

FREEMASONRY AND SUFISM: TWO ROADS AND ONE DESTINATION

(PART 1)

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“My heart can adopt all forms, I follow the religion of Love: Whichever road the camel of Love takes, that is my religion and my faith” Ibn Arabi

Contrary to the majority of “Exoteric Spiritual Systems” Free-Masonry lacks totalitarian ambition. It accepts that although its method is “just and perfect”, it is not the only one through which its goals are accomplished. It recognizes that its modus operandi is merely one more of the Traditional Avenues of Access to Knowledge, just like in the Occidental world so were the diverse Gnostic Schools with which it shares a number of basic elements.

For the individual who knows how and when to advance beyond the appearances which at times seem discordant and contradictory and reaches the central nucleus of a proposed concept and/or theory, it must not be difficult to encounter profound parallelisms among Traditions which emanate from the same fountain. Thus, it is with minimum or no effort that we can realize how Free-Masonry shares so many essential tenets, attributes and characteristics with other socio-cultural movements which have emerged all throughout the history of mankind; Movements which in the form of academies, cults, private associations, clubs, congregations, guilds and corporations united and still unite “men and women of good repute and customs” who labor incessantly in the construction of their Inner Temples.

The acceptance of this proven fact, however, must not lead us to the extreme assumption that “everything is identical”, thus reducing Traditions to its minimum common denominator and therefore losing its intrinsically characteristic richness. The fact that “within their nucleuses” Traditions seem analogous does not make their manifestations appear so before the eyes of the common folk, for in order to really appreciate it, it is necessary to make an active and persevering effort.

One of the traditions which outside the occidental frame distinguishes itself among those most proximate to Free-Masonry, is Sufism. The similarity and compatibility of Sufism with the Craft is such that, quite frequently, learned men and women refer to Free-Masonry as: “Western Sufism”, and, in like manner, they refer to Sufism as: “Free-Masonry of Islam”. Before continuing on, it is important to under-line what I consider the most fundamental difference between these two Traditions: While Free-Masonry accepts any “exoteric frame”, Sufism can only be lived plentifully within the Islamic Religion. In this occasion, therefore, notwithstanding how passion-inspiring the topic may be, I will not address the more or less true relationships existing between these two Institutions and their precursors; I will, however, focus very succinctly on points that are central and common to both Traditions.

There are two origins commonly attributed to Sufism: One, is a type of “Concealed Interior Doctrine” directly transmitted by the Prophet (may Peace be upon him!) to his most intimate Disciples; a somewhat similar to certain Gnostic Interpretations of Primitive Christianity and transmitted to our modern days by way of a “golden thread” of Initiates. And the other, entirely different from the first one, is that of the Persian Influence upon the primogenial Arabic Islam, an influence through which certain pantheist and monist depth was aggregated. It is indeed probable that both theories bear much Truth in them; But, only one reality remains uncontested: Sufism has been present in Islam since the first centuries of its existence, having, just like Free-Masonry, a

best or worst fate while living its Principles of Love and Tolerance in any of the social/political contexts of the last twelve hundred years.

Though Sufism is not a monolithic block, and philosophical positions from the most orthodox to the most heterodox have been based on it, the most adequate definition may be the one given to us by Omar Ali Shah: "Doctrine which seeks to remove the veil from the eye of the heart (Ayd al-Qalb) to see what is Real (al-Haq)". It is difficult to condense greater profoundness in such a few words, and impossible to explain them to he/she who does not feel. On the other hand, the moral aspect, just like in Free-Masonry, is not alien to Sufism; Hence the definition given by Junayd of Bagdad: "Adoption of superior qualities and abandonment of inferior ones".

Sufism, contrary to practices and Ascetic Schools of the Indian subcontinent with which it is also compared, is vivid and practiced in open communities, thus vertebrating themselves with Progressive Ways from smaller groups headed by a "Master" to larger "Grand Orders", of which the Naqshbandi is probably the best known. The exterior practices of Sufism are determined in great measure by belonging to either "Order", and most specially by the "ritualistic knocking", counsel and input of the founding "Master" who inaugurates all major ceremonies which are then followed by prayers, supplications, invocations, diets, pilgrimages and other activities which are as generic and specific to the Muslim World.

The internal practices are, on the contrary, much more faithful to Sufism and very common/familiar to it independently of the "Order" affiliated with, as it usually happens with any esoteric doctrine of difficult comprehension to the non-initiate. Let us in this occasion only mention the practice of Meditation over the Internal Reality (Haqiqah), over the thought-integrator of opposites, over the motion of Nature innate to all human beings (Fitra) and which reveals in its interior the Full Sense of Creation and the presence of Allah (Dhirku'llah) in an analogous perception.

These exercises, among other disciplines, are carried out individually, but, under the tutelage of the "Master" of a regular Community where nobody is granted admission, unless he/she has been subject to rigorous trials aimed at provoking the "Awakening of the Sufi", an event rarely referenced to under such appellative, but, instead, commonly known as: the "Awakening of a Friend", very close to the Masonic expression: the "Resurrection of a Brother Master Mason".

May these few lines suffice to at least superficially emboss the coincidences between Sufism and Free-Masonry, in order that the individual interested in the study of Esoterism in general may benefit from the resources offered by either path, and the Free-Mason, with or without an apron, may know of a Sister Tradition in the Muslim World, a world that is now so perversely defamed and slandered by Profane and "Mason" alike, a world that, contrary to the nefarious assertions of our nation's failed leadership, is plethoric of Hope, Faith and Charity and ever ready to extend the hand of Brotherly/Sisterly Love, Relief and Truth to all the people of the world.