

## Preface

There are a lot of books about Islamic mysticism and Sufism. In most cases these are books about ancient Sufi masters like Rumi and Hafez. But a book written by a contemporary Sufi master is rare. This is a book by Seyed Mostafa Azmayesh, the official representative of the Nematollah Gonabadi Sufi Order in the West. In a penetrating way he writes about the 'Path of the Substantial Evolution'. But Seyed Mostafa Azmayesh is not only a Sufi master, he is also a researcher. He graduated at the Sorbonne (Paris) on the subject of Islamic Gnosis. An ideal combination: mystic and scientific researcher. In fact it is the only good combination, because the true mystic is a scientific researcher. A scientist of the soul, a scientist of the spirit.

Like a chemist researches and works with the matter, the mystic investigates and works in the inner laboratory. A mystic is an alchemist; he perceives how the 'substance of the soul' changes as he approaches God. In this book the inner changes are precisely described; the negation, the temptation, the destruction, the acceptance, the ascendance and the liberation and in the end, the surrendering to God. These are the stages on the path of 'Substantial Development', a journey which starts with the ego and ends in God.

The path that changes lead into gold.

In this book Seyed Mostafa Azmayesh emphasizes again and again that this 'Path of Substantial Development' is no easy travel. It needs a lot of discipline. Because of this, it is better not to travel alone. Provided the path could be travelled alone. The serious seeker needs a master. In the West we have lost to a great extent the sense of importance of a spiritual teacher. It has a negative connotation: a Master...that is something of the East! We in the West are our own spiritual Master. At least, this is what we think. And so –we can commonly assume - spiritual growth in the West is superficial.

Seyed Azmayesh says: "The Master chooses against the ego". In the West we choose by our ego. And so, we spiritually 'shop around', as long as our ego is satisfied. Seyed Azmayesh, however, explains very clearly in this book that you need a Master on this path. The Master helps us to dominate our ego in order that the 'higher self' can come in control. The Master knows the dangers on the path of transition to one's substance. He prevents us, he stimulates us, he puts you in front of situations and most of all he gives us love. Therefore it is a good advice to follow a Master, even though you do not know yourself why, yet.

To follow, does not mean to abandon one's own will –it is the student who chooses the Master - the student decides whom he obeys and to whom 'he falls in love'. The true Master teaches in parts, he gives to the student what the student can digest and not more! The Master is connected to God; the seeker is in the first period mainly connected to his ego. Numerous are the stories –

also in this book- in which the student starts out to find his Master. Not the other way round!

In the understanding of Islam, Jesus was not crucified. In Christianity he was. So there is a problem! At least, in theology. Not for the mystic. Because, crucified or not, it is important that Jesus has returned. For the Islamic and the Christian mystic that is the focus. 'The seeker always awaits the coming of Christ in his heart', writes Azmayesh. Jesus is always there, the mystic, also the Islamic mystic, is able to experience Jesus. And more, it is the goal of Islamic mysticism to experience Jesus within the heart. Only when you know Jesus in the heart, you can recognize Jesus in the outer world. How? By observing other people.

'When you see Christ in your heart, He brings you peace and quietness and when you meet somebody who gives you this feeling you have met Christ'. In another human being! Within Sufism, Jesus is the true Master.

This is no surprise because Seyed Azmayesh shows in this book that Sufism is older than the Islam and it has its roots within Gnosticism and Christian mysticism.

So, the final goal of Christian mysticism and Islamic mysticism is the same: to find Jesus within the heart. The trans-substantial stages of the soul are also the same. The mystical techniques differ a lot with (medieval) Christian mysticism. In Christian mysticism the techniques are more cerebral, while the methods of Islamic mysticism are artful in the first place. The different techniques are precisely described in this book. Like the rhythms that are 'hidden' within the mystical poetry of Rumi for example.

The reciting of the mystical poetry, called Qawwal, brings the heart in tune with the inner development. Also the Koran is filled with rhythms. Reciting the verses of the Koran changes the rhythm of the heart. For the Sufis the Koran is more a book of recitations than a theological book. To the Sufis Mohammad is more a mystic instead of the founder of a religion. Often the recitations are supported and accompanied by rhythmical music, like the playing of the Daf. Like in the old Western music the Gregorian chanting is meant to bring the body in tune with the divine rhythm.

Another important technique is the telling of stories, by which your head becomes your heart. For this reason stories have been included within this book. All these techniques are meant to bring the heart in tune with the divine rhythm.

Of course the changes cannot be perceived by the naked eye, these are subtle changes which can only be noticed by the spiritual eye and ear. The Master can hear them; and God who hears in the attuned rhythms an invitation to enter inside.

**Dr. John van Schaik.**

**(John van Schaik (1956) studied medieval Mysticism and Gnosticism at the University of Utrecht and the University of Antwerp. He did his PhD at the Catholic University of Nijmegen on a comparative Study of Dualism among the Manichaeans and Cathars. He is co-founder and Director of the Origenes Institute in the Netherlands. The Origenes-Institute is specialised in the relationship between esoteric Christianity and the established Church. He is also editorial chief of BRES, a review on religion, science and gnosis. He has published a lot in the field of esoteric Christianity).**