

Initiation In the Sufi Order

An Interfaith Approach To Spiritual Growth



“Initiation only means a step forward, a step which should be taken with hope and courage, for without courage and hope it would be most difficult to take any forward step.”

“Initiation in the real sense of the word, as it is used on the spiritual path, takes place when a person, in spite of having a religion and belief, an opinion and ideas about spiritual things, feels that she/he should take a step in a direction which he/she does not know; when she/he takes the first step, that is an initiation.”

“The aim is to find God within ourselves, to dive deep into ourselves, so that we may touch the unity of the whole being. It is toward this end that we are working by the power of initiation, in order that we may receive inspiration and blessing in our life from within.”

Requirements for Initiation

What is asked by the Order of someone requesting initiation is first of all, sincerity of intention. There must also be the attitude of an open heart and mind toward the teachings, although complete acceptance is never required and there is no dogma. While the prospective initiate may not understand the full ramification of this act, there must be an awareness of the significance of such a step. Initiation signifies a serious commitment to deeply participate in a process of spiritual training. It is especially important that one not be unrealistic in his/her expectations, desire “*fantastic experiences*” or occult powers, attempt to use spiritual practices as a means of escape from the world, or evade personal issues through the misuse of spirituality. A person interested in initiation is usually asked to attend some classes and seminars on the teachings. During this period he/she may be viewed as a candidate for initiation.

Objectives of the Training

Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan, has enumerated a series of objectives that he associated with initiation into the Sufi Order. These objectives are offered here with brief commentary.

Self Realization

The first objective is “*to realize the Self within and without*”. The Self is the divine aspect of each human being and is often referred to as our divine inheritance. The Sufi Order also places a strong emphasis on the initiate creating a meaningful life in the world, since doing this can be the means to actualize potential qualities, gifts and archetypes, thereby manifesting the Self without.

Expansion of Consciousness

“*To see into the world unseen*” is the exploration of transpersonal states of consciousness. This means not reducing reality to the narrow perception of “ordinary” human consciousness but reaching beyond these parameters in a quest for direct experience of union with the Absolute.

Training the Ego

“The path of initiation is the training of the ego, and it is self discipline which is learned on the path”. An important element of the above quote is the word “training” for it conveys an image of the ego with a positive and significant role within the human structure when properly disciplined. It is not destroyed but worked with creatively. The practice of mastery is taught in the Order as a means to transform the ego into suitable instrument for serving the divine within.

The Art of Personality

“The soul is veiled by covers, one cover over the others, and the rending of these covers allows the soul to emerge and rise high.” This image of lifting the veils is found throughout Sufi poetry and refers to the process of awakening to one’s natural state of being. The veils are our distorted identification with past conditioning and personal dramas. The “*art of personality*” is in the creation of a personality which incorporates, manifests, and actualizes the soul’s potential.

Awakening Divine Love

“To kindle the fire of divine love.” The awakening of the divine in the human being is the igniting of the love element in the heart. One of the essential criteria for recognizing a realized being is captured in the observation that “*the Holy Ones are living streams of love*”. There is much emphasis placed upon the kindling of the love element in this training, which sometimes is described as the “*Religion of the Heart*”.

Other Traditions

The Sufi Order has an inter-faith orientation based upon respect for all authentic spiritual disciplines. Members are welcomed to participate in the religious traditions of their choice. If you have been initiated into another path and are presently doing a daily practice please inform your Sufi Order guide. This is to insure that the various practices are in harmony or are not repetitive.

To Know the Divine

“To know and communicate with God.” The various practices used in the training of initiates facilitate different modes of relating with that ultimate reality which many call God. Part of this path explores different relationships between God and the human being and the understanding that arises from each. The archetypal relationship of particular significance to the Sufi is that of the lover and the Beloved.

Communication with Life

“To be able to read into nature’s manuscript” represents the mystic’s capacity to communicate with all of life, experiencing a world composed of beings rather than things. Learning to read means, in this case, developing the capacity to see within the mineral, plant, animal, and human kingdoms, patterns which illuminate the nature of reality and reveal an underlying unity permeating the micro-macrocosms. Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, the present head of the Order, describes this phenomena as *“discovering that which transpires through that which appears”*.

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Service to Humanity

“If we ask what profit we derive from initiation, the answer is that religion, mysticism or philosophy - all that we gain - would help us to achieve one result, and that is to be best fitted for serving other human beings.”

The Sufi Order is concerned that its spiritual training not be distorted into a narcissistic self-involvement but enables one to become more sensitive to the human condition throughout the world and better able to respond in a positive and creative manner. The expanding of individual into planetary consciousness, is the ideal which the Sufi Order seeks to serve.

Drug Policy

The only rule of the Sufi Order is that initiates are asked to refrain from using non-prescription drugs. This policy stems from the concern that combining spiritual practices and mind-altering chemicals may create an unbalanced condition in some individuals.

Financial Aspects

There are no financial obligations for those who take initiation. Both initiation and on-going personal guidance are provided free of charge. In addition, study circle classes are free for all initiates. Other programs may cost a reasonable fee.

Membership in the Sufi Order is not the same as initiation. Membership is open to all, whether or not they are initiated, who voluntarily chooses to pay dues to support the work of the organization.

The decision

Initiation is a very sacred step and should not be entered into lightly. Once an individual has explored this path and feels that this is truly their spiritual path, it is their responsibility to request initiation. Ideally, the Representative at their local centre will be the initiator, since this is the person whom the candidate will see most often; however, any individual appointed by the Pir can perform the initiation ceremony. If the initiator feels that the individual is ready for initiation, they will initiate the individual. Otherwise, they may ask the person to wait for a period of time.

The Initiation Ceremony

Some members have found it beneficial to spend a period of preparation before initiation. This may include a personal retreat, or some other expression of spiritual reflection and practice. During the ceremony it is appropriate for one to be relaxed, open and receptive to the sacredness of the occasion. The following questions are asked of the person seeking to enter this path.

- ♦ Is it your wish to become initiated in the Sufi Order?
- ♦ Will you consider the teaching that is given to you as your sacred trust?
- ♦ Will you offer your allegiance to the Message of Unity brought by Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan?

This is followed by a prayer and the invoking of the Masters, Saints, and Prophets of various traditions and the Sufi lineage. During this time the transmission of the Spirit or Baraka which gives inner life to the Sufi Order is communicated to the new initiate. The ceremony ends with the following blessing:

“May God bless you, illuminate you, protect you, and make you fruitful in Gods service.”

At the end of the ceremony personal practices are usually suggested and demonstrated. If you are initiated by Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, then you will need to select another guide for further practices. Due to his extensive travel and commitments as Head of the Order, Pir Vilayat is not able to function as personal guide. Contacting your local center and meeting the representative is a good place to begin this selection process. Other initiations may be given at the discretion of one’s spiritual guide.