

Sufi Prescriptions for World Politics:
A Way to Global Community

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September 10th-12th, 2004

“The ‘Shakir’ World Encounters”
Marrakech, Morocco

INTRODUCTION

With the shrinking attraction of “universal visions” such as communism and other secular ideologies, Sufism has a vital role to play in efforts to fashion a new compass and forge a new peace culture for humanity. For too long the world’s leaders have sought to extract visions of humanity’s place in the universe that were limited to the horizons of positivist science. These visions failed to deliver because they could not bridge the tremendous material and cultural divides that define the world today, nor could they provide impetus for an ecologically sustainable future. As a result we now stand in need of new visions, visions that draw upon the untapped spiritual resources and enduring wisdom of the world’s great contemplative traditions. At the present historical juncture it is tremendously important that exponents of faith traditions such as Sufism begin to rearticulate essential precepts in ways that respond to the contemporary context of profound human need and deep ecumenism.

This essay outlines a Sufi response to the challenges presented by contemporary world politics. This response, which includes a call for movement towards a consensus-based and cooperative approach to global issues, is based on eight principles derived from an interpretation of the Sufi heritage: *tawhid* as epistemology, reinvestment of spirituality, global citizenship within cultural diversity, “beloved” global community, economics of sufficiency, development as modernization plus humanization, democracy as process not product, and social healing. It is our hope that the principles and priorities suggested below will stimulate inspired discussions of the following questions: What does Sufism tell us about international relations? What are the normative and practical implications of Sufism’s vision of *tawhid* (unity)?¹

1) *Tawhid* as Epistemology

It is fitting that we begin our discussion of Sufism and global politics with *tawhid*, a fundamental Islamic theological precept that has been understood by Sufis as a “unity of being” (*wahdat al-wujud*). We must start with this most essential basis of the Sufi vision and methodology, and then proceed to its existential implications.

Through the testimony of such exemplars as Ibn ‘Arabi, Sufism has developed the view that all being is one, and that the purpose of human life is to know this unity existentially – that is, in the midst of action, experience and spiritual practice – and not merely to seek distinction or salvation as an individual. Sufism challenges us to discover and live the principle of *tawhid* as direct personal experience of Reality – as the grasping of our relation to the absolute, and as the maintenance of harmony with the universe. It challenges us to discover that human consciousness comprises both analytic and intuitive modes, and to see the individual parts of reality as well as the whole of it. It regards the complementary functioning of the rational and the intuitive as a measure of human creativity. When we reconcile the two, we come to terms with ourselves as whole beings.

¹ The interpretations offered in this paper reflect our best efforts as long-standing students of Sufism and international relations. We invite and welcome further discussion of Sufi principles and their contemporary application.

Sufi epistemology is rooted in the heart, and in a perception that faith cannot be reduced to cognition or belief. To substantiate this perception, Sufis point to the testimony of saints and mystics throughout the ages: ordinary people can turn to inner and higher forces for inspiration, courage, and perseverance. Only this kind of inner strength and creative energy can sustain us and enable us to construct a bridge over the gap between appearance and reality, without which there can be no vision. Only this variety of inner experience can allow us to transcend and unify the seemingly opposed principles of life, such that we do not see one another as rivals.

Invoking the unity of existence as suggested by *tawhid* does not deny the apparent existence of a multiplicity of created things. Multiplicity is due to a single reality being filtered through differing points of view. As Ibn ‘Arabi has affirmed, *tawhid* refers us to the overall harmony and patterning of the universe. It is natural law in the broadest possible sense: each individual person has a unique place and special obligation to act in support of this patterning. At first the multiplicity of things, manifested in the complex processes of daily life, acts as a mirror to us. We then search out and discover the characteristics of Unity in all things and situations. Our being becomes sacred. God becomes human. The material world and the spiritual world become one world. Indeed, we discover that the whole world needs the whole world. We perceive that the West can give the East the best it has in exchange for the best from the East.

Sufism challenges us to perceive unity between subject and object, and to combine different modes of thinking in harmonious and creative ways. Universities have excelled in training persons in linear critical thought, but they have been woefully negligent in educating for other modes of analysis and perception. A new openness to spirituality can help us to balance intellectual culture, connecting truths of reason to truths of feeling and experience. In this manner we can make not only tight, sequential connections, but also connections that are serendipitous, random, or visual.

Knowledge in the complete sense is transformative knowledge of the unity of existence. Doubt remains as long as the object seems different from the knowing subject. Real knowledge is relational; the whole is reflected and replicated in the parts, and from parts we may construct the whole. Ibn ‘Arabi defined knowledge as perceiving and being that which is. Normally we do not feel this relation between knower and known, or recognize that in a deep and profound sense we are what we perceive or see. Really to know – to realize that we already are whatever we perceive – is to be deeply changed. The purpose of real knowing, therefore, is transformation. Union with the known blends heart and head. The heart directs the head to its proper purpose – knowing the unity of existence – and the head focuses the heart’s energies so that transformation can occur.

Real knowledge has the nature of being. Being is unity-awareness. We mistakenly think that we are separate creatures, thereby losing grasp of our real nature. Existence is one, hence knowledge is also, and so the search for real knowledge must start with the question, “How can I find the unity of existence?” That unity *is* knowledge of that unity. It frees us from illusions, chiefly the illusion of separateness. And the rational mind cannot liberate us in this way.

The naïve materialism of the post-Renaissance centuries is no longer working, and must be replaced by a more inclusive epistemology. The deeper we delve into the fundamentals of science, the closer we are to the fundamentals of many of the traditional mysticisms. Sufism enables us to assimilate these insights, and to pursue education and transformation in a free spirit using various methods, combining both linear and intuitive modes of consciousness. We recognize our oneness in a way that radically alters our way of being in the world.

Sufism allows us to dismiss the idea that positivist science should be enshrined as a substitute for religion, while simultaneously affirming that traditional approaches to spirituality do not need to be “sheltered” from the pursuit of scientific knowledge about human consciousness. Rather, these ways of knowing can coexist, informing each other to produce new insights about human interdependence at the material and social as well as spiritual levels. At the deepest level, we *are* and always have been one. The divine manifests through the material, and the material exists within the context of the divine.

If humanity at its depth is already complete, it nonetheless lacks the new vision and ethic that would permit it to experience itself as such. Our “different” and “new” ways of knowing are already there; they are quite real – indeed ancient – but remain dormant. For three centuries formal Western education has neglected them. When finally we become sensitive to them and start to open them up, we will value the self as a whole, embracing conscious and unconscious. We will recognize that the most profound knowledge comes from personal integration, which in itself offers a template for integration of humanity at the species level.

2) Reinvestment of Spirituality

Sufism provides compelling testimony to the fact that everything in the universe and in human nature is not fully accessible to positivist science. Many aspects of our inner reality and life, including consciousness itself, remain mysterious. One of the most characteristic and mysterious features of the inner life – a feature about which Sufism speaks quite articulately – is the age-old quest of the human spirit toward transcendence, the act of reaching toward an ultimate reality. From a Sufi perspective there is a profound need to reestablish this quest as the foundation of human striving – that is, to reinvest spirituality in our collective undertakings.

Throughout history, though admittedly for limited periods, various civilizations have demonstrated how spiritual values can engender social progress. At the same time, we would hasten to acknowledge that spiritual values have just as often been corrupted and manipulated to justify actions which represent their antithesis. This in itself, however, should not prevent an appreciation of the historic association between the emergence of a just world order and a widespread commitment to spiritual values.

From a Sufi perspective, spirituality is a consciousness that sees the whole of existence in its parts, and constructs the whole from the parts. Spirituality means filtering out the superficial, the changing, so that the essential emerges. “Holistic” is another metaphor evoked by Sufi spirituality: holding all directions in simultaneous connection – both horizontally and vertically. The horizontal connects all people with all things. The vertical joins the higher and lower consciousness.

Sufism enjoins humanization of the sacred and consecration of the human. The humanization of the sacred means the destruction of nations and idols so that the Reality may live and be known in human life. The consecration of the human means the recognition that sacred activity is not apart from the immediate, the personal, and the interpersonal. We experience the reinvestment of the sacred in our lives.

Sufism recognizes that spirituality starts with the individual, with our very essence. At the same time, Sufism sees politics as inherently spiritual because our public life reflects our social values. The reconnection of politics to our highest and most worthy values is now the most important task in political life. World events and trends will continue to expose the precariousness of relations among people and nations based on separateness in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. Spirituality provides the possibility of experiencing and accepting human solidarity, and most importantly, the wholeness of human life. It is an experience of a sense of unity that overcomes the principle that divides humanity on the basis of religions, genders, and classes.

By affirming a deep unity of soul and spirit, Sufism allows us to see the world as a single, integrated whole. By deconstructing the delusive beliefs that separate us from others, however, Sufism also challenges to perceive that our world is painfully fragmented. There is great suffering, much of which comes from individualistic and exclusivist belief systems: beliefs that we are somehow self-sufficient in our accomplishments, virtues, and capabilities. By restoring a vertical axis to politics, Sufism points beyond egocentrism, ethnocentrism, and competitive materialism, while also providing a basis for cooperation between left and right.

3) Global Citizenship within Cultural Diversity

Sufis have long recognized that cultures are not and never have been monolithic, and have provided powerful examples of how carriers of different cultures can coexist without violent conflict. Contrary to the theses of Samuel Huntington and his counterparts in non-Western contexts, cultural diversity is not a security threat. It is the reality of our world, and we need to learn to work with it more effectively. Cultural differences are not only obstacles to understanding; different cultures bear within themselves resources for grappling with fundamental problems of human existence.

When we regard culture as a resource rather than as a threat, we begin to change the way we relate to our own traditions and to those of others. Our authenticity ceases to depend on replication of past forms and exclusion of outsiders. We become more comfortable with our own distinctiveness, and simultaneously more capable of recognizing the genuine uniqueness of others. We recognize that the whole world needs the whole world – to survive and to become more human.

In the world today there is an increasing need for some kind of minimal global bonding culture to facilitate the creation of a working, global consensus to address the most critical global issues. Without an ethos of global citizenship that embraces the idea of unity in diversity, we will be

unable to work with one another to address these issues, and will deprive ourselves of invaluable resources.

Many of the reasons that Western and non-Western intellectuals experience discomfort with cultural diversity are epistemological. Because the inelasticity in our traditional ways of seeing and knowing the world is precipitating a global crisis of identity, we need new, synthetic approaches to education that permit us to experience ourselves as global citizens. The global citizen should access “knowing” as a mode of multi-perspectival consciousness. Education should increase the boundaries of awareness, and open new horizons to individuals in their search for truth, beauty and order. Knowledge should liberate us from our presumptions and illusions. It should liberate our creativity to interact with the magnificent diversity and vibrancy of the many ways of knowing developed by different civilizations. It should enable us to harmonize multiple religious, social and national identities. It should enable us to discover that the incommensurable insights of different knowledge systems may be complementary rather than contradictory.

The coexistence that global citizenship strives for is predicated upon pluralism. The pluralism necessary to create global citizens should reflect the natural progression of humanistic ethics. Different linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and national entities are all valuable. They flower in unique spaces and manners, whose richness is only understood in juxtaposition with the whole.

Cultural diversity creates intellectual possibility. In history, wherever a conscious decision was undertaken to integrate the many forms of knowing, a cultural renaissance has emerged. A dark age for the Western world was ended by a golden age for the Islamic world. In Andalusia, the coexistence of Muslim, Jew, and Christian made it the intellectual capital of the medieval world. The Abbassid capital of Baghdad in the Tenth Century comprised one of the most cosmopolitan cities ever known where Jewish, Muslim and Christian scholars searched for truth in harmony.

It is eminently possible to create, restructure and redevelop the realm of education so that each human being can achieve self-awareness within a global context. Through creative approaches to education, students can move towards a global context of perception and citizenship without sacrificing their own sense of cultural dignity and identity. Recognizing the presence of truth in every language requires study and a reconsideration of received assumptions, but it need not mean ceasing to speak one’s own native tongue. Global citizens must walk a tightrope, balancing past with present. They preserve the values and accomplishments of the past while creating new the possibilities for the future.

Sufism affirms that spirituality often transcends the socially defined boundaries of religion. Our inner essence abides with our Creator, and is the basis for our broadest and most inclusive involvement with the human prospect. In this respect it is worth noting Sufism’s historically ambivalent relationship to dogmatic theology. Though most Sufis respected institutionalized frameworks, they radicalized Islam’s rejection of idolatry to include even excessive ideological attachment to their own beliefs about God and divine will. They used form as a vehicle, never as an end in itself. Moreover, Sufis saw no reason to believe that the circle of divine providence excluded non-Muslims.

Sufism sees culture as a resource whose function is to express our humanity in ways that make us more human. Cultural creation is essentially a communal process and cultural community becomes the primary source of human realization. In this way, creativity can replace conformity as the primary mode of political action. Freedom is defined away from a purely liberal and individualistic “doing of one’s own thing,” both for people and for societies. The individual is not seen as the victim of society. The goal of freedom and of development is human creativity. The communal nature of the cultural process involves a certain amount of discipline, self-restraint, and self-sacrifice.

Sufism sees cultural pluralism and freedom of expression as the basis of existence. Each individual is a powerful source of transformation. Each one of us can participate in the creation of harmonious global institutions and the restructuring of existing ones. Each one of us can help to transform cultural conflict by reframing value polarities into value complementarities. The impassioned mind and the informed heart can together call forth the energy to move the planet towards realization.

4) “Beloved” Global Community

The globalization process is irreversible. Nonetheless, it is not clear whether the world is coming together or falling apart. Unless we are able to foster a new sense of global community, the concurrence of globalization and privatization on a world level may leave us in a desperate and chaotic situation that aggravates ethnic and religious conflicts.

The existing international system favors the rich who are getting richer and the powerful who are getting more powerful. The resultant maldistribution of wealth and power is itself a form of disorder. We are confronted with bitter paradoxes: Our world has never been richer than it is today, but the scope and intensity of poverty is also unprecedented. The peoples of the world have never been closer together – and yet they have never been farther apart.

Despite these grave problems with globalization, we should not ask how to reverse it. Simply put, there is no possibility of de-globalization. Instead we must ask how we can reshape and redirect globalization. How can we establish institutions and a process of world governance to accommodate both the universalizing and the localizing effects of globalization? How can we deal with the issues of massive inequality, unfair distribution of benefits, and marginalization of tradition and culture? How can we create a sense of global community that gives coherence, meaning, and purpose to our emergent reality of functional interdependence?

With guidance from spiritual traditions such as Sufism, our era could become a prelude for one of the most creative and harmonious epochs in human history. Preparation for the journey toward a world community begins with seemingly irrelevant dreams. Dreams are imperfect and subject to contextual, cultural, and historical biases. Yet they open the way for a future in which we can shield ourselves from the disaster of chaos, take at least some small steps towards the alleviation of human misery, reduce the burden of the world arms race, and decrease the burden of repression on hundreds of millions of people.

Sufism leads to a profoundly healing vision of cooperative global politics. Developed and developing worlds – North and South – become one world. Oppressor and oppressed become people experiencing life in all its vicissitudes. Civilization and barbarism become culture. Planning and spontaneity become one reality. Propositional and anecdotal knowledge change into the root of knowledge. Reason and intuition become faces of truth. We learn that there are no developed or less developed states, only individuals and societies in development.

The Sufi community is a global community, and the global community is a beloved community.² From a Sufi perspective, this global community is possible because all of humankind (*insan*) is ultimately one people – a single community that transcends creed, caste, class, country, and color. Every human community has received streams of divine truth and revelation. Each civilization has a unique contribution to make to the human prospect, and every culture is intrinsically valuable. Moreover, each culture can benefit from contact and exchange with other cultures: the whole world needs the whole world.

Global community means unity in diversity. In nature as well as in culture, Sufism sees diversity as a form of divine blessing or baraka. The whole is reflected in the parts, and “Wheresoever you turn is the face of God.” We must see and seek the whole in the parts. Rather than prejudice, Sufism calls for attitudes of humility and deep respect. Every individual and every nation or culture is capable of manifesting divine qualities or eclipsing them. Within a context of divine transcendence and human responsibility, no individual or community can believe itself to be uniquely privileged or unconditionally favored.

5) **Economics of Sufficiency**

Sufism tells us that inner commitment to a vision of humankind’s place in the universe which gives priority to ethical thought and values over mere physical existence is a fundamental prerequisite for survival and, ultimately, prosperity on this planet. To this end, Sufism prescribes a cooperative global economics based on love, sacrifice, and cooperation, supporting individual and communal self-reliance, a fair distribution of the earth’s limited resources, care for the planet, and control of large-scale human destructiveness. Global and personal human concerns become aligned. A cooperative global economy emphasizes sufficiency rather than scarcity. The purpose of production is to produce enough of the right goods rather than as much as possible of everything.

The purpose of production in a cooperative global system is to provide everyone with enough to serve as the basis for approaching the non-material aspects of human life. Human capacities, strengths, motivations, and attitudes become primary economic resources and the foundation of development.

Because Sufi epistemology complements scientific epistemology, it can provide us with new ways of thinking about how material values relate to non-material values. It can also expand our vision by placing positivist thought-forms in a broader context that permits creativity. These

² Aspiration toward a “beloved community” was a keynote of Martin Luther King’s activism during the American civil rights movement.

thought-forms, which are modeled on Aristotelian logic and linear thinking, have limited our capacity to understand complex dynamics of the world we live in.

We complicate problems of world politics when we are unable to perceive context and long-range consequences. The natural, biological systems and global social interactions that constitute our world are always more complicated and circuitous than our ideas about them. Using lineal, cause-and-effect thinking to map a world that is an interconnected, interdependent network of feedback circuits inevitably leads to inappropriate actions that generate unanticipated results. Rather than perceiving the world as a home within which we reside, we “think the world apart” through abstractions that fragment knowledge and encourage manipulative relationships to nature and society.

It becomes difficult to build a just, stable and sustainable peace when we think that ecological values are somehow in conflict with economic values, and that we are faced with an either/or choice between taking care of our environment vs. taking care of people. This is exactly what happens, however, when we attribute too much concreteness and autonomy to abstract concepts enshrined by linear thinking. Closer reflection on the words “ecology” and “economy” reveals that they share a common Greek meaning: “study of the house.” They refer to housekeeping.

The physiology of the human body, the complexities of family life, the network of global trade, and the infinitely varied and delicate interdependencies of the totality of life of earth – all are alike in structure. Aristotelian logic would treat these concepts as distinct, and perhaps even consign them to different departments of the university. In contrast, a Sufi perspective would provide greater scope for a maieutic (dialogical, or Socratic) thought process that would bring them together and probe their connections and interdependencies.³ It would help us to discover that sufficiency and not scarcity is the true condition of human life on the planet. There is enough for everyone, provided that we accept standards of discernment and justice, supplanting frantic accumulation with a search for means of satisfying deeper and more enduring human needs.

An economics of sufficiency can greatly mitigate international conflicts, while also transforming relations with the natural world. From a Sufi perspective, the human being as *khalifah* has a profound responsibility of custodianship vis-à-vis the natural world. The environment is a dimension of the divine manifestation or pleroma. Love of nature and person are therefore equal in the heart of the Sufi. Existence is the grand mosque of nature where there is a place for every root under its grounds, and for everything under its skies. All human beings are subject to the same laws of evolution. There is no difference in organisms: we are all the same.

6) Development as Modernization Plus Humanization

³ For a discussion of the maieutic method, see David Fortunoff, “Dialogue, Dialectic, and Maieutic: Plato’s Dialogues as Educational Models,” <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anci/AnciFort.htm> (accessed 19 July 2004).

Sufism redefines development and democracy in spiritually inclusive and dynamic terms, and frames democracy as a global process of reorganizing political behavior.

To become more democratic and developed, each person and culture must sweat out their own growth, and develop/refine their praxeological style. At the same time, they must coordinate and cooperate with other persons and cultures, evolving common standards without imposing a single, privileged model of democracy and development that is rooted in a particular context.

Sufism leads us to a view of development as an historical process through which we change and create a humanist and creative future within the context of our environment. Development becomes a process of the evolution of our basic strengths. Individual and societal growth become one; each one or us is a part of this open-ended process. Development is self-conscious, participatory, self-managed, cooperative, and seeks the full humanization of the person.

True development occurs when we recognize that the material and the spiritual are united, and cannot be separate and independent. When we blend the materialism of the West and the spirituality of the East, we cause both elements to “meet and fuse” by losing their original identities. By standing at the point of their convergence, we can balance the equilibrium of our thought. The most highly developed being is neither Western nor Eastern, but rather a person who partakes of the finer qualities of both the Western genius and the Eastern prophet.

Sufism is concerned with the whole person. It sees that the person cannot be whole until the globe itself is interacting together. It takes the fusion of East and West as a metaphor for the new person who is the global citizen. The fusion also represents the potential balance. The global citizen possesses both East and West, materialism and spirituality. Sufism recognizes that we must conquer even our spiritual passions – and not just our intellectual or physical passions – if we are to be balanced. The Eastern mystic who whirls his way into ecstasy and the American who sweats for gain are two poles of the same reality.

Emphasizing the value of cultural diversity and the importance of global citizenship changes the way we think about development and democracy. One of our first priorities should be redefining and pluralizing our understanding of development. It is no longer tenable (on empirical as well as critical/normative grounds) to theoretically extrapolate from the experience of industrial societies to formulate proposals for the guidance and transformation of non-Western societies. Neither is it acceptable to presume that experts from Northern countries should dictate to the peoples of the Global South, providing them with detailed instructions about how to manage everything from population and housing issues to irrigation and agricultural development.

We need to separate the idea that the West has learned something of value about development from the idea that the West *embodies* development and is therefore on the cutting edge in all domains of human progress. Conceptions of development should neither presume Western superiority and universality nor reject the Western experience outright. Rather they should acknowledge Western science as a remarkably dynamic source of inspiration for development, within a wider context that includes diverse cultural systems of social values. Development is an intrinsically normative process, and different civilizations can develop in diverse directions if their internal dialogues on social values set them on trajectories that do not reproduce a Western

model. Insofar as the West has something to teach the East about techniques of modernization, the East also has much to offer the West with respect to non-material values.

From a Sufi standpoint, there are no underdeveloped or developed nations. All nations are in various stages of development, with respect to different value criteria and indices. The larger international system is extremely underdeveloped, characterized more by the rule of force than by the force of rules or of consensus.

There is an important distinction between modernization and development. The development process is the way in which society and its members seek to reach their potential. It is a process with a goal – even if this goal is perceived as an ever-receding one. Implicit in all development models is desired state or implied utopia that has been extracted from the cultural experience of a people and generalized into a vision of the desired society. Because cultural experiences change, it is natural that the “utopia ideal” behind development models changes as well, leading to new conceptions of development and new indicators.

In contrast, modernization is the adoption of modern technologies for the use of society. Modernization attempts to make a society more rational, efficient, and predictable, especially through the use of comprehensive planning, rational administration, and scientific evolution. Modernization also carries the connotation of a more productive society, at least in economic terms. Like development, modernization is always at least a partially conscious effort on the part of a minority that has a vision of what a modern society should look like.

The vitality of visions of development can only be derived from the cultural realities of a given society. The increasing cultural pluralist and persistent inequality within contemporary societies only underscores the importance of political participation and social justice as elements of development processes that bring dignity, combining modernization with humanization. The dialogue about development that is necessary within societies is also increasingly needed on a transnational basis as the world economy becomes more tightly integrated in the absence of participatory processes of global governance.

7) Democracy as Process Not Product

Democracy is not a western product. It is a global process of organizing societies to provide for political needs on an equitable basis. Like development, democracy must be deeply rooted in the dreams and hopes of the great majority of a nation to flourish. In a Middle Eastern context, the vision of democracy must be rooted in Islam – in a system of values that rejects the idolatry of dictatorship and enjoins social justice.

We frequently tend to conflate Western liberal forms of democracy with the substance of democracy. The substance of democracy is a human society that has a sense of common goals, a sense of community, a process of participation in decision-making, and protective safeguards for dissenters. The form of democracy, on the other hand, is always cast in the mold of the culture of a people. The practice of democracy is always less tidy than its definition, because it is more dynamic than its formal description and prescription.

There is no fundamental incompatibility between Islam and democracy. The lack of democracy in the Middle East is due more to a lack of preparation for it than to a lack of religious and cultural foundations. In addition to social functions, Islam serves a practical role in politics by offering recourse to a transcendental order to which rulers can be held accountable. The oppressed can defend their rights by appealing to religious standards. Islam offers a vocabulary of resistance to corruption and repression, and a vocabulary of hope for the cultural future.

Western democracies emerged after years of deep introspection, existential anxiety and conflict over its faith system with hard-won lessons and achievements in the realm of political coexistence. Muslims are not required to reach the same conclusions that Christians adopted with regard to their faith, and do not need to in order to develop an authentically Islamic response to political empowerment. There is a great need in the Muslim and Arab world to deliberately integrate the person, the citizen and the Muslim. Christianity has emerged with a close linking of personal behavior with citizenship and social values, while Muslims today are on the threshold of discovering the obligations and meaning of Muslim citizenship.

Muslims must ask themselves: What kind of citizens can their societies create, animated by Islamic values and contexts? What kinds of solutions can Islam bring to affect participatory decision-making in the absence of authoritative guidance in social matters? What Islamic values and social mechanisms can be brought to bear for ameliorating the poor economic conditions of modern, urban living? The flowering of the individual as citizen within Islamic community can inspire new avenues of meaning and institutions that testify to – and fortify – what is enduring in Islam.

Today we face a delicate task: There is a need for a new beginning in the Islamic World. Here is an opportunity to engage in a substantive dialogue that seeks to overcome years of repressed political conflict. If dialogue about democracy can begin to extend beyond elites, we will witness not only a transformation in historical relationships and understandings, but also the emergence of true leadership that thrives through the flourishing of others. Such leadership is “strong” because it applies deeply rooted social values in creative ways that are good and beneficial for the community. Such leadership is “powerful” because it chooses to empower others rather than take power away from them.⁴

8) Social Healing

Forgiveness and reconciliation are keynotes of the Sufi approach to world politics. Sufism works for brotherhood, sisterhood, tolerance, and inclusiveness, and to this end it seeks social healing and eschews revenge. From a Sufi standpoint, it is no longer appropriate for humankind to consciously appropriate the name *muntaqim* (avenger). God is the final settler of accounts, and observing limits in efforts to correct injustice is a key component of the Islamic injunction against *fitnah* (civil discord). Sufi confidence concerning divine justice in no way precludes effort to right wrongs, but it does entail an understanding that those who sew bitter fruit will ultimately taste it. The most constructive way for the Sufi to contribute to the manifestation of a better world is to seek transformation.

⁴ See Appendix for further commentary.

Sufis appreciate that the world community is now threatened by the very mechanisms which, in the past, have served us well. Until recently, the dual standard of morality which operated within and among groups served a positive value. The competition among states and cultural groups formed a frame of reference for a humanity that lived collective life within fragments of the whole.

So long as we lived in a flat world, infinite in extent, groups in conflict could move on whenever they lost out in some competitive encounter over resources or power. This competitive mechanism served the function of dispersing humanity across the face of the globe. And so long as humanity's technological capacity was limited, competition among groups could transpire without a generalized threat to the species and the natural world.

But now we have run out of room, and the consequences of resentment and violence are much more severe. The competitive mechanisms and double standards of the past cannot serve us well in a finite, spherical, shrinking world. We have moved into a new context for humanity as a whole. We must be committed to a world that works for everyone, and that excludes no human group from its moral imagination. We must become committed to the hard work of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Sufism reminds us that reconciliation begins with our own inner life. Just as we seek to reconcile the disparate aspects of our own personalities – reason and passion, spirit and matter – so too do we aspire to reconcile the many voices of truth as they manifest within societies and cultures. The Sufi approach to politics requires effort to learn the many faces of humanity, and to see the essence unfolded in each person. It enables us to see that the oppressor and oppressed are both human beings experiencing life in all its vicissitudes. It helps us to perceive that reason and intuition are two faces of truth, and that planning and spontaneity are equally valid and complementary ways of fulfilling our human potential. Rather than seeing civilization and barbarism we see culture. Propositional knowledge and anecdotal knowledge become twin roots of human knowledge.

Perceiving harmony and potential complementarities amid great cultural diversity is an exercise in awareness. This awareness reflects the progression of the individual's search to know human wholeness as described by the many wisdom traditions of the world. It comes from acknowledging and accepting basic differences in world-view among different peoples.

Acknowledgment of differences is appreciation, honoring the unique experience of each individual, citizen, believer, and civilization. This appreciation gains its wholeness through empathy. Once we are able through education to constantly shift subject and object, agent and structure in our dialogic analysis, we begin to experience the history of the other as our own, without judgment and without regret or hate. In recognizing the authentic individuality of others, we truly begin to understand our own unique contribution to the world, the part our own identity plays in the global mosaic of beliefs.

CONCLUSION

Sufism's vision of inner freedom and spiritual elevation has powerful ramifications for humanity's collective well-being. The principles cited above can provide a compelling basis for responding to contemporary challenges of global life. They can help us discern pathways toward cooperative global politics.

As we translate principle into practice within the context of the present world order, four interrelated challenges emerge. *First*, we must seek to promote of a global system of checks and balances, i.e. a global balance of power. The global balance of power should not be based upon military power and economic leverage as has been the dominant practice in the past. A viable global balance of power cannot be status quo-oriented; it has to possess anticipatory insight become open to broader participation. The marginalized people of the world must be empowered, so they can also be part of the global balance of power.

Second, we need to build basic agreement on priorities within global civil society. The development of an agreement on priorities contributes to building a global community because different peoples feel they have a stake in the success of programs and share a common purpose. The one worlders, the environmentalists, the developmentalists, and the advocates of human rights and democracy need to continue expanding the global civil society of transnational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). They need to fashion an agenda that is truly global.

Third, we need to align human rights principles with their contemporary context of application. Particular emphasis must be given to cultural diversity. We need more of the world's countries to become living laboratories of multiculturalism, so that they can provide us with a new vision of core values associated with diversity. We also need to focus our energies on the greatest and most widespread violation of human rights today: poverty.

The *fourth* challenge is the creation and development of a broad consensus of peoples and governments. Consensus – the distinctive political tool in relations among equals – must replace armed force as the preferred instrument of national policy. “Realists” may object to the naivete, the instability, or the shortsightedness of some manifestations of consensus, but it would be sheer folly to challenge either its existence or its power. The process of consensus is so new as a method of reaching binding international decisions that mistakes and contradictions in its application are inevitable. But we have little choice: the emerging global order will either learn to live with mass opinion or it will not survive.

Consensus does not demand a radical transformation of the global system. Negotiation, persuasion and accommodation will remain as standard features of interstate life. The loss of the ability to force a verdict by war will do little more than impose one more limitation on the practice of statecraft – a more fundamental inhibition than any the system has accepted up to this point but nevertheless one that will leave room for vigor, imagination, and skill in framing and executing national policy.

Consensus introduces a cooperative model of world politics which focuses on the benefits of international stability in the global system. No country can achieve this by itself, and stable cooperation cannot be maintained without reliance on a standard of fairness. Cooperation based on fairness requires the identification and acceptance of shared objectives reached through cooperative efforts. Each of the potential cooperators has to expect personal benefit. There must also be a fair distribution of the benefits and the costs, together with mutual trust. Since no one party can force any of the others to cooperate, and since each party has a selfish temptation not to cooperate, each must trust the others not to take advantage of both the opportunity and the temptation to cheat.

Thus, cooperation requires mutual expectation of a willingness to sacrifice short-term self-interests for the common good. Cooperation based on fairness involves some risk, but the level of risk decreases when there is more confidence in the trustworthiness of the other. It is sometimes necessary to build a basis for trust by starting with relatively low-loss, low-risk cooperative ventures, and working up to bigger enterprises that have higher payoffs but also greater risks.

Sufism has a vital and essential role to play in these efforts, in which it can harmonize relations between Islam and other great religious cultures and direct attention to issues that are of fundamental importance to the moral and spiritual development of humanity. Because of its capacity to inspire human solidarity and deeply ecumenical spirituality, Sufism can greatly expedite the emergence of a global peace culture. Like other religious and spiritual traditions, however, Sufism must be reborn if it is to respond to the contemporary context of human life. Though most religious and ethical systems promote reciprocity and goodwill, their institutions and outlooks are too frequently identified with just those aspects of the past that contribute to current division and conflict. Put very simply, spiritual values for the present and future cannot be partisan; they must speak to the universal human need for transcendence, unity, and justice.

Achieving a unifying global consensus as a basis of a just world order is possible. The essence of such a vision must be felt as well as rationally argued, because it involves both the head and the heart. From this perspective, a new global system requires new political and social arrangements, a new (or renewed) vision of humankind's existential reality, and purpose and an unrelenting effort to make the former truly reflect the latter.

APPENDIX:

What Makes A Strong Leader? ***The Power of the 99 Names****

May 2004

Sufism has much to offer supporters of democratization, especially when it comes to developing the qualities that define a democratic leader. From a traditional Islamic and Arab perspective, being a good leader meant following true guidance and developing noble traits in the self through the emulation of divine qualities. It is this tradition of cultivating divine qualities in the self (*takhalluq bi-akhlaq allah*) that formed the vital core of Islamic and Arab teachings on leadership as a form of service to God and to the community. A person who excelled in the service of divine qualities, *Asma' Allah al-Husna* (the 99 Beautiful Names of God), was a true leader of the people.

Leadership in the Middle East was traditionally understood to be based on interlocking covenants in which the delegation of power and authority was contingent on willingness to honor interests greater than one's own personal aspirations for power and authority. On the one hand, the would-be leader was first and foremost responsible and subservient to God, whose grace and blessing were conditional upon humble surrender. On the other hand, the aspirant to leadership was also responsible to the community, whose loyalty could only be expected if he fulfilled his divine obligations to them. The ideal leader from a traditional perspective, therefore, was doubly a servant – both to God and to the people.

Traditional Islamic and Arab values remain extremely relevant to the challenges facing Middle Eastern societies today. The Middle East desperately needs inspiring leaders who are in touch both with the needs of others and with the spiritual richness of their heritage. Islamic teachings on the divine qualities constitute a foundational – yet also contemporary and dynamic – path for those who seek to manifest authentic and essential values in times of change through dialogical engagement with their communities. In practice, leadership emerges within the context of communication and action. It is a function of an operational situation and an understood action program, and demands a generous measure of free assent from those who follow. A great leader may wish to exercise his or her natural bent for leadership, however this will be impossible unless followers consent to be led. In short, coercion and the disempowerment of the community is not leadership, as resources needed for progress and community well-being are diverted to maintain institutions of fear. Who leads and who follows, in other words, is important only *after* agreement is reached on where everyone wants to go; in other words, after the articulation of vision and the establishment of cooperation and trust.

How do we begin? Contemplation of divine qualities as expressed in the *Asma' Allah al-Husna* provides a template and a model for reflection both for personal training and for the effort to

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actualize the highest values of the community. Where these are present, the essential prerequisites emerge to inspire the confidence, support, and cooperation of a community that rewards leadership with the dynamism and unity needed to envision and achieve a collective destiny.

Leadership is Empowerment

Being a leader involves being a representative both of leadership qualities and of people. A leader models leadership qualities by speaking and acting respectfully toward everyone. To be a true statesperson, one must also be an accomplished facilitator. The leader as facilitator is a compelling example of the quality of *al-Malik*, the Possessor of Power or Sovereignty. Politics and leadership always involve power, but power for what purpose? A leader, in the fullest spirit of generosity (emulating *al-Wahhab*, the Bestower, *al-Razzaq*, the Provider, and *al-Muqit*, the Maintainer), is one who owns power in order to empower others. This power manifests *al-Qadir*, the All-Powerful.

Yet, what actions are connected to such power? Moral leadership is the ability to inspire or awaken (*al-Khabir*, the One Who is Aware) people to their innate potential. A leader provokes people to act, and act toward proper ends, that are ultimately for the good of the whole community. With the responsibility of empowerment, he or she awakens and encourages people, both men and women, to fully participate in society at all levels (social, moral, economic, and political) and to form and develop their own accounts of social reality. In doing so, a leader then becomes a witness (*al-Shahid*, the One who bears witness) to the societal processes through diligent observation of his/her own actions and environment (*al-Raqib*, the Ever-Watchful, *al-Hasib*, the One who takes into Account, *al-Muhsi*, the Accountant).

Clearly, a greater leader needs to be an effective politician (a good strategist and tactician), but this needs to be in service of moral statesmanship, not personal and momentary advantage (*al-Ghani*, the Rich, one who has no desire, and *al-Mughni*, The one who does not need). A variety of characteristics describe such a moral stature (*al-Majid*, Nobility, *al-Jalil*, Majesty, *al-Azim*, Dignity or Excellence).

The power of an effective leader is thus drawn from a multifaceted strength. For the leader to remain true to the purpose of their leadership, power has to be anchored upon an unwavering commitment to the common good and to engendering all the qualities considered above. But fulfilling this requirement demands that leadership must communicate these principles in speech and in deed both clearly and consistently. When wisdom for the need of the community calls for tough and forceful action, the leader must be tough and forceful (*al-Aziz*, Mighty, *al-Jabbar*, the Repairer, *al-Qawi*, the Strong, *al-Matin*, the Firm in Resolve). The problem is that force can easily get out of hand, and often triggers cycles of counter-resistance through injury to dignity, mercy, wisdom, compassion, and unity. When there are no ways to ensure that the use of force is used only to uphold the presence of these other qualities, which it is obliged to protect, the use of force may ultimately destroy the qualities and purposes for which it is merely a servant. Indeed, the greater leader must know how, above all else, to avoid having to exercise a force, whenever appropriately possible, and know how to reunite the community whenever official action is taken that divides the hearts and minds of the community her or she serves and represents.

Leadership requires more than the elites merely adopting a mood of optimism or generating fear of the future. Leadership requires action and intention. In order to balance the *siffat al-jalaliyyah*, qualities of majesty, a leader also needs to develop *siffat al-jamaliyyah*, the qualities of beauty. The first two names of Allah are *al-Rahman*, *al-Rahim*, the Compassionate and the Merciful. Every *surah*, or chapter, within the Qur'an except for one begins with the invocation of the *Bismillah al-Rahman, al-Rahim*, "In the Name of the Compassionate, the Merciful." Out of all the names and qualities of God, *rahma* is the most mentioned in all its derivative forms in the Qur'an. Both of these facts and many others are reflected in a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammed: "God's Mercy is Greater than His Wrath." God's manifestation through mercy and compassion has always been the primary basis of God's relationship with human beings. Thus God's presence has been called the "Breath of the Merciful"—for He breathed mercy into Adam—and human beings accepting His mercy achieve sympathetic consciousness.

This is reflected in the Arabic saying: "I am the *al-Rahman* and thou art the *al-Rahim*, I have derived thy name from my name." *Al-Rahman* is God's Mercy and *al-Rahim* is creation's compassion. *Al-Rahman* gives Mercy only to the merciful, who are receptive to His mercy. In turn those who embody *al-Rahim*, the merciful, relate to one another through mercy.

Mercy, or *rahma*, mercy, is an essential leadership quality. History shows us that the loyalty inspired by leaders who demonstrate mercy and compassion is profound. Other qualities linked to *rahma* are *al-Latif* (the Gentle), *al-Halim* (the Clement), *al-Karim* (the Generous), *al-Wadud* (the Loving), and *al-Ra'uf* (the Kind). Empathetic consciousness enables a good leader to forgive and spread the habit of forgiveness to others (*al-Ghaffar*, the Forgiver, *al-Ghafur*, the All-Forgiving, *al-'Afu*, the Pardoner).

Guardian of the Public Interest

A skilled leader cultivates these qualities at the individual as well as the collective levels. Every thought, action, and word is directed in relation to the context of the greater Whole. A greater leader becomes a guardian of the public's interests (*al-Mumin*, the Guardian of Faith). He or she protects (*al-Muhaymin*, the Protector, and *al-Wakil*, the Solver of Problems, and *al-Hafez*, the Preserver). As spokesperson, he or she embodies visionary leadership and seeks to represent all of the people. The subtle relationship between power and influence, between executive image and agenda setting is constant and dynamic. To effectively lead, it is necessary that a leader inspires mutual trust, and this requires the ability to be a good communicator: the leader's view must be all encompassing (*al-Wasi*, the All-Embracing, and *al-Basit*, the Expander). This means that leaders must be very good listeners (*al-Sami'*, the All-Hearing) and fine observers (*al-Basir*, the All-Seeing). To hold vision is to be a mapmaker: to see that all of the old maps are out of date, and that we do not yet have new, good and reliable maps. In order to invent our own maps, with all the skills that doing so accurately and compassionately requires, leaders need both humility and dignity (which may be linked to *al-Shakur*, the Thankful, and *al-Hamid*, the Praiseworthy).

Leadership demands vision. Why vision? Vision avoids drift and self-centeredness. It mobilizes the energy and imagination of the people, and it widens and deepens the sense of mutual responsibility. It articulates what is possible while also demanding discipline, sacrifice,

and the capacity to dream. The presence of vision on the part of leaders is the best insurance against the dangers of short sightedness of self-interest. The results of such leadership are compromises and cynicism, and the demoralization of the community. Much of our common “wisdom” is rooted in and held stagnant by cynicism, premised on the belief that human society is not capable of rising above self-centered dreams. This belief paves the way for the dangers of “charismatic leadership.” A democratic society should not tempt the people to overload leadership by expecting too much. In addition, leaders should not expect blind loyalty. Blind loyalty denies creative dynamics that challenge and stimulate the leader. The charismatic leader earns greatness by learning how to listen to observers, followers, and advisors.

Leaders need vision that has faith (*al-Mu'min*, the Faithful) and wisdom (*al-Alim*, the All-Knowing). Like power, inspired leaders do not need wisdom for themselves alone, for they possess the courage and strength to be able to share it. One cannot be an effective representative without finding and facilitating creative ways to prioritize and balance all the interests of the people and groups in a fair and inclusive way on the basis of wisdom (*al-Hakim*, the All-Wise), which is both principled and practical--far seeing and yet focused on meeting the issues of the moment in a just and balanced manner (in *al-Hakam*, the Judge, wisdom is connected to the sense of having good judgment). A successful nation needs a broad public dialogue, with a great variety of suggestions and opinions, and not only consultation. Justice (*al-'Adl*) itself is a dynamic and not merely a static or purely legal concept. Justice is embodied in the “rolling consensus” of people for more democracy, more equality, and more opportunity. It involves pride in one’s heritage and tradition, and a strong sense of community.

From Leadership By Force To Leadership By Consensus and Cooperation

Building a system of good governance must begin with good leadership. From the outset this means that the character and education of leadership is crucial. Secondly, it means recognizing that the people have the right to know and learn what proper leadership is, so they may be empowered to remind those in leadership positions of their responsibilities. An attentive citizenry is one of the most important institutions to ensure better leadership and reward effective government. Traditionally in the Middle East, power has been dispersed in society, although not along the lines of Western systems of checks and balances, and there have been ways of choosing and removing leaders that often worked fairly well to keep them representative, responsible and honest. Through working with such qualities as *al-Hadi*, the Guide, *al-Rashid*, the Guide to the Right Path, and *al-Warith*, the Inheritor, a leader seeks to fulfill the sacred trust to inspire and empower the whole community. This trust is essential for health, vibrancy and the long-term sustainability of a united and prospering community.

True leaders are consensus builders (*al-Muqaddim*, the Expediter). They work to build mutual trust and agreement on principles of fairness among their people, as a basis for cooperative efforts in which all have some expectation of shared benefit (*al-Barr*, the Source of All Goodness). Since no one party can force any of the others to cooperate, and since each one has a selfish temptation not to cooperate, each must trust the others not to take advantage of the opportunity and temptation to cheat. Cooperation requires, then, mutual expectation of a willingness to sacrifice short-term self-interests for the common good (*al-Jame'*, the Gatherer).

Because of the need to rely on mutual trust, cooperation based on fairness involves some risk. The more confidence one has in the trustworthiness of the other cooperators, the less this risk will be. The role of fairness in the game is to obligate cooperators not to take advantage of one another in a risky situation. It is sometimes necessary to build a basis for trust by starting with relatively low-loss, low-risk cooperative ventures, and working up towards bigger, higher-payoff, but higher-risk enterprises.

While having shared objectives that benefit all is a necessary precondition for cooperation, it is not sufficient. There is a crucial role for leadership at each stage in the confidence-building and community-building process (*al-Salaam*, The Source of Peace): forming common goals, establishing mechanisms for cooperation, ensuring that efforts will be coordinated, determining the fair allocation of benefits and burdens, and identifying the roles and responsibilities of the various actors in the cooperative enterprise. Leadership is needed to promote solidarity without which the highest values of the community do not manifest and underlying norms of fairness and reciprocity cannot be effective. When cooperation is achieved, however, a great leader will be known as a good friend (*al-Wali*, the Protecting Friend).