this curriculum aims at “removing the blocks to the awareness of love’s presence, which is your natural inheritance.” The method of learning includes study of the Text, which guides one through a psychological process, and application of the suggestions that appear throughout the Text and within the 365 Workbook practice lessons.

The Text teaches, “seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven...There is nothing else. By awakening to [love], you are merely forgetting what you are not. This enables you to remember what you are” (T-7IV.7:1-12). Lesson 122 says forgiveness is the answer, “It lets you recognize the Son of God, and clears your memory of all dead thoughts so that remembrance of your Father can arise across the threshold of your mind.” Forgiveness acknowledges that, in Truth, the error never occurred and therefore only we can deprive ourselves of the peace of God. The importance and nature of forgiveness is echoed by these words of Inayat Khan: “If you wish to follow the path of saints, learn to forgive” and “Forgiveness is a stream of love which washes away all impurities wherever it flows.”

Although the Workbook exercises are intended to be experiential, Lesson 158 reminds us that “Experience cannot be shared directly... The revelation that the Father and the Son are one will come in time to every mind. Yet is that time determined by the mind itself, not taught.” The closing section of the Workbook leads us to seek direct experience of truth and to come to beingness.

One day as Rumi was instructing a group of students, Shams-i-Tabriz, his close companion and teacher, suddenly took Rumi’s books and threw them into the pond announcing, “You must live what you know.”

The Sufi way embraces both silent and active forms of meditation, breathing practices, and guidance through the teacher/student dynamic. Inayat Khan comments that saying words aloud reaches to the inner plane of one’s being, and action makes pictures in every atom of the body of the thought which is behind it. Every atom of the body prays. The whole being becomes a prayer.

Some new work with meditation, based on traditional methods, has been published by Neil Douglas-Klotz, a Sufi teacher and Aramaic scholar. It includes breath, sound and movement practices based on translations of Jesus’ sayings from his native Aramaic language. Likewise, the Dances of Universal Peace are a form of movement meditation originally developed by Samuel L. Lewis, a student of Inayat Khan and founder of the Sufi Ruhaniat International. Samuel Lewis once said, “One of the reasons I am teaching this music and dancing is to increase Joy... bliss in our own self [Self]. This is finding God within, through Experience.” The lyrics of one such Dance, taken from Shabistari’s Rose Garden of Mystery, present a traditional Middle Eastern image of how we remember. He writes:

Go sweep out the chambers of your heart. Make it ready to be the dwelling of the Beloved. When you depart, love will enter. In you, void of yourself [your self], God will display His beauties.

Another image found in Sufi poetry is that of wiping rust from a mirror. This image also appears in The Course: “Clean but the mirror, and the message that shines forth from what the mirror holds out for everyone to see, no one can fail to understand”(T-14.IX.6:5).

The Sufi guide assists with this purification and healing process. With the help of this friend on the path, the student can observe and better “catch” the teachings in action. One comes then to living inwardly in the manner of the teacher [tasawwuri], one of the defining practices of the Sufi way. This relationship is mutually interactive. “Very often a student is an inspiration for the teacher because it is not the teacher who teaches, it is God Himself” (Inayat Khan).

In The Course both Jesus and the Holy Spirit serve as our inner teachers. Jesus, in the Text says, “Healing does not come from anyone else. You must accept guidance from within... healing is a collaborative venture. I can tell you what to do, but you must collaborate by believing that I know what you should do” (T-8.IV.4:5-9). Again, we hear, “One Teacher is in all minds and He teaches the same lesson to all” (T-7.VIII.7:2) and “[The Holy Spirit] is in your mind and ... He is helping you to remember what you are” (T-9. I.4:3-4).

Inayat Khan writes: “The Spirit of Guidance [the Holy Spirit] is the light of God which may be likened to a search light which shows up any object upon which it is thrown, and so when [this light] is thrown upon any aspect of life, man receives a keen insight into it. In the Spirit of Guidance one finds a living God, active in the heart of every person... One who depends upon the Spirit of Guidance to direct his life is guided rightly.”

Fruits of remembrance

In Sufism signs of progress on the spiritual path include: inspiration, power, joy, fearlessness, and peace. In reference to Jesus' words in the Bible: "Let your light so shine before all men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven," Neil Douglas-Klotz comments:

Hearing this blessing of permission with Aramaic ears, we find Yeshua [Jesus] showing what happens when the light of our being – a tangible sense of our personal 'I am' connects to the sacred 'I Am' and allows itself to shine. First, we bless those around us by reminding them subconsciously that there is a greater reality to which we are all connected. Second, we bless our own inner self, the inner community of voices called the naphsha in Aramaic and nafs in Arabic [allowing] these voices 'in the shadow' to be illuminated and feel a more expanded, connected sense of divine Self.

The Course teaches, "When I have forgiven myself and remembered What I am, I will bless everyone and everything I see"(Lesson 52) and affirms that God's messengers are joyous and peaceful. The path to the Beloved may lead one to discover that "You who are beloved of God are wholly blessed" (ACIM T-8.VI.10:4) and "In you is all of Heaven. Every leaf that falls is given life in you. Each bird that ever sang will sing again in you. And every flower that ever bloomed has saved its perfume and its loveliness for you... This can you bring to all the world..."(ACIM T-25.IV.5:1-11).

Although there are differences in form between these two spiritual paths, both *A Course in Miracles* and Sufism share the same content, which is Love.

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