

Sufism and Dervishes

The origin and roots of Sufism lie in the life and practices of the Prophet of Islam and the Qur'an. Sufism espouses a well-founded and thoroughgoing interpretation of Islam, which focuses on love, tolerance, worship of God, community development, and personal development through self-discipline and responsibility. A Sufi's way of life is to love and be of service to people, deserting the ego or false self and all illusion so that one can reach maturity and perfection, and finally reach Allah, the True, the Real.

Through the Whirling Dervishes program we hope to bring to you a hint of one of the remarkable ways of achieving this: the way of Rumi, the great Muslim mystic and poet.

The Order of the Whirling Dervishes is one branch of the vast Sufi tradition of Islam. The universal values of love and service shared by all Sufis are very much relevant to the social and political realities of today, and this ritual, which is only performed by the Order of the Whirling Dervishes, has come to symbolize these values in the hearts and minds of millions throughout the world.

The Fundamental Meaning of *Sema*

THE SEMA RITUAL began with the inspiration of Mevlâna Jalâluddîn Rumi (1207-1273) and was influenced by Turkish customs and culture.

It is scientifically recognized that the fundamental condition of our existence is to revolve. There is no being or object which does not revolve, because all beings are comprised of revolving electrons, protons, and neutrons in atoms.

Everything revolves, and the human being lives by means of the revolution of these particles, by the revolution of the blood in his body, and by the revolution of the stages of his life, by his coming from the earth and his returning to it.



However, all of these revolutions are natural and unconscious. But the human being possesses a mind and an intelligence which distinguishes him from other beings. Thus the whirling dervish or semazen, intentionally and consciously participates in the shared revolution of other beings.

Contrary to popular belief, the semazen's goal is not to lose consciousness or to fall into a state of ecstasy. Instead, by revolving in harmony with all things in nature -- with the smallest cells and with the stars in the firmament -- the semazen testifies to the existence and the majesty of the Creator, thinks of Him, gives thanks to Him, and prays to Him. In

so doing, the semazen confirms the words of the Qur'an (64:1): Whatever is in the skies or on earth invokes God.

An important characteristic of this seven-centuries-old ritual is that it unites the three fundamental components of human nature: the mind (as knowledge and thought), the heart (through the expression of feelings, poetry and music) and the body (by activating life, by the turning). These three elements are thoroughly joined both in theory and in practice as perhaps in no other ritual or system of thought.

The Sema ceremony represents the human being's spiritual journey, an ascent by means of intelligence and love to Perfection (Kemal). Turning toward the truth, he grows through love, transcends the ego, meets the truth, and arrives at Perfection. Then he returns from this spiritual journey as one who has reached maturity and completion, able to love and serve the whole of creation and all creatures without discriminating in regard to belief, class, or race.

In the symbolism of the Sema ritual, the semazen's camel's hair hat (sikke) represents the tombstone of the ego; his wide, white skirt represents the ego's shroud. By removing his black cloak, he is spiritually reborn to the truth. At the beginning of the Sema, by holding his arms crosswise, the semazen appears to represent the number one, thus testifying to God's unity. While whirling, his arms are open: his right arm is directed to the sky, ready to receive God's beneficence; his left hand, upon which his eyes are fastened, is turned toward the earth. The semazen conveys God's spiritual gift to those who are witnessing the Sema. Revolving from right to left around the heart, the semazen embraces all humanity with love. The human being has been created with love in order to love. Mevlâna Jalâluddîn Rumi says, "All loves are a bridge to Divine love. Yet, those who have not had a taste of it do not know!"