Table of Contents

Part I

Chapter 1: My Entry onto the Path of the Heart
A New Awareness of Heart; A New Phase in My Journey 7
Intention of Paper and Structure 11
Relevance to the Current State of the World 15

Part II

Chapter 2: Sufism: Uncovering Meaning in the Heart of Islam 21
Chapter 3: Uwayy-i-Qarani and the Origins of the Path within the Heart
Importance of the Inner-Connection to the Present Context 29
Uwayys' Example of Service 30
The Gift of the Robe and the Beginning of the Uwayysi Order 31
The Uwayysi-i-Magh soudi School 34

Chapter 4: The Physical and Spiritual Reality of the Heart
Transformative Potential of Awareness of Heart in Every Day Life 48
The Sight of the Heart in Unity 48
The Heart as the Source of Life 53
The Heart as the Center for Inspiration 57

Part III

Chapter 5: The Alignment of Hearts in the Student-Teacher Relationship
Finding a Unique Teacher for a Universal Knowledge 65
The Interplay of the Physical and the Spiritual in the Student-Teacher Relationship 68
Developing Presence in the Heart at the Presence of the Teacher
The Structure of Sufi Gatherings at IAS: Adab as a Manifestation of Respect and Love 79
The Alignment of Hearts in the Student-Teacher Relationship: A Summary 85

Chapter 6: Movement from Darkness to Light: Purification and the Reception of Knowledge within the Heart 89
Annihilation into the Heart of Knowledge 93

Chapter 7: The Sight of the Purified Heart: Emergence into a Unified Vision of the World 96
From Vision to Action: The Purified Heart in Service to the Rights of "Being" 100

Conclusion 110
Acknowledgments

Appendix A: Interview with Arife Ellen Hammerle

Appendix B: Interview with Glen Pascall

Bibliography
Part I
Chapter 1
My Entry onto the Path of the Heart

"You think you are a small body, yet within you is wrapped the entire universe."
--Amir al-Moumenin Ali, 7th Century Sufi Master

Amir al-Moumenin Ali’s message, proclaiming the greatness hidden within the human being, echoed throughout Sufi Masters Shah Nazar Seyed Dr. Ali Kianfar and Seyyedeh Dr. Nahid Angha’s words the first night I met them. The two teachers spoke to a group of 30 Sufi students of the Uwaiysi tradition, gathered for a bi-monthly meeting for instruction, meditation, and prayer, in a warmly lit room of the group’s Khaneghah located in San Rafael, California. The students sat on rows of green cushions and listened in rapt attention, some taking notes and others with eyes half closed, as the teachers unraveled a truth central to the Sufi path: While we may understand ourselves in the limited framework of our physical bodies and senses, we are in fact heir to a boundless spiritual treasure as great as the whole universe. The human has the capacity to discover this treasure, Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar indicated, hidden within the human heart.

As a sophomore in high school, the Sufi Masters’ words reverberated within my own heart and seemed to unlock a source of knowledge that called for deeper understanding. Though I did not realize it at the time, I had found my guides, or more precisely my guides had found me. Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar, as learned masters who had traveled their own paths to their conclusions at the gate of knowledge, held out the

1 A communal Sufi meeting space translated as “house of time.”
tools and the direction for me to expand my awareness of the questions and the answers vibrant within myself.

Dr. Angha writes, “The eloquence of words are understood only if their meanings are also reflected in the mirror of the heart” (1991: xxx). The full depth of the words I heard that night stood, and continue to stand, far beyond my grasp as a student still in the beginning stages of my journey, but my experiences thus far had prepared me at least to recognize their life-changing significance. In particular, my educational and extracurricular opportunities at the Jesuit high school, Saint Ignatius College Preparatory, embedded within me a sense of human beings’ innate and indestructible personal potential as well as their equally unshakeable bond to one another. The school’s motto, “men and women with and for others”, provided me with a model for human relationships that made no distinction between genuine self-service and service to other people and the rest of creation. This ethos overlaps seamlessly with Sufi teachings that hold human value in the highest esteem and trace our essence back to one unlimited Divine origin.

The Jesuit influence manifested itself in my approach to academics and service-oriented activities, as well as my appreciation for the natural world. As a writer, I sought to create pieces that could appeal in subject matter and style to the most pressing problems delimiting the bounds of human happiness. I felt most drawn to topics that explored and brought to light existential perspectives and modes of behavior that prevent us from reaping the maximum benefit from our time on Earth. Our wellbeing, it seemed to me, rested on the extent to which we could foster an awareness of and gratitude for our own lives and the lives in the world around us.
Service-learning opportunities arising under the banner of my schools’ motto, “men and women with and for others” provided fertile ground for me to pursue the questions that drove my writing. My work with the homeless and poor in Tacoma, Washington and San Francisco, California gave me an acute sense of humankind’s inherent dignity that stands in contrast to social structures that demean our value. I gained my first in-depth exposure to the character of poverty in the United States during a trip to Tacoma that I took part in along with eight other students from Saint Ignatius. In Tacoma, I worked in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and other social service organizations while living in a Catholic Worker Community. Catholic Worker Communities draw their guiding inspiration from their original founder, Dorothy Day (1897-1980, United States), who believed in the sanctity of each human life that made communion with God possible through communion with others (Stone cover page). The communities emphasize service in a manner akin to the Ignatians for whom subscription to social hierarchies bars true service from taking place. The voluntary poverty ascribed to within the communities reflects the desire among Catholic Workers to overcome socially constructed boundaries and eliminate any division in their relations with others. The Catholic Workers’ philosophy appealed to the sense that I developed in high school of the common bond between all humans regardless of social rank.

The ideas I encountered while living with the Catholic Workers came dynamically alive for me during my time in the social service centers of Tacoma. Volunteering at the soup kitchens and homeless shelters, I formed relationships with people with individuals who I may never otherwise understood as part of my social sphere. They shared with me their histories, which often struck me as radically different
from my own. I learned of the complex mixture of external circumstances and personal choices that had put them in positions of poverty, in which they felt isolated and marginalized from the society operating around them. Inherited poverty and chronic abuse, neglect, and addiction along with a desire for human connection and community factored prominently into many of the stories I heard. The apparent differences between the people I met in Tacoma and myself served to enrich our dialogue and bring added perspective and at the same time, came to feel like an inconsequential veil over our fundamental unity.

Because of this, the injustice of poverty and the marginalization that surrounds it seemed possible only in the face of a massive, socially accepted lie: We could only allow our fellow humans to undergo the degrading conditions accompanying poverty and street-life in the United States by closing our eyes and hearts to the dignity within each human as well as our presence within each other. Housing patterns of income segregation literally put the poor out of sight for most of Tacoma’s affluent residents and when members of the two groups crossed paths, those portraying the signs of wealth steadfastly avoided eye contact. In my mind, this behavior characterized the antithesis of Dorothy Day’s conception of community, and I could not imagine otherwise than our lack of communication with each other signified a lack of communication with our own selves.

My experiences in Tacoma immediately became a directional force in my life and prompted me to learn more about poverty in my home area, San Francisco, California. Upon returning from my trip, I took on the position of co-coordinator of a social outreach program at my school called the “Comfort Run.” Through the program, students from
Saint Ignatius brought food and hygiene materials to the poor, inner city Tenderloin District of San Francisco. My co-coordinator Sarah and I believed that the program served, at least minimally, the practical, material needs of a district where half of the residents suffered from chronic hunger, however it was our desire for the sense of community that Dorothy Day so prized that motivated our work. The occasional individual snubbed our meager offerings, turning their back in indignation at our audacity to assume that a sandwich, juice, and toothbrush could in any way attenuate the harsh realities of street life and others at times stuffed the pre-packed lunch bags we had made in the trashcan when they realized it lacked their preferred ingredient. Words and actions we might previously have written off as rude, we could no longer judge because we saw them as pieces within a broader personal context.

As in Tacoma however, the reward of mutual connection trumped any feelings of rejection. I again formed lasting friendships with open individuals eager to share, joke, and listen. I took these friendships with me throughout my day as lessons for my interactions with all people. Exclusionary social patterns in San Francisco, like the ones that I found to exist in Tacoma, began to stand out blatantly to me. I witnessed for a second time the castigation of the poor to spaces largely out of sight from the nearby business community. It appeared to me that we live in a society obsessed with and distracted by coverings, where we learn to evaluate our position relative to each other based on our apparel and titles. Entrenched social injustices and inequities from the local to the global, I felt, had roots in this fixation on exteriors, because it caused us to overlook the dignity residing within all people. Just as significantly to me, I saw that our culturally supported self-identification with the material caused us to forget the
independent value within ours selves that stands apart from precarious social trends. My later introduction to Sufism would give me the tools to understand the meaning of these sentiments more deeply and refine my call to work for a society grounded in respect for life.

My high school’s location in San Francisco provided the perfect setting for my insights from working in Tacoma and the Tenderloin to take root in a way that would color my perception of not just my relationship to my fellow humans, but to creation in its entirety. My high school sits perched on Sunset Boulevard, with views from its westward-facing windows of the ocean reaching out to the horizon. Track practice gave me the occasion daily to soak in the vast expanse of blue during and after my runs along the coastline. The ocean, in its beauty, mystery, and infinitude, fed within me a sense of wonder for creation and led me to sit atop the sand dunes for hours with my best friend contemplating its meaning in relation to the individual human being. Sunset and the gradual emergence of the stars in the night sky added another dimension to our musings.

In addition to the ocean, I had contact with a landscape teeming with life. Gulls dotted the beach and their cries added another layer of richness over the sound of the waves lapping the shore. Along the eastern side of campus and in nearby Golden Gate Park, cyprus trees with wood dark and swollen with moisture and boughs touched with raindrops made silhouettes against the thick fog of Autumn days. The area’s grassy fields, woven through with the yellows and blues of wildflowers, stretched out beneath the arching sky. These surroundings, perceived through the lens of Jesuit insights, put me in touch with the beauty pervading creation and a sense of identification with that beauty within myself. They impressed upon me the scope of existence that, though
unfathomable with the mind, finds parallels within the heart. My heart seemed to both contain the ocean, the stars, and the sky and disappear within them as they overflowed beyond my heart’s confines. These experiences prepared me to glean the eloquence behind my teachers’ message, which called upon me to look for the “universe” wrapped within my small body. It prepared me for a path that demands an intimate connection to the heart, as the container of meaning within messages.

A New Awareness of Heart, A New Phase in My Journey

The night I met Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar, I entered into a new awareness of my heart that marked a new phase in the journey that had led me to my teachers in the first place. Their words brought together the multiplicity of my experiences into one framework that contained the tools for me to search for and discover the truths hidden within those experiences. I learned that I could uncover the reasons for my awe that arose in response to the ocean and the expanse of the night sky, for my appreciation for the beauty I found in the world around me, and for the heart-based connection I felt to my friends and family. I saw that with the proper guidance, I had the ability to witness the truth of my own nature as experienced through the spiritual heart and my place within existence because of the fact of my mere humanity.

Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar’s teachings took a radical step beyond the religious doctrine I had been exposed to up until that point in the capacity they attributed to the human. They made it clear that one who seeks to understand existence or know God must move beyond acceptance of the pre-packaged truths offered by the religious authorities of society and look for understanding within their self. One cannot attain
knowledge by memorizing the words of others, regardless of the wisdom within the words’ depths. Rather, one must find a teacher who helps turn his or her student’s face towards the light hidden within the student’s own being. Through consistent practice and the guidance of such a student-teacher relationship a student may come to personally know the meaning of spiritual teachings through experience not requiring the intervention of any medium.

At the International Association of Sufism (IAS), the organization founded by Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar to support Sufi practices and the advancement of world peace in the United States and abroad, I found a community of people who exemplified the results of genuine adherence to a path towards self-knowledge. Together and individually, they brought a powerful peaceful presence to their immediate environment that reflected a remarkable capacity to take each moment of life as a gift and an opportunity for self-advancement on their quest. Their healing influence bore fruit beyond the immediate environment at IAS and extended to their neighborhoods, cities, and the world at large. Each in his or her own way made vital contributions to humanity as informed advocates for human potential and the rights inherent to “Being.”

My teachers’ lives stood out to me in particular as the pinnacle of service to creation. Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar’s lifelong commitment to their respective paths had enabled them to see life’s multiplicity through the lens of unity found in the heart. The lack of separation they experienced in creation made the Jesuit ideal, “men and women with and for others”, more than an idea for them but a mode of existence possible with personal transformation. I saw this in their unswerving dedication to their students around the world, in the generosity and civility that undergirded all of their interactions,
and in the accomplishments they achieved through their grounded work ethic in pulling up the roots of injustice and oppression that prevent humans from living full and rich lives according to their potential.

Once introduced to Uwaiysi Sufism, I entered onto a path from which I could never wholly turn back. The wisdom of my teachers and the example of their lives and the lives of their students opened an awareness within myself, experienced through my besting heart, of the incredible possibilities I had been given through the gift of life. I saw that I could follow my appreciation for the beauty I found within humans and nature to its source and in so doing, come to witness the pervasive beauty of an undivided reality. This would require a personal process of evolution, whereby, in the words of Dr. Kianfar, I could come to “see the face of God everywhere”. Such a transformation, from limited perception to full cognition according to one’s human potential, calls for the development of self-awareness that leads to a continuously deepening understanding of the unlimited “I” at the center of the human. Upon hearing these teachings with an open heart, I quickly realized that I could not waste any time in moving forward on this journey in order to do justice to myself and to contribute to the world to the best of my ability.

To the beginning student, or even to the seasoned mystic, the nature of the Sufi’s goal can at times seem unobtainable especially when considered from the mindset of human limitation. However, the committed student gains access to an immense source of inner strength that buffers against these doubts and draws her further down the path. Dr. Angha once instructed her students at a Sufi gathering in 2007 to stop questioning with

Please note that I do not intend any gender bias by my use of a feminine pronoun. I merely use it to simply sentence structure.
their minds whether they can or cannot achieve their goals. Instead, she said, "ask yourself why you are not in love." This comment struck me and has stayed with me through the ups and downs I have experienced on my own journey. Love's call, once recognized, can overcome mental uncertainties and beckons the student back to a place of confidence that resides within the heart. By cultivating love within a focal point in the heart the student comes to find the Divine pervading existence within and without and accelerates her progress by awakening to the opportunity within every moment. The simple words spoken by Dr. Angha have provided me again and again with a key to escape the circuitous hesitations of my mind. "Why are you not in love?" I repeat to myself, and shift my focus to my spiritual center within the heart in which a dynamic love for life resides. This expansive love, at the core of the Sufi journey, drives me on towards a goal based in affirmation of my greatness no less than the entire universe.

Dr. Angha's question too speaks to Sufism's role in refining my life's direction in terms of what I seek to bring to the human population. In my relationships with others and in my observations regarding human suffering, I cannot help feeling strongly that as humans we should have the opportunity to live in and fall in love with life's beauty. We should have the knowledge and the conditions necessary for nurturing a full appreciation of our own selves, a "treasure hid in ruins" (Maghsoud 1998: 97). The world incurs a huge loss for each life that passes without coming into its full inheritance, and yet our social structures, as well as seemingly intractable circumstances of material deprivation, can erect barriers that impede us from realizing our identity in Divinity. I hope to use my Sufi practice to deepen my understanding of the elements stopping us as a race from falling in love in "a quite absolute and final way", as Jesuit Pedro Arrupe has said, and by
working in communion with diverse individuals, help create the conditions for humans to claim this birthright.

I thank my teachers and the Sufi community whose wisdom, constancy, and humanity brings me back to this love within myself and provided the inspiration for me to pursue the Uwaiysi path. Over the seven years I have now been in contact with the group, I have seen myself evolve as human beyond my expectations and beyond what I knew possible. I have taken out of my efforts on the path a strong sense of the possibilities innate to humans that exist within us as long as we live, even in the moments when hope for anything better seems foolish. I have found in myself an indestructible reserve of love, kindness, wisdom, joy, determination, and compassion based in nuanced understanding of human nature that given adequate care and circumstances continuously unfolds as the breathe of Rachman, . I have come to appreciate the advice of Uwaiys i-Qarani, the progenitor of the Uwaiysi order, to “Guard your heart,” for I have experienced that my heart contains the wellsprings for all my divine qualities (Angha, M.T. 47). The heart in sickness can close off to the world, covered under layers of “dust”, but when polished can give the human a radiance fitting to her true nature. I thank my teachers for their invaluable guidance, which has given me an awareness of my own relationship to my heart and provided me with the tools to discover the meaning of being human.

**Intention of the Paper and Structure**

In creating this work, I hope to give the reader an introduction to Uwaiysi Sufism and its contributions to humanity as a path that reveals to the traveler, widely referred to as salek in Sufi terminology, her true identity in relation to the whole of existence. Self-
knowledge frees the salek from the bounds of her previously limited self-perception as a “small body” and introduces her to the unlimited greatness of her being, as large as the “entire universe.” On the Sufi path, the salek discovers her identity through the gateway of the heart, as not only a physical organ but also a spiritual locus within the human body, and for this reason, the heart will figure centrally within my writing.

Correspondingly, the emphasis on the heart in Uwaiysi Sufism makes service to society integral to the Sufi’s process of growth and her presence in the world. Within the heart, the Sufi finds the truth of Divine Unity that connects her to all of creation and in fact, reveals a lack of any real separation between the infinite manifestations of this Unity in the realm of surface appearances. I therefore seek to elucidate in my writing the development of qualities within the salek that make her into an effective servant of humanity and the tradition among past and present Uwaiysis of generously dedicating their lives to moving society forward. I have had the pleasure and opportunity for this purpose of interviewing some of those currently practicing under the guidance of Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha in the United States’ Pacific Northwest. I will weave the stories, experiences, and thoughts of these Sufis throughout the paper to give the reader personalized examples of contemporary individuals traveling their own unique, path towards a full humanity defined by service to Whole. This contributes to my goal of demonstrating the practical applicability of ancient Sufi teachings to the human within a modern context.

I will use my intention of introducing the reader to the mystical practice of Uwaiysi Sufism as path of the heart that simultaneously draws the salek towards a full recognition of her identity and pure service of humanity to shape the structure of this
paper. In the first section of the paper, I will give an overview of the origins of Sufism and the Uwayisi Order, which both date back to the inception of Islam within the heart of Mohammed. Uwaiys-i-Qarani founded a particular order of Sufism through his connection within the heart of his teacher, Mohammed. The Uwayisi order has been passed down generation upon generation through the Uwayisi Mashrab, or the Uwayisi style of instruction, by which teachers inherit the light of knowledge through the powerful lens of their teacher’s heart. Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar currently lead one group of Uwayisis among many and are located in California in the United States of America. They do however guide students all around the world at a distance, which falls in line with the Uwayisi tradition.

Next, I will provide a foundation for the reader on the heart as the physical organ that contains the spiritual center of the human being. The Uwayisi must progress through the layers of the heart to reach the Divine reality hidden within. In so doing, she finds the “Source of Beauty” unveiled within her, as thirteenth century Sufi Poet Jallalleddin Rumi has put it. Love aids the student during this journey, yet she must confront personal obstacles in order to reach her goals.

From there, I will discuss the fundamental role of the student-teacher relationship as based on the Owaysi Mashrab or “way.” The student must learn, in this relationship, how to align herself with the teacher’s wisdom in order to receive Divine knowledge from the teacher like light from the sun reflected by the moon. This relationship forms the basis for all of the student’s progress, because it is the teacher who has traveled the way in advance and has the tools to guide the individual towards the fulfillment of her potential.
A discussion of the student-teacher relationship leads naturally into the next section in which I will discuss the process of purification and how it prepares the student to receive Knowledge. Through purification, the student works in conjunction with the teacher to align the mind with the wisdom of the heart and remove the negative qualities, habits, and attitudes unessential to the student’s nature, but which she has acquired from her experiences and decisions over her lifetime. Sufis often describe this as a process of “polishing the mirror of the heart” by clearing away the “dust” that hides a masterpiece underneath. The process of purification therefore coincides with the deepening of self-knowledge because as the Sufi clears away the unessential elements within herself, she finds her face illuminated by Divine qualities in the polished mirror of the heart.

From purification I will focus on the Sufi’s experience of attaining new levels of self-knowledge and eventually knowledge of her place within the whole of existence through the experiential understanding of the final revelation of Islam, *La ilaha ila allah*—“there is no reality but God.” Because of the personal nature of this phase of the journey, which takes the Sufi beyond surface level perceptions, any description of the reception of knowledge must rely heavily on symbols and metaphors but rests on the movement out of the narrow framework of the ego mind which understands itself in isolation into the freedom of the heart which recognizes its connection to all of existence. Through this process the *salek* shifts from a state of death-like unconsciousness to life. The individual present to life perceives it in its unified beauty within and without and can come to truly celebrate diversity by recognizing in multiplicity the sanctity of unity.

Finally, I will specifically address the roles Uwaiysi Sufis have individually and collectively played as progressive change makers in society as humans who have a
heightened capacity to perceive the Divine dignity that pervades creation and our connection to one another within the Unity of being. The Sufi, who becomes annihilated into knowledge in the sense that she dies to egoic self and awakens to her identity as an essential component within the Unity, becomes a servant to the Whole out of love. Her love forms the basis and the drive for servitude and paradoxically, frees her by taking away her choice. The humanitarian work of the Uwaiysis extends back to the inception of the order with the life of its founder, Uwaiys-i-Qarani and has continued through the current generation of Uwaiysi Sufi masters and students. Their contributions stretch into many realms of society, including international human rights advocacy, pro-active support for interfaith dialogue and community outreach aimed at dispelling the ignorance that leads to stereotyping and prejudice against world religions, and in particular, Islam, innovative approaches to therapy based upon Sufi principles, caring for the poor, the creation of beautiful art meant to draw people closer to the beauty within themselves, as well as the peaceful influence they have on society simply through their presence in the world and through their prayers. Rather than seclude themselves away from the world in hopes of accelerating their personal enlightenment, Uwaiysis have melded their personal practices with active human citizenry, by continuously pushing the bounds of social norms that delimit our obligation to one another and the Earth.

**Relevance to the Current State of the World**

I chose to write this piece because of the importance of the wisdom Uwaiysi Sufism has to offer the world today and to give credit to the teachers and students who act as healing force within their personal relationships as well as our local and global
communities. We live in an age of “mass distraction,” as Uwaiysi Glenn Pascall said during my interview with him, in which we may feel constantly bombarded by opportunities for consumption, heightened demands on our time and pressure to center our lives around work, and the need to fit ourselves into ever-shifting, and often unobtainable cultural standards for beauty and identity. Our emphasis on self-aggrandizement weakens the bonds of community in our personal relationships and families as well as our neighborhoods, workplaces, and public spaces. By fixating on material measures of success and largely defining our selves and our ability to succeed in opposition to and in competition with others we disconnect from a love of our fellow humans and begin to see only their surface appearances. We box ourselves into a protective isolation, represented by our societal attachment to the use of exclusionary electronic gadgets like “ipods” and “Blackberrys” in public venues like commuter transit and the centrality of television and video games within our daily routine. These activities inhibit communication with and awareness of our surrounding environment to the point where we lose sight of the wonder of its contents and the possibilities for experiences of love and connection therein.

Along with a loss of appreciation for the richness that fills our lives, humans can loose a stable sense of their own self and their self worth that derives simply from the fact of their existence. When we base our identity in comparisons with others, changing fads, or the goods we purchase, we paint ourselves as hollow beings reliant on external factors to make us worthy to enter society or even exist. With this mind-set, we can pass our lives absorbed in efforts to meet the socially constructed expectations of others or own perceived needs and nagging desires but never deeply question what it is that we want out
of life for ourselves and what we believe we have the ability to achieve. Life may become a routine or an exhausting climb up a never-ending ladder, in which our attention hovers around anxiety, judgment, labeling, and obligations whose roots in fear and apathy squelch the springs of love. As a result, we may wake up after years wondering where our time and energy has gone and what has been the purpose of all our efforts. We may question who we are among a collection of fading memories, material possessions, career titles, and superficial friendships to which we cling more for security than for the joy they bring to our hearts. We may yearn for something substantial to arise within ourselves that we can assuredly call our own.

The “culture of mass distraction”, and the deeply lodged greed that it spawns, also manifest in the upsurges of violence as well as the environmental degradation that occurs around the globe. By turning away from recognition of the value of life and our place within creation, we tune out to the voice of our heart that directs us to live in balance with the Earth and its inhabitants and lay the groundwork for lifestyles that trample unconcernedly on the rights inherent to Being. Dr. Angha once said, “Peace becomes necessary only when we value the wealth of being more than having.” This current, spreading culture, epitomized by American consumerism, does much degrade the foundations for peace in our neighborhood communities, our cities, our nations, and across the world that begins with attentive recognition of others and peaks where individuals learn to “fall in love” with the greatness of existence. Under the current direction of our culture, we destabilize our selves and also put the balance of our global system at risk by entering into unsustainable cycles of need.
Sufi practices and teachings, however, provide a strong counterweight to the pulls of our culture by enabling us to find an independent and fixed sense of identity within ourselves, which the changing tides of social opinion or the fleeting passage of time cannot alter. The practices help the student develop the self-awareness to consciously and thoughtfully decide what she wants from life based on a realistic understanding of her human potential. Quoting an ancient Sufi Master in his and Dr. Angha’s publication, Sufism: An Inquiry, Dr. Kianfar writes, “If you are searching for the gem in the mine, you are the mine. If you are searching for the eternal life, you are the life. I will uncover a truth for you. You are what you are looking for” (1988: 3). This poetic quote illustrates how the Sufi path, as with many other mystical paths, can enable the salek to cut straight to the source of richness within her self without getting lost in ultimately fruitless pursuits focused on the external or on limited self-conceptions. She can come to find balance in an environment that constantly pulls her between multiple competing interests, and in so doing not only conserve her strength but build upon it. In releasing herself from distractions, she can pinpoint her attention on the beauty beneath surface level phenomena and live in a state of appreciation for the blessing of life.

Further, by finding the precious value within her self the Sufi can recognize this value in others and can work to reverse the destructive trends set into motion by a culture centered on stimulating desire. Her ability to witness life’s Divine essence provides an anchor of hope despite human baseness that can, in the words of Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar, put them “below the level of animals” and despairing conditions among millions of the world’s people. Along with her ability to perceive the good, as the Sufi advances she gains the freedom to treat others with decency, because no one can stand between her
and "what she is looking for." Uwaiysi Sufism, therefore, offers critical insights for humans into the art of living in a modern context, as well as the tools for humans to pull out the roots of some of the most pressing local and global issues of our time. It possesses a relevant wisdom from which we can learn to take control of our lives and create something meaningful and beautiful within the circumstances given to us. The Uwaiysi Sufi path enables the human to overcome the sadly limiting measures of self-worth propagated by society and uncover the masterpiece of her being hidden in the depths of her heart.
Part II
Chapter 2
Sufism: Uncovering Meaning in the Heart of Islam

Sufism arose from the wellsprings of Islam and heart of its Prophet, Mohammed during the period of revelation by the Prophet that marked the inception of a new world religion in the seventh century (Schimmel 24; Newman 1). The story goes that during the Prophet’s lifetime, a small group of individuals gathered on the platform outside the Prophet’s mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia. For this they initially earned the title, “Ahle Suffe”, or “people of the platform,” although the group gave themselves no collective title (Angha 1998d: 37; Newman 3). The Sufis sought a knowledge of the Prophet’s revelations, as recorded in the Qur’an and taught by the Hadiths (the Prophet’s teachings through word or deed) on par with the understanding of the Prophet himself. The first Sufis therefore initiated the beginnings of the many mystical schools of Islam in that they strove to actually experience the meaning behind the words of revelation regarding God, existence, and reality. To discover this meaning the Sufis engaged in meditation, deep prayer, and discussion on message contained within the revelatory teachings of the Prophet. Uwaiysi Michael Newman writes that these pioneer Sufis based their practices off the principles of piety, virtue, purification, and asceticism, which the Prophet modeled through his actions and emphasized in his teachings. These individuals eschewed social activity and material luxury in order to maintain their consistent and focused practice and so laid the foundations for discipline within Sufism as a means of spiritual progress (Newman 2).

The “people of the platform” started out as a small group of followers of the Prophet and his revelations but eventually grew to a size of about 400 people by eighth
century A.D. At this point, the Sufis spread out from their center in Medina and many historians believe, came to establish three main centers of Sufism: Baghdad (present-day Iraq), Khurasan (currently Northern Iran), and Fars (now Southern Iran) (Newman 3). Schools and orders began to define themselves and increase in number from this time onwards and the influence of Sufism stretched far beyond the original platform in Medina to seep into the character of nations and their cultures. Dr. Nahid Angha classifies the two main divergent branches as “practical” and “philosophical” Sufism, where those who take the practical path continue the tradition begun by the first Sufis of “inner traveling” to receive knowledge. Those who take the philosophical route have established a language for describing the journey, principles, and stages of Sufism, yet most within this school have not practiced the principles or taken the journey themselves (Angha 1998d: 38). As a whole, Sufi teachings, disciplines, and arts such as calligraphy, poetry, dance, and music have added richness and depth to the lives of individuals across the world (Newman 3; Angha 1998d: 38).

The origins of the word “Sufism” remains unclear to this day, although among competing theories one has attained the most popularity—wool. *Suf* refers to coarse wool the likes of which first generation ascetic Sufis wore (Schimmel 14). Another possibility considered includes *Suffa*, referring to the platform on which the first Sufis sat. The Arabic grammar, however, does not match up between *Suffa* and Sufi to make *Suffa* a feasible derivation (Newman 5). Scholars have also considered for the derivation *Safa* meaning “purity” as the Sufi practices have always centered on purification, *Sufate*, the name for a thin plant that resembles fine hair, because of Sufi ascetic practices such as fasting which left Sufis with thin hair, *Soph*, a Greek word for knowledge or wisdom.
Whatever the true origin of the word Sufi, it does not show up in Arab scripts until those dated approximately two centuries after the “People of the Platform” first gathered.

Annemarie Schimmel, author of The Mystical Dimensions of Islam, calls *Tasawouf* the translation of Sufi and then moves forward to outline the explanations of the term Sufism’s derivations as described above. Michael Newman, student of Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar, however, finds meaning in *Tasawouf* as an acronym composed of the letters T, S, W, and F. Uwaiysi Sufis believe that each letter represents three principles of Sufism, and together they make up the complete system practiced within Sufism. T stands for *Tark*, *Tobe*, and *Taghva*, which respectively translate to Abandonment (of material attachments), Repentance (meaning to return to God or the Self within), and Piety. S stands for *Sabr* (patience), *Sedgh* (honesty in word and deed), and *Safa* (Purity). Next comes W, representing *Woud*, *Werd*, and *Wafa* or Love, Remembrance (of God), and Faith, which Newman translates as loyalty. Finally, F stands for *Fard*, *Faghr*, and *Fana* meaning Solitude, Poverty, and Annihilation. As we will see through our exploration of Uwaiysi Sufism, these principles remain very much alive in the current Uwaiysi practice and therefore, make the explanation for *Tasawouf* both interesting and compelling (Newman 7).

Despite this discussion of names, we must return to the revealing fact that the first Sufis gave themselves no name. The thirteenth century Sufi poet Rumi writes, “If you’re not completely naked, wrap your beautiful robe of words around you, and sleep” (18). Love underlies the mystical path that is Sufism and this love burns so deeply it does not leave room for words to clothe the heart of the lover. The lover seeks to awaken to knowledge of the Divine that exists in the realm beyond thought within the spiritual
essence of the "Self" (Angha 1998d: 5). This particular striving, based in Islamic principles and practices, that arises from the longing heart differentiates Sufism as the mystical branch of Islam whereby Sufis can come to experience the meaning of their teachings in their complete fullness (Newman 2). Uwaiysi Sufism in turn is one order of many orders within the umbrella of Sufism, and uses the Islamic understanding of the heart as the center of spiritual knowledge. The Uwaiysi too abandons the heavy cloak of dry words and exchanges it for the robe of knowledge encompassing within it the universe of meaning.
Chapter 3
Uwaiys-i-Qarani
and the Origins of the Path within the Heart

The story of Uwaiysi Sufism begins with a relationship of hearts, between Uwaiys-i-Qarani and the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed, which forms the basis for the distinction the order carries through to today. Uwaiys-i-Qarani never physically met the Prophet, yet he became one of the Prophet’s “best followers” according to many historical texts (Newman vi; Angha 1988: 34). He did so through his loyal dedication, impelled by the love in his heart, to the rules and laws established by Mohammed and thereby, came to receive Divine illumination from the heart of Mohammed. The resulting emphasis in the Mashrab-e-Uwaiys on inner connection between the hearts of the student and the teacher over and beyond any physical closeness speaks to the spirit of Uwaiysi Sufism that seeks to strip away superficial coverings that veil essential truth. In addition, Uwaiys seamlessly integrated into his practice service to his mother and to society into his life, demonstrating his sight through love in the heart that encompasses particular manifestations of Divine Unity and the Unity in itself. He therefore set a particular direction for the future of his order that has resulted in active service to and in the world by Uwaiysi Sufis. The Mashrab-e-Uwaiys as practiced today continues to reflect the example of Uwaiys’ life in the understanding of the student-teacher relationship as well as through commitment by its students to an actively ethical mode of life based in the heart.

Uwaiys, who would not leave his blind mother in order to visit the Prophet, made up for the physical absence of his teacher through devotion to the Islamic teachings,
practices, and laws that Mohammed brought to humanity with the inception of the new religion. Uwaiys’ very decision not to travel to the Prophet from Uwaiys’ home in Yemen stemmed from his respect for the Shariah, or Islamic law, which calls for filial care for one’s aging parents. Uwaiys’ piety extended beyond service to his mother into all reaches of his life. According to historical texts, Uwaiys “would spend his days fasting and break his fast with only a few dry dates” and “prayed day and night” (Angha 1998b: 37). He dressed in the simple attire of an old woolen robe that he knitted himself to keep himself warm, representing his concentration on inner wealth as opposed to the outward symbols of material success (Angha, M.T 39). His strict observance of the Prophet’s instructions put him among the eight most pious individuals, named the Zuhad Samanie, at the time of the birth of Islam, and Attar called Uwaiys “the best of [the Prophet’s] followers (Angha 1998b: 34).

Purification became a central tenant around which his practice revolved, for he looked to the “greatness of the Creator” who witnessed his actions and with whom he sought to unite. Uwaiys exemplified dually his understanding of the importance of purification to the human being and the commitment it takes to achieve it when he said, “Death is close; it is under your pillow when you sleep and in front of your eyes when you are awake; do not underestimate your sins no matter how small they look, since if you fall in them they will become the cause of your destruction” (Angha 1998b: 36). In sin the heart turns away from the Divine, the source of life, and so Uwaiys sought to “keep [his] heart pure and present only for Allah” and advised others to do the same (Angha 1998b: 37). Uwaiys has since become a “symbol of piety” in Sufism and great Persian Sufis from Bayazid Bastami (ninth century), Sheikh Najmeddin Kubra (twelfth
century), Sheikh Abul Hassan Kharaghani (eleventh century), to Hafiz of Shiraz (fourteenth century), Rumi (thirteenth century) and many others have given credit to Uwaiys for inner-guidance and his example of purification through dedication to the practices and the light he received through his teacher, Mohammed (Angha 1988b: 34, Angha 1988a, Angha, M.T 49). Uwaiys today strive to guard their hearts against corrosive influences by “praying night and day” like Uwaiys through remaining continuously “present” to the Divine in the space of their hearts.

While Uwaiys never saw his teacher with his physical eyes, Uwaiys’ loyal adherence to the Prophet’s teachings based in the spirit of love and concordant desire to purify his being allowed Uwaiys to form a relationship with Mohammed founded in an “awareness of heart” through which Uwaiys progressed to share in the Prophet’s Divine knowledge (Angha 1998b: 36). Mohammed clearly sensed the spiritual blossoming of his avid disciple, as Jallalleddin Rumi, 14th century Sufi poet, indicated in a famous love poem when he wrote:

\[
\text{The fragrance of Rachman is coming from Veyse}^3 \\
\text{As the fragrance of God is coming from Uwaiys} \\
\text{Divine perfume that the Prophet talked about} \\
\text{Was Divine fragrance from Uwaiys and Qarani}
\]

By careful attention to the Prophet’s teaching within his heart, Uwaiys purified his being such that he exuded the qualities of the Divine, which reached his teacher like a beautiful fragrance on the breeze. Likewise, twelfth century Sufi poet Farideddin Attar writes that on occasion the Prophet would remark, “I smell the essence of Rachman from Yemen”, Uwaiys’ hometown (Newman vi). Mohammed gave Uwaiys high praise in associating

---

3 Ramin and Veyse are the main characters of a love story, written by Nezami Ganjav, on which Rumi later based a poem in his Masnavi from which the above excerpt is taken.
him with Rahman, one of the 99 names of Allah meaning “most gracious” and an opening attribution to the Divine at the beginning of every Sura of the Qu’ran and every unit of prayer. According to Mah Talat Angha, the mother of Dr. Angha, Uwaiys’ spiritual progress under Mohammed reached the point where he fell into a “state of Divine ecstasy and rapture” that contributed to his decision not to travel to Mohammed and disrupt his practices (Angha, M.T. 41). Through Uwaiys’ connection to his teacher, who had traveled the path to the Divine before him, could Uwaiys come to receive knowledge as reflection from his teacher’s being and ultimately, directly from the Divine.

In a piece on Uwaiys’ life, Dr. Angha writes, “The sign of true devotion is the relationship of hearts and not the outer connection to a teacher” (Angha 1998b: 36). Uwaiys’ use the example of their order’s founder to show that physical proximity to a teacher may give an illusory impression of closeness while a bond between hearts remains strong despite any distance. The second caliph of Islam once asked Uwaiys why Uwaiys never went to see the Prophet if he really was a truthful follower. Uwaiys returned, “Did you see him? You saw but the cloth and not the reality of him” (Angha 1998b: 36). Uwaiys saw the Prophet with “the eyes of his heart” and so gained access to the reality of the teacher, which remains closed to those who only look with their eyes (Newman vii). According to Ein-al-Ghozzat, Uwaiys had no need to see the Prophet’s face “because the purpose of seeing a face is to know the meaning and reality of the face” which Uwaiys had already experienced (Angha, M.T 44).

Uwaiys, who knew the Prophet the best any friend could, put his solidarity with Mohammed into practice in the physical plain. He not only diligently followed the Prophet’s teachings, but when opponents of the Prophet broke the Prophet’s teeth with
rocks, Uwaiys inflicted the same pain on himself by removing his own teeth from his mouth. In this way he established and signaled a physical connection in addition to the spiritual connection to the teacher, implying a holistic unitive relationship that did not exclude any part of their reality. “Isn’t such agreement the basis of friendship?” Uwaiys said upon explaining this action. “I agreed with him in spirit without seeing his face; such agreement is from true religion” (Angha, M.T 44). These stories of Uwaiys and Mohammed reflect the loyalty, love, and respect that underlie the student-teacher relationship in the Uwaiysi Sufi order and how this relationship takes root in the connection between hearts. Further they provide a glimpse into the interplay that occurs between the physical and spiritual dimensions of the student teacher relationships as individuals firmly planted within the physical experience of life but traveling towards spiritual unity at life’s essence.

**Importance of the Inner-Connection to the Present Context**

This emphasis in Uwaiysi Sufism on the inner connection of the student to the teacher has particular relevance in our society, in which we so often relate to others based on their surface level qualities that may attract or repel us according to our personality as well as our perception of how they fit into the social hierarchy and how we understand their identity correspondingly. Fixation on the physical face, therefore, may even block the spiritual connection of many who make judgments and decisions based on its appearances.

On the opposite end, our susceptibility to influence by alluring rhetoric and compelling looks may cause us to follow the doctrines espoused by others without
carefully verifying the truth of those doctrines with our personal experience. These doctrines may come in subtle or explicit forms, and we may adopt them into our worldview knowingly or unknowingly. They come towards us from many directions, including the mass media, the sociocultural behavior that surrounds us, and the religious authorities of the “spiritual marketplace” as Dr. Kianfar has said. These sources may each help mold our understanding of the world and ourselves and determine the direction we take in our lives. We often fail, however, to examine these doctrines and sources that promote them beneath a cursory reading and follow their lead in a state of partial blindness, regardless of whether they serve us well or not. Uwaiysis seek to cut below all superficialities that bar our ability to see the truth of reality and push us about like “dry leaves in the wind” (Angha 2007). Particularly in their relationship with their teacher, Uwaiysi Sufis value a heart-based connection in order to discover the meaning beneath the coverings of words and appearances. The emphasis in Uwaiysi Sufism of teaching and receiving through the heart, as central to spiritual growth over physical nearness, has distinguished the Uwaiysi path among Sufi orders (Newman viii).

**Uwaiysi’s Example of Service**

Owaiysi also shaped the future of his order through the precedent he set for service to one’s family and society as an essential component of spiritual development. Instead of leaving his mother to visit his beloved teacher, he took the more disciplined approach of finding his teacher within his heart and obeying the ethical code of the *Shariah* in staying to care for his elderly and visually impaired mother (Newan viii). In addition, he divided his minimal income between himself, his retired mother, and those poorer than
he. As a disciple of the Prophet who made his way to knowledge of Unity, according to Uwaiysi Sufi understanding, Uwaiys must have become immersed within the love that characterizes Unity and "glues" it together. This love gives the individual the sight to see the dignity pervading all creation because of its unique character as particular manifestations of the One source of the Divine. Thus Uwaiys could care for his mother and care for the poor while strengthening his connection to the Prophet whom he saw only by the eyes of his heart.

Mah Talat Angha writes that Uwaiys, who earned his living as a shepherd and by selling dates, "ate very little, and would eat only to break his fast and gave the remaining to the needy" (39). His concern for the welfare of humanity manifested in his unrelenting pleas for the forgiveness of the Prophet's followers, on behalf of the Prophet's request, only cut short before all had been forgiven due to the interruption of impatient outsiders (Angha, M.T. 43). His martyrdom in the "Saffein" in 658 A.D (37 L.H) in battle for the fourth caliph of Islam Amir Al Moumenin Ali, who called humans as "great as the entire universe", represented the ultimate gift Uwaiys could give to preserve the path towards knowledge discovered by Mohammed for the benefit of humanity (Angha, M.T 46; Angha 1998b: 37). Uwaiys' piety that came before all else echoed in his words when he said, "no prayer was worthier than following Ali", the "King of the Believers", even if it meant following Ali to his physical death. Ali, like Uwaiys, had followed the teachings of the Prophet in perfect step such that he broke free of a consciousness limited to his "small body" and witnessed the greater world within and for this reason, Uwaiys laid

4 Please note that I make this statement as an explanation for Uwaiys' martyrdom and do not seek to call into question the legitimacy of alternative viewpoints surrounding the Saffein.
down his life to protect him. The examples above reflect how Uwaiys has served as a role model for his spiritual descendants in his order by melding service to the Whole with service to individuals as perfect reflections of that Whole. He followed his persona practice diligently through love while identifying his welfare with the advancement of human civilization as he understood it.

“The Gift of the Robe” and the Beginning of the Uwaiysi Order

Uwaiys’ dedication to his spiritual path under the teachings of the Prophet led to the birth of the Uwaiysi Sufi order with the Prophet’s gift of his robe to Uwaiys. Having smelled “the fragrance of Rachman” on the breeze, coming from Uwaiys, the Prophet instructed his disciples to bring Uwaiys the Prophet’s robe upon the Prophet’s death. This gesture takes on a special significance that reaffirms the style of teaching within the Owaiysi Mashrab, as the Prophet’s robe covered his chest and his heart therein, which contained the whole of the Prophet’s teaching and their basis in his knowledge of existence. One day, according to a Hadith of the Prophet, the Prophet took all the members of his immediate family under his robe and said, “Under my robe is my family, from whom, and only from whom can you receive by your hearts the light of my teaching”6. By passing the robe down to Uwaiys, therefore, Uwaiys and all who have followed in his footsteps became part of the spiritual family of Mohammed not only figuratively, but also literally. Through this act the Prophet signified his “approval and blessing” of Uwaiys’ practice and bestowed upon Uwaiys his understanding of existence.

6 The family members he took under his robe include Hazrat Fatima and her husband Hazrat Amir al-Moumenin Ali, their children, Imam Hussein and Imam Hassan (Newman vii).
Thus began the Uwaiysi Tarighat, or order, by which Uwaiys' distinctive practice became a path practiced by people across the world over fourteen centuries to today (Newman vii).

Uwaiysi Sufi Masters across the generations have guarded the knowledge encompassed by the Prophet's robe within their hearts, passing it down to qualified students around the world and successoral teachers (Newman vii). According to Farideeddin Attar, the Prophet foresaw the reach Uwaiys' work would attain, having said that Uwaiys would intercede for as many people as there were hairs on all of the sheep owned by the two tribes of his region with the most sheep (Angha, M.T 41). Uwaiys has had a hand in the ultimate outcome of countless lives through the establishment of the Uwaiysi Tarighat, which for students like me opens them up to a new mode of existence where they can use each moment to strengthen their connection to their heart and the Divine knowledge within.

Since the Prophet made his prediction, the Uwaiysi Tarighat has spread across the world, with students practicing in countries around the Middle East, such as Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as in areas of Central Asia, China, Southern Russia, and the United States of America. Many different teachers guide these students, though as Uwaiys they all trace their roots back to Uwaiys-i-Qarani as the spiritual father of the order. Uwaiysi students may also take their guidance straight from Uwaiys or the spirit of the Prophet himself, without a physically present teacher, just as Uwaiys "received his share [of the inner journey and spiritual wisdom] through the heart of the Prophet, swa\textsuperscript{7}, without seeing him physically" (Angha, M.T. 48). These Sufis have been numerous over
\textsuperscript{7} swa is an abbreviation for subh\textit{a}na \textit{wa} Ta'\textit{a}la and roughly translates to "may he be glorified and exalted."
time and include such renowned figures such as the poet Hafiz of Shiraz. Since Uwaiysis recognize that everyone has an individual path, they have avoided the creation of religious hierarchy, which could interfere with the personal progress of students. The focus on the inner-journey, therefore, has meant that the various Uwaiysi groups and solo-practicing individuals around the world have among the least organizational structure to bind them together in relation to one another of all the Sufi orders. The lack of organizational structure however cannot in itself guarantee the freedom of the order from corruption. As human organizations, even and especially individualistic Sufi groups must remain aware of the extent to which their ways are aligned with the aims at the heart of the order.

Despite the lack of structure Dr. Angha has said, "[the groups] are very much in communication with one another" since they all "approve and agree" on the style of teaching based on heart-to-heart connection. Accordingly, their focus on the inward journey has resulted in a similar outward simplicity among their dress and practice. Students and teachers alike eschew elaborate costumes and typically where white as a representation and reminder of their inner purification. In addition, memorization and ceremony have little place in the Uwaiysi Path, aside from where they can serve the purpose of drawing the student closer to her heart (Angha 05/2008). These outward consistencies among the international Uwaiysi groups represent the groups' inner connection through their common acceptance of the Uwaiysi principles and path directed towards a reception of the knowledge of existence discovered by Mohammed and passed on to Uwaiys-i-Qarani.
The Uwaiysi-i-Shah Maghsoudi School

My teachers, Seyedah Dr. Angha and Shah Nazar Dr. Ali Kianfar, direct a particular school of Uwaiysi Sufism that has a rich history rooted in Persia, modern day Iran, and unfolding in more recent years in the United States. The order obtains its name, the Uwaiysi-i-Shah Maghsoudi School, from Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar’s teacher, Moulana Shah Magshoud, who devoted his energy and his resources towards building the school and preserving its practices and history. The school, however, traces its origins back over 40 generations of Sufi Masters and throughout its history it has contributed notably to society through its emphasis on the attainment of knowledge, both physical and spiritual, the production by its members of useful literary works and beautiful poetry, and their active citizenry to address the inequity and injustice the inhibits humanity from living up to its potential (Angha, M.T. 142).

The Sufi Masters of the Uwaiysi-i-Shah Maghsoudi School have taken seriously the Prophet’s teaching when he said to “seek knowledge”, the “duty of all Muslims” (Angha 1995: 2, Angha, M.T. 144). They have not only protected the meaning of the teachings of Islam within their hearts and worked steadfastly to help their students open to this knowledge but also eagerly pursued, and encouraged their students to pursue, higher education at universities at home and abroad. Hazrat Jalaleddin Angha, grandfather to Moulana Shah Maghsoud and born in 1847, took upper level courses in philosophy, theology, Islamic law, and mathematics. He went on to teach in both academic and spiritual disciplines and publish books on topics pertaining to Islam and the nature of reality and existence (Angha, M.T 142). Jalaleddin’s son, Mir Ghtobeddin Mohammed Angha continued in his father’s footsteps and worked to bring together the
polarized fields of science and metaphysics, because he perceived that they strove
towards a common goal. In his society, he saw the burgeoning superficiality of
materialism, which turned people and science's attention away from the "fundamental
questions of life itself (Angha, M.T 156). He hoped that by "[bridging] the world of the
mystic and the scientist", and learning to "explain the essence of spirituality in the
language of science," humans could experience "true joy" derived from full appreciation
for "the nature of this life in which we live" (Angha, M.T 155). Ghotbeddin Angha's
aspirations closely mirror those of his son, Moulana Shah Maghsoud, and their role in
spurring progress towards a spiritually and materially unified understanding of existence
represent a fundamental contribution of the Uwaiysi-i-Maghsoudi order to humankind.

Moulana Shah Maghsoud, from whom this Uwaiysi order takes its name, has had
particular influence over the school's continued emphasis on higher education and
acknowledging the necessary agreement between spiritual and scientific knowledge.
Maghsoud, as a student, so ardently pursued philosophical understanding that he trained
himself to reduce the hours he needed for sleep in order to fully use the time he had and
"learned and completed reading every available book on philosophy." "There was
nothing left in philosophy that I did not know," he remarked in his autobiography
(Maghsoud xiv). Outside of philosophy, he took advanced courses in physics and
obtained a law degree in the interest of public service at the University of Tehran. He
used his diverse body of knowledge in material and spiritual matters to author many
books, some which took the form of poetic verse (Maghsoud xiii). In his book *Hamaseh
Hayat*, Moulana Shah Maghsoud expresses his hope and belief that scientific discovery
would one day prove the mystical understanding of unity, that the "whole is one, and one
is the whole” (Newman 73). With his sense of the importance of increasing humanity’s understanding of reality and the role spirituality has to play in that, Maghsoud urged many of his students to obtain degrees abroad in order to learn and take part in the cutting-edge discoveries in modern science (Angha, M.T 179). Mah Talat Angha, the great Sufi master’s mother, writes that the “pursuit of knowledge was the essence of the teaching of Shah Maghsoud” (178).

Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha have upheld the Uwaiysi-i-Maghsoudi tradition of fostering the advancement of spiritual and material knowledge among their students and within society as large. At the end of 1979, Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar moved with their spiritual master, Moulana Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha, from their home in Tehran, Iran to bring the Uwaiysi Tarighat to the United States of America. They sought to introduce receptive individuals searching for a path to themselves and to higher knowledge with the principles and practices of Uwaiysi Sufism that could help these individuals move forward on their quest. Both Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar, as the respective daughter and spiritual son of Shah Maghsoud, and who joined in marriage as husband and wife, had received a blessing from Moulana Shah Maghsoud to teach upon attaining the state of spiritual knowledge called Erphan, or inner witnessing of God, while still in Iran. Through her father’s blessing, Dr. Angha became the first woman Sufi Master of the Uwaiysi-i-Maghsoudi school, thus reflecting high value placed on women within the tradition such that it often pushes the limits of surrounding cultural norms in society’s that do not recognize rights in the same way. Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar, as appointed Masters, began teaching along with Moulana Shah Maghsoud soon upon their arrival in Northern California (Newman 1; Bassiri ii).
Since that time, the pair have promoted their own students' education in all its forms and have consistently been involved in efforts to further societal understanding on a range of subjects as diverse as those dealt with by their spiritual forebears, but also with an approach to these topics as united in intention as those who came before them. The primary vehicle for their work has been the International Association of Sufism (IAS), which they founded together in 1983 as a center to “introduce Sufism in all its varied forms to the public, to make known the interrelation between Sufi principles and scientific principles, to provide a forum for dialogue between the different schools of Sufism, and to preserve and advance the study and goals of Sufism” (IAS Mission Statement). This organization has blossomed under their leadership to support a continuously growing school of Sufi students, who through their work and creative initiative provide the organization with a backbone of support.

Many of the students, like those of Moulana Shah Maghsoud, have gone back to school under the guidance of Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha to earn higher degrees in fields such as psychology and law. Amineh Amelia Pryor, a long-time student of Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha whom I interviewed, returned to school to get her Ph.D. in East-West Psychology even though her family had always expressed distain for formal education when she was growing up. Amineh remarked, “You might think, ‘...that doesn’t sound like spiritual guidance...but the result is that I found a way to do it and I got it done and I’m a different person...I’m more confident not only because of the education, but because my teachers saw that potential in me and brought it out” (04/2008). Aside from the benefits that returning to school has brought Amineh, she is now able to give to society with her work by bridging useful aspects of Western and Eastern psychology that
contribute to new understanding of the potential of the discipline to help humans heal. Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha have intervened similarly with many other Sufi students to help them uncover and recognize their abilities and bring them to full fruition in service of human development.

Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar’s contributions to the advancement of human knowledge, as well as those of their students, takes many other forms beyond encouraging the obtainment of higher education by their students. As professors--most recently at Dominican University in San Rafael, California, Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar, have made information available about the principles of Islam and Sufism, Sufi poetry, and ancient and modern Middle Eastern history. Likewise, their many publications including the quarterly journal, Sufism: An Inquiry, provides insight into Sufism and incites productive dialogue between different Sufi orders on existential issues regarding the nature of human being and life as well as the application of Sufi principles to the creation of peace within the world (IAS). On top of this, the teachers and students at IAS are responsible for organizing events such as the first-ever annual International Sufi Symposiaums, beginning in 1994, which bring Sufis from all “orders, schools, and walks of life” together from around the world to discuss “self-discovery and empowerment and [celebrate] with music, poetry, dance, and Sufi practices” (Bassiri ii). Further, their numerous community outreach and social justice projects serve as a natural corollary to these discussions by taking action to promote awareness of human rights from the perspective of mystical Islam.

The Uwaiysi-i-Maghsoudi Tarighat displays a concern for clear public understanding of the nature of religious traditions and the beneficial insights they can
offer humans well beyond the boundaries of Sufism. They have actively supported interfaith dialogue, with an emphasis on creating a global culture of peace, through their participation and leadership of national and international conferences. In conjunction with these efforts, members of IAS have sought to address the assumptions and misconceptions that people may bring to their view of religions that lay outside of their experience. Through their event series, “Building Bridges of Understanding”, for example, IAS has focused on unveiling particular faiths, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam and their multi-faceted nature, by sponsoring representative panelists and group workshops. Representing the spirit behind involvement at IAS in interfaith initiatives, Dr. Angha says in a 2008 newspaper article, “We call God by many names, and if we are only paying attention to those names, we get into problems. But if we experience the essence of being itself, then we know that everybody else is as worthy to receive life as we are” (Burklo). This quote illustrates the recognition among Uwaiysis that many different paths exist that lead to a universal knowledge and that truly following the Prophet’s teaching to “seek knowledge” and help others do the same means to work for the adequate representation of faiths that call God by different names and for respect for the wisdom they each have to offer humanity.

Dr. Kianfar has said, “The potential of the heart is the potential of the seed that creates the whole tree” (2006: 19). This overview of the Uwaiysi-i-Maghsoudi school, as a distinct group within the Uwaiysi Tarighat, provides only a glimpse of the lush tree that has grown out of the seed planted and nourished within the heart of Uwaiys-i-Qarani. From Uwaiys’ journey from limitation to understanding has sprung Uwaiysi schools across the world whose members engage individually in their own path towards self-
understanding and collectively, in cultivating the cooperation and harmony necessary to engender peace and develop lasting solutions to global problems. As Uwaiys found his pathway in the heart, so too does each student within his order who adds to the flourishing life of the Uwaiysi Tarighat today.
Chapter 4
The Physical and Spiritual Reality of the Heart

The beauty you craved in things
Was always my face seen through a veil.
Turn Around.
See now where beauty comes from.
– Jalaluddin Rumi, 13th century

“Turn around,” Rumi says. To the ears of the Sufi, Rumi beckons his audience to shift their focus from external appearances to the source of beauty found in their hearts within. Sufis understand the heart as the source of life and the seat of the Divine within the human, wherein the student or salek who seeks spiritual knowledge must journey in order to awaken her connection to the heart of her teacher and to eventually, see her own face. The heart contains multiple levels, beginning with that of the physical organ and drawing deeper to its spiritual center where inner witnessing takes place and Divine love resides. The salek’s passage through each subsequent level marks a different stage in her journey by which she can gain a true understanding of the meaning behind her teachers’ words. The Sufi’s experiences within the heart have served as the inspiration for the ecstatic love poetry that has flowed from the tradition all the way back to Mohammed’s recitation of the verses of the Qur’an. Even for those without the intention of the salek who strives for knowledge of a unified existence, Tawhid, however, the influential role the heart plays in our lives makes the cultivation of a basic awareness of the working of the heart by individuals beneficial to themselves and broader society in diverse ways.

Within the Uwaiysi School, students and teachers have sought to draw attention to the centrality of the heart to human existence by pointing out our tendency to reference the heart in association with a vast number of experiences across languages, cultures, and time. Uwaiysi Arife Ellen Hammerle, whom I interviewed for this project, writes in one of her books, “Generally speaking, any deep feeling and expression in our system relates to the heart” (34). In observing human behavior, we may soon notice the recurrence of the heart in our gestures and in our descriptions of our emotional state and in our feelings for and descriptions of others. Those who display kindness, generosity, and acceptance of others we call “openhearted”, whereas those who lack sympathy or compassion we often refer to as “cold-hearted.” When we undergo deep disappointment or suffer rejection, we may say we are “broken-hearted”, while conversely we may “loose” our heart when we fall in love. Exquisite beauty in any of its forms, such as the delicacy of a sunset, the perfection of harmonious music⁹, and uncalled for magnanimity, may “touch” our hearts. We use these expressions in our daily life and come across them consistently in film, advertising, and popular and classical literature.

If we look closely into ourselves, we may become aware of the actual experiences within our hearts that we may match with our uses of the term. Consciously recognizing the versatile ways our heart can impact our state of being has led many people, with the Sufis as a prominent example, to inquire more deeply into the heart’s nature. Dr. Angha writes, “this heart that lovers feel when in love, that the despairing know in their pain, that inspires artists while creating and that Sufis refer to when they seek enlightenment

⁹In her article “Music and the Ear of the Beholder” in Sufism: An Inquiry, Vol. III, No. 2, p.28-34, Judith A. Hill provides a fascinating look into the qualities of beautiful music from the perspective of spirituality, in which she writes on “harmony” as a key component of beauty in music.
and illumination, is it just the simple organ of the body, or does it hold within itself the secrets of the heavens and the earth?” (Angha 1991: xxxiii). Uwaiysi Sufis, in particular, have used the “laboratory of the self” to answer this question, in conjunction with guidance from their teachers extending back to Uwaiys-i-Qarani and Mohammed along with the direction provided by the Qur’an which references the heart in 113 verses (Pryor; Hammerle 33). The inquiries of Uwaiysis over the ages have resulted in the fundamental agreement within the order that the heart exists not only as a vital physical organ but also as the spiritual vessel into which the Divine breathes life into clay.

As an organ, the heart performs functions essential to our health and survival, which mirror the role of the heart as a spiritual center. Dr. Kianfar often points out that the heart is the first organ to develop within the human being just as the cessation of the heartbeat signals physical death. The heart also plays the critical role of purifying our blood and returning it to our system for the nourishment of our cells with each heartbeat (Pryor 2000: 59). Only with a physical heart can the human experience and continue physical life, replete with the beauty of its colors, sights, sounds, and tastes.

Yet to the Sufi, the surface phenomena of life acts like a veil that only gives a glimpse into the greater majesty beneath. By traveling through the successive stages of the heart, the Sufi can move towards a clear-sighted vision of the reality that brings these phenomena into existence. Many different schematas exist, even just within the Uwaiysi-i-Maghsoudi Tarighat, to explain the layers of the heart due to the impossibility of adequately describing such concepts in words. The simplest of these describes the heart as composed of four levels—that of the chest, called sadr, the physical heart or ghalb, the

---

10 As a corollary fact, the Bible mentions the heart in 650 places (Hamerlee 33).
inner heart, foad'ad, and the final level of the spirit of love, shagha'af, though some believe shagha'af to proceed foad'ad. Each level corresponds to a respective stage of experience, namely “inspiration” which serves as the impetus for the individual to begin the journey, the “light of belief” which solidifies the foundations for the salek’s further progress, “Divine witnessing” through which one receives knowledge of reality, and finally “Divine love” which annihilates the seeker in union with the wholeness of reality where she “sees and hears none but God” (Angha 1991: xxxix; Hammerle 35). As the seeker draws closer to the innermost center of the heart, she washes away the dust hiding her true identity through a process of purification and comes to see through the light of her heart her true face at the source of the “I” of consciousness. From this face radiates the 99 names of God to which Muslim’s refer, which make manifest all of the beauty the salek sees in the material world (Angha 1991: xxxv).

Uwaiysis leave no doubt as to essential importance of moving beyond the physical layers of the heart to the spiritual center within for any individual concerned with understanding the teachings of Sufism. Moulana Shah Maghsoud makes clear two problems surrounding verbal communication that one can see leads to special difficulties in the interpretation of religious doctrine. First, he says,” everyone realizes that even the most logical and reasonable word cannot define the feeling and the quantity of meaning. It will not transfer the meaning to the mind.” To illustrate he uses the example of thirst, in which he writes that one listening to a person complain of thirst processes a word but does not experience the sensation of himself unless actually in the state of thirst. Second, he writes, “words have no similarity to their defined meaning” because those who hear a

\(^{11}\) The concept of annihilation demands further discussion not fitting to this section, and so I return to it in section on the attainment of knowledge.
word spoken by another understand the word according to their own experiences and associations surrounding the word which may differ from the one speaking the word (Angha, M.S 1980: vii). As a result, even though we may sit at the feet of a learned Sufi Masters who have experienced the meaning of the words they use to describe the Self and reality, we may receive only a minimal and warped version of what they intend to express. By listening to a lecture on “Unity”, for example, or reading Rumi’s poetry in which the “cup” that holds the wine bearer’s wine shatters and all three merge into one, one does not experience the complete meaning of unity unless in that state herself. Some words, like “God” and “love” bring with them so much historical baggage and cultural connotations that Dr. Kianfar uses them only cautiously, when he uses them at all. Referring to our attachment to our ideas of such words, Dr. Kianfar has said, “Not only are they not God, they prevent you from understanding God.” If we use these words at all, he says, we should do so with the intent of getting to their meaning beneath and ultimately discarding our personal need for the word (1/2007). Sufis like Amineh Pryor therefore suggest to, “Do your own research”, which begins with an awareness of the heart wherein meaning is contained.

The Sufi who seeks to shift the lens through which she sees the world to that of the spiritual heart embarks on a quest with a destination that stands beyond what most people would ever assume possible for the human. Fortunately, however, the nature of the heart facilitates this quest by pulling the seeker towards self-recognition just as she reaches out for it herself. Those who have traveled the path describe a connection that reverberates in every heartbeat between the individual and the whole, which the salek can follow through careful attention to the source of her being. Uwaiysi Arife Hammerle
commented during my interview with her, “When we can actually sit in silence and connect with the rhythm of the heartbeat, it’s such an incredible connection that then can lead us to the Divine.” Moulana Shah Maghsoud, with his joint background in physics and mysticism, and the Uwaiysi students that came after him often describe this connection in the language of science. They explain the heart as the most powerful of 13 electro-magnetic centers of the body, which acts as a “magnet” for the student who focuses her energy to receive spiritual knowledge (Angha 1998d: 30). Alternatively, Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Kianfar have at times put the concept into words more familiar for some in their teaching that, “When you take one step towards God, God takes ten steps towards you.” Many call this attraction between the individual and the universal, which the human experiences within her heart, love and the force of its presence in seekers’ lives has representation in the reams of Sufi poetry through which love runs thematically (Hammerle 35). Love also gives the salek the focus to remain consistent and loyal on the path, traits necessary to progress and ultimately, attainment of the goal (Clow). Those who follow Rumi’s advice, therefore, and “turn” their gaze from upper levels of surface phenomena to the layers beneath through concentration on their heart do not undertake this task alone. They choose the “journey of the lovers” in which the lover and the beloved do not meander or walk but run towards one another. While many may step onto the path, few in fact follow the journey to the ultimate destination of knowledge because of the challenges inherent to fully stepping into and remaining in the heart where love’s attractive force resides. The individual whose heart genuinely longs with pure and steady intention for understanding can find within the spiritual heart that beats the support of the
entire universe that draws her beyond the “small body” and into understanding of the source of unity.

Transformative Potential of Awareness of Heart in Every Day Life

Leading a meditation circle at the International Association of Sufism’s Khanegah, Dr. Angha said, “Close your eyes. Aim your attention to a point of presence and focus on your heartbeat. If you lose your attention to your heartbeat, your mind is too busy, as it usually is. But if you can listen to your heart, you’ll remember, ‘I am alive,’ and you’ll begin to appreciate your life” (Burklo). At this gathering, Dr. Angha teaches a practice of awareness not restricted to diligent Sufi students seated on their meditation cushions, but open to all people in all moments of their day. Even for individuals who do not desire to attain to a complete knowledge of the physical and spiritual levels of the heart, the cultivation of a basic understanding of its workings and the ability to station our selves within its presence can positively transform our experience of life. Such awareness can return us from the numbness of routine and constant mental chatter to a conscious appreciation rooted in our connection to the source of life. The benefits of stationing ourselves in our heart, which gives us perspective on the Unity and Divinity of creation, flow into all areas of our lives and serves as a healing force to others in our community and our world.

The Sight of the Heart in Unity

Among the Sufis whom I interviewed, all expressed an improvement in their relationships with friends, family, co-workers, and strangers that corresponded to their
shift to presence within their hearts. Arife, as a psychotherapist who integrates Eastern and Western methodologies in her practice, uses the term “heartfullness” to describe the connection established through focusing on the heartbeat. Practicing a state of heartfullness, she says, will “open our eyes in a new way, our ears in a new way, and you actually see the world differently” (3/2008). As the seat of the Divine, our heart contains the knowledge of our spiritual unity with all creation and serves as the sight love that binds the universe together. From our heart arise the mercy, compassion, blessing, care, and service which mold us in the “image of God.” By paying attention to our heart, we awaken these qualities within ourselves and reform our whole vision of the world around us. We operate less as isolated and individual bodies and more as shareholders of one reality. Promotion of our own opinions and ideas in favor of our personal wants and needs takes a backseat to consideration for the wellbeing of the community and respect for the validity of alternate viewpoints (Pryor 4/2008). This change occurs gradually within individuals as the cumulative effect of repeated and intentional return to the heart.

During my interview with her, Amineh Pryor described how her practice of heartfullness has heightened her ability to manage conflict situations at work and the positive spillover effects this has had on her relationship with her family. Amineh experiences a sense of increased stability in her heart through which she has grown out of past patterns of impulsive reactions to disagreement made from a defensive standpoint. Now, she reports having an increased desire to inquire more deeply into the situation to “find out what’s going on and hear what other people have to say.” She acknowledges that “mine is just mine” and everyone else in the room may feel just as strongly about their personal opinions. While this does not mean that Amineh fails to uphold or present
her opinion to a group, it has given her the flexibility to seek out the best solution to a problem without clinging to an incomplete idea for the sake of her ego. She has also found herself able to “explain [her] position in a much calmer way and be heard in a different way.” This not only helps Amineh preserve her energy and enjoy the time she spends at work more, but influences the way her co-workers handle tension as well. “It’s a bit of a chain reaction,” she comments. In addition, Amineh now has more left in her to give to her family when she returns from work at the end of the day. Amineh’s makes clear in her narrative that her practice fuses into her everyday life and enriches its outcome in all its facets.

The transformation experienced by Amineh in her approach to relationships closely mirrors that felt by the other Uwaiysis whom I interviewed and has incredibly hopefully implications for the healing effect an increased understanding and awareness of heart among humans could have on the fabric of society. Through their continual practice, the students moved away from narrow-minded and self-absorbed perspectives towards an expanded care for the needs of others and the realization that their wellbeing hangs contingently upon their ability to relate positively and openly to their environment. Most of the students, including Soraya, Amineh, Glen, and Arife, further contrasted the common and divisive habit of continuously judging others as good or bad versus perceiving their actions in the frame of balance or imbalance and consciousness and unconsciousness. The students have come to interpret the harmful thoughts, speech, and actions of others as indication of inner disconnect within the individuals from the wisdom of their heart which prevents them from living in a state of harmony with their Being. Thus, the heart that sees humanity as connected by its underlying Divinity does not seek
to isolate individuals with the stamp of black and white categorizations but rather aims to bring those individuals together in their apparent diversity through the spirit of love.

Through its impact on relationships, the practice of heartfullness brings an inextinguishable ray of hope to our current global situation. In her book, *The Sacred Journey*, Arife discusses the "accelerating destruction of the earth and the debasement of human life" as the consequence of a rampant materialist cosmology, which introduces the self as a hollow consumer requiring endless sensory inputs for its moment-to-moment gratification. This conceptualization of the human stands in opposition to any idea of the intrinsic spiritual worth of the individual and instead, bases our value off of the exterior commodities with which we surround ourselves (Hammerlee xii). Such a composition imagines a soulless society that can carry in it no possibility of a fundamental bond tying us together. Our cultural absorption in the consumer lifestyle therefore draws us further away from the space in hearts that recognizes the unity of life and our responsibility to one another therein. In response, we back ourselves more and more into defensive isolation against everything we perceive as "outside" and that could potentially threaten our ability to fulfill our purpose as the consumer. The social structures we create possess thick boundaries that delimit the extent to which we can reach out to each other without becoming an uncomfortable anomaly. These structures further block our vision of the destructive consequences of our lifestyles and promote the spiraling escalation of the "destruction of the earth and the debasement of human life" which Arife speaks of from the local to the global levels.

Heartfullness, however, provides the perfect gateway for the reversal of these trends by redirecting us to our hearts where the "source of beauty" resides. If we
concentrate ourselves in our hearts, we gain a sense of the fullness of our being without any need for external additives and can free ourselves from the insatiable drive to consume that harms humanity and undermines the Earth’s life support systems that we rely on for survival. In this way, we can begin to overcome the anomie and social alienation that creates the illusion of separation and to lay the seeds for communication grounded in a culture of respect for ourselves and for one another. We can learn to work with and for each other, instead of in opposition to one another, by fostering the unitive vision of the heart and so nurture the development of genuine community. Amineh’s story shows that even one individual can have a noticeable peaceful influence on her whole environment, which produces ripple effects through the individuals who bring their altered attitude to their interactions throughout their day.

Uwaiysis repeatedly reiterate that everyone has the ability to develop their consciousness of their heart, without exception for race, age, circumstance, or religious affiliation or creed. Jamal Granick, a member of the Uwaiysi-i-Maghsoudi Tarighat whom I interviewed, impressed upon me during our conversation that heartfullness is “by definition practical”, because “you can practice shifting” to the heart throughout the day for directly observable results. Throughout their teachings, Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha stress that humans should have this knowledge, so they can understand themselves and make informed decisions about how best to live their lives. If we truly are spiritually vapid creatures at our core and have no fundamental connection to others, then why worry about the world’s vast inequities or the damage we cause to the environment if we can keep our own boat afloat? If our lives have no existential meaning in themselves, then why not make our purpose the attainment of material goods? If we listen carefully
to the beating of our heart however, as Dr. Angha suggests to her meditation groups, we might find the source of life pulsing within that calls us to witness a greater reality open and waiting for each one of us.

The Heart as the Source of Life

In addition to profound changes in their approach to relationships, the Uwaiysi students whom I interviewed experienced an increased abundance in energy and a more refined ability to direct it favorably proportionate to the extent that they “abide in an awareness of the heart” (Jamal). According to Sufi wisdom, the spiritual heart contains the point of entry to our Divine origin, from which all energy derives (Kianfar 8/2007). By concentrating on our heart, therefore, we help clear the channel through which energy can flow and increase the stores available for use in our everyday lives (Kianfar 2004). Likewise wisdom, the quality by which we assess our actions within their full context before taking them, exists within the spiritual dimensions of the heart. Wisdom allows us to, in the words of Dr. Kianfar, “[take] the best of every moment of life” by choosing the best option with expanded foresight into the consequences of that action “down to the end of the line” (Kianfar 1/2007). Further, our use of wisdom corresponds with the concentration of energy out of a scattered state, such that for what action we do decide to take, we can accomplish with a more “laser-like” efficiency (Jamal). Heartfullness therefore serves as a strong tool to help the individual manage the ever-mounting demands of modern life and selectively determine what to engage in while surrounded by a “culture of mass distraction.”
Amineh connects her expanded energy reserves to the change in her relationship to her work, and the spillovers this change has on her life at home. The capacity she has developed to defuse conflict and disagreement by transcending judgmental and defensive habits has been supplemented by her simultaneous familiarization with her inner wisdom. “The more that we see that there is a balance and a wisdom available, and that we are part of it and that we have access to it,” she said, “the more that I find the smoother life goes” and “the better my experience of life is.” By remaining in the stable wisdom of her heart, rather than engaging in workplace tension or hostility and having to deal with “all the cleaning up” that comes with such behavior, Amineh leaves herself with excess energy to spare when she returns home to her husband and child. She explains, “Before it used to be a challenge just to have a job or just to be home with my kids, let alone [have] any other hobbies or interests...Now it fits a lot easier.”

Amineh does in fact incorporate more activities into her schedule than she did before she began her spiritual practice and does so with a greater sense of overall ease. As mentioned earlier, Amineh took on and completed the task of writing her first book, Psychology in Sufism, a feat she had not considered possible for her in the past. She returned to school to obtain her Ph.D. in East-West Psychology, while balancing her commitments to her family. Now, she works as a psychotherapist at the Community Healing Centers—a department of IAS that links Sufi wisdom with Western psychology to help a broad spectrum of people, in addition to her side-job in bookkeeping and her position as a clinical coordinator and supervisor for case managers at another psychiatric organization in San Francisco, California (Amineh; “IAS Departments”). On top of this, Amineh helps design, organize, advertise, and lead many of the retreats and fundraising
efforts held by the International Association of Sufism. She frequently prepares talks on Sufi psychology and the brotherhood between scientific and mystical discoveries as part of her leadership role in the Sufism and Psychology Forum (SPF), a department of IAS that seeks to unite Sufi principles and practices with western psychology. She also occasionally writes on these topics for Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha’s publication, *Sufism: An Inquiry*. Regarding all of these activities she remarks, “I’m just so much more productive and there’s so much less ego involved. It takes a lot less energy to do the things I do.”

Jamal echoed this sentiment in my conversation with him with commenting that he now does a lot more than he has “ever done before” and is “constantly raising the bar for what [he] can accomplish.” Jamal finds that while achievement has been his weak point throughout his life, he can now better conserve his energy and “with an awareness of heart, [has] more ability to direct it.” Like Amineh, Jamal returned to school to obtain his Ph.D. after becoming a Sufi student. He now carries out his studies in transpersonal psychology, attends to his current practice as a psychotherapist, teaches Aikido as a certified instructor, co-directs the Sufism and Psychology Forum of IAS, and actively contributes to IAS’ many events, projects, and retreats. Also like Amineh, Jamal balances his work and home life in honoring his relationship with his spouse and children. Jamal links his increasing ability to orchestrate a packed and diversified schedule to his management of his energy through the cultivation of his residence in his heart. By focusing his awareness in his heart, Jamal has learned to collect his energy from a “state of dispersal” to conserve it for conscious and selective use with a “more coherent,” “more penetrating”, and “more specific” purposefulness.
While Amineh and Jamal, like other Uwaiysi-i-Maghsoudi Sufi students, have a personal set of practices arranged for them through the individualized instruction of their teachers, the basic principle of presence of heart underlies the essence of these practices and makes them widely accessible to people of all types. As Jamal stated to during my interview with him, the more we practice returning to our hearts with the intentionality of staying in its presence, the greater the transformative effects on our lives. Uwaiysi students use a set of tools discovered and hones by the great Sufi Masters and receive guidance in each step of the path through a devoted teacher. These factors put Sufi students like Jamal and Amineh in a position to achieve their full transformative potential. They have the support and understanding necessary to take their practice to a level far beyond their original state in which they can explore the spiritual stages of the heart.

Individuals not planted in a Sufi school however, may also reap far-reaching benefits from an increased understanding and awareness of the heart simply by being a member of the human family with the capacity and desire to learn. Uwaiysi Sufi psychologists, such as Arife, Amineh, and Jamal, have shown with their successful integration of heart-based techniques into Western psychotherapy methods that clients with no prior training or background in Sufi studies or heartfullness practices can experience quite significant healing affects, from learning to focus on their heart, that seep into all aspects of their lives. Arife, for example, teaches her clients to concentrate their energy through focus on their heart, which has helped students her clients "[release] the brain/mind dualistic split from defense mechanisms and the sensory based multiplicity of action and distraction" (2000: 15, 16). Arife has seen her clients
overcome, with these use of these practices, residual trauma carried since childhood, debilitating mood disorders, and “limited belief systems.” She has seen them regain their balance, energy, their ability to relate to and enjoy people, and most importantly appreciate their lives. Arife writes, “The creative journey is embedded within the human being” and so the possibility exists for the motivated individual, with the appropriate tools and guidance, “to enter the realm of unity” through the gateway of the heart (66).

The Heart as the Center for Inspiration

Finally, for the Sufi who understands the heart as the source of life and the center of knowledge, the heart also serves as a source of intuition and creative inspiration that manifests in scientific discovery and artistic expression that benefits the individual and society. In the realm of scientific investigation, Uwaiysis have placed emphasis on the importance of combining sensory approaches based on observing the physical properties of matter, which yields what Einstein termed “comparative knowledge”, and spiritual inquiry that aims for discovery of absolute Truth within the essence of matter or Erphan (Pryor 2006: 44, 45). Uwaiysis have made clear throughout their history that these two forms of knowledge stand far apart from one another, where only the latter can provide a clear view into the unchanging rules of existence (Maghsoud 1980: 6). Individuals such as Moulana Shah Maghsoud, therefore, have made their life’s work bridging the pursuits of science and spirituality in order to advance society towards a full and accurate understanding of reality. Amineh Pryor writes, “Sufis understand that the tool we have each been give to make this discovery is the heart.” Polishing the heart “so that no impurity or imperfection remains to cloud or distort discovery” allows the individual to
become like a tuned receptor for information, capable of receiving the “inspiration and revelation” that Moulana Shah Maghsoud writes of as “deep and true acquaintance within essential existence” (1980: 4).

Uwaiysis, however, also point to certain notable figures who did not follow a mystical path, such as Isaac Newton, and pushed science far-beyond the existing logic of their time to illustrate that universal knowledge springs forth from the stable character grounded in the heart (Maghsoud 1980: 2; Newman 15). “We seem to have forgotten,” writes Uwaiysi Michael Newman, “that without the scientists who relied on something other than their senses—their immeasurable intuition derived from their hearts—the sciences could not have advanced” (15). Dr. Kianfar illustrated this principle at a 2007 retreat for meditation and instruction at Dominican University in San Rafael, California by having the attendees briefly write something creative that came to them on a piece of paper and then relate their experience of the process. It came to light that for many individuals who followed Dr. Kianfar’s instructions, they naturally did not use thought to compose their short piece and instead, the words flowed directly out of them. This sparked a discussion by Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar on how the most profound discovery and artistic creation do not arise solely through mental calculation but by accessing universal knowledge stored within the silent space of the heart. In this way, the development of a stable center within by the individual can enhance one’s personal enjoyment and success in scientific pursuits, which in turn may benefit society if used wisely.

The same logic regarding the benefits of heartfullness to the scientific process applies to creative and artistic expression. Inspiration arises within the awakened heart
and finds an outlet through the hand of the painter, the voice of the singer, or in the
movement of the dancer. As with the scientist who seeks to uncover the rules governing
existence, the artist who washes away impurities from heart can transmit a clear message
of the Divine that reflects the names of God and that often draws the audience inward to
the source of those names within themselves. In this sense the artist must clear her own
ego away to act as "the reed pipe" through which the Divine breath flows, thereby
providing an act of service to all those who hear the tune that sounds forth. But just as
each reed pipe possesses its own unique qualities through its shape and therefore
produces its own sound, artistic production gains its full beauty as work inspired by the
inseparable union of the individual human and the Divine.

Soraya commented during our interview on her experience as a member of the
six-person Sufi music ensemble, Taneen, in a way that perfectly tied together the
perceptive heart's role in both facilitating the personal creative process and fostering the
development of community that allows for the respectful expression and coordination of
each member. The individuals in Taneen all practice Sufism as students in the Uwaiysi-i-
Maghsoudi order and receive support and direction for their work as an ensemble from
their teachers, Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar. The group draws from both Western and
Eastern influences to create their musical renditions of the poetry of great Sufi Masters
such as Jalaleddin Rumi, Hafiz of Shiraz, Omar Khayam, and Moulana Shah Maghsoud,
but remains close in its intention for its creation as that stated by the tenth century Persian
Sufi scholar and mystic, Al-Ghazali:

"The purpose of music, considered in relation to
God, is to arouse longing for God, and passionate
love for Him, and to produce states in which God
reveals Himself and His favor, which are beyond
Achieving this goal requires the orchestration of each member as a reed pipe producing its own unique song into one harmonious whole, and thus from the perspective of Sufism, mirrors the functioning of any healthy system. Soraya, a singer, described a very personal process of sitting with a poem the group intends to use to for a new piece until a melody that she feels coordinates with the poem comes to her. “The music is really arising from my spirit,” she said. “It’s a melody I hear within myself and it’s a melody flowing through me.” She adjusts the melody until she feels pleased with it and then brings it to the group, so they can work on it as a whole. On working as a member of a community she says, “You have to totally let go of the ego. You cannot survive in that atmosphere with ego. You have to submit to the greater whole and yet bring your whole self to it.” She remarked that each person brings their own “signature” to the group, given the different characters and musical background of the individuals.

Together, they must coordinate to produce a multi-layered composition that resounds with one underlying current that draws the audience into their own hearts. This reflects both an inner dynamic whereby the individual must collect herself within the heart to arouse artistic inspiration and an outward dynamic whereby presence in the “seeing” heart underpins her ability to work productively with diversity to contribute to a healthy community whose product benefits humanity. The importance of presence within the heart arises parallelly in both Soraya and Amineh’s stories, where it shapes the ease with which they execute their “tasks” and relate to others positively in their environment.
Soraya’s experience as in Taneen as a member of a group and as a performer for an audience further illustrates the heart’s fundamental power as a liminal space, where the spiritual and the physical meet, as well as the balance people must strike by living on the edge of both planes to reap all of the benefits of heartfulness described in the sections above. As comes across above, Soraya must stay poised between the “inner” and the “outer” world as she connects to the people around her from the balance point of the spiritual heart. Soraya must relate to them at once as “others” in her physical experience, each of whom bring a different set of technical skills and insights to the musical process while also drawing her inspiration from her spiritual heart which perceives through the lens of unity. Soraya also acutely senses her place on the edge of both these worlds during performance which she calls a “fascinating balance between being very present in...one’s intention to facilitate divine expression, and also being very aware of the audience and the fact that one is performing.” Soraya must use her intention to focus on the source of inspiration within her heart while also directing its product outward such that her song will coordinate with the group and ultimately serve the group’s purpose of sparking longing and love for God. Interestingly, the outward projection of Soraya’s intention comes full circle through those who listen to Taneen’s melody and become, as audience members have indicated to her, “transported into the center of them selves.”

Thus by fusing her attention to her spiritual heart with sensitivity to the physical world around her that contains its own spiritual reality therein, Soraya can best serve herself, her group, and the audience for whom she performs.

Above I described various ways in which Uwaiysi Sufis have benefited from a practice of heartfulness, including through an increased ability to manage and avoid
conflict and to positively relate to the people in their lives without requiring defensive stances, an increase in energy and a heightened ability to direct it, a stronger connection to the source of knowledge which thus stimulates scientific advancement and finally, through sparking the inspiration of creative expression. These benefits all spring from the heart as the container of all divine qualities, such as patience, wisdom, care, and creativity, and because of this, may occur simultaneously, interact, and reinforce one another as displayed in the case of Soraya and Amineh. Individuals who practice heartfullness must learn to “turn” as Rumi said to see through the lens of the spiritual heart in their dealings with the difference, otherness, and separation of a physical world. In this way they can reap the full benefits of their practice by appreciating both the all-encompassing unity that lies beneath its veils and the inherent dignity and reality of the particular manifestations of that unity in their daily life.
Part III
Chapter 5
The Alignment of Hearts in the Student-Teacher Relationship

“One needs a friend on the path of love, 
An illumination, an intention. 
On the way of love, one must become the dust 
Under the footfalls of the guide, a nothing blended 
with the light of being.”
–Moulana Shah Maghsoud (Angha 1998a: 97)

While many step onto the path of the heart, few reach the final gate of knowledge at its spiritual center. In the Uwaiysi tradition, the teacher plays a critical role for the student as a guide for her journey who can lead the student to her final destination. This relationship revolves around the alignment of hearts between the student and her teacher whereby the student can receive the meaning beneath the words of the teachings and the light of knowledge through the “lens” of the teacher’s heart. This requires first finding a “truthful” teacher who has traveled the path in advance and who for the Uwaiysi can exist in physical form or the purely spiritual, and secondly, learning the art of being “present at the presence of the teacher” along with developing the discipline to follow her teacher’s instructions exactly (Kianfar 1/2007). Love’s pull can ultimately draw the student down the path, however the student must still face the challenge of owning up to and overcoming her weaknesses that prevent her from fully aligning herself with the heart of her teacher and practicing correctly. The student who, with the help of her teacher, addresses her inner obstacles clears the way for the growth of love within which she experiences as an attraction to the divine knowledge contained within the heart of the teacher. The student thus establishes a stable and direct inner connection with the teacher, just as Uwaiys did with the Prophet Mohammed, through which the student can
come to receive knowledge from her teacher like the light of the sun reflecting from the moon.

From the Uwaiysi point of view, one who seeks to experience truth through the reception of divine Knowledge must find a guide who has traveled the path in advance and can thus lead the student safely to her destination. The student undertaking a journey into such unfamiliar territory necessarily requires “a map, instructions, teachings, signs, [and] language” that can point her in the right direction. In Sufism, the salek seeks a “straight path”, referred to as seratal mostaghim\(^{12}\), which leads her directly to the Divine. A straight path avoids circuitous detours that steer one off course and away from the ultimate destination and requires. Taking this path requires an understanding of the “rules of Being” which govern existence, which the salek must fall into careful step with in order to harmonize her self with the greater cosmos and make successful progress towards knowledge on her journey. She therefore requires a teacher who has him or her self followed and become familiar with the rules of Being and so, can attune her to their subtleties in relation to her behavior (Angha 1998d: 32). For these reasons, Dr. Angha likens the teacher to a gardener whose wise care determines “the fruitfulness of the saplings” (Angha 1998d: 33).

Ultimately for the Uwaiysi, a true teacher is one who leads to the salek towards the Divine and not to anything else. For the student who aligns herself with the rules of being, the teacher must act like a “powerful lens” that the student can look through to

\(^{12}\) In the Islamic prayers, which Uwaiysi Sufis return to 5 times a day, one asks to be shown the “straight way.” The prayer associates those who take the straight way as those who have received God’s Grace, whose “portion is not wrath”, and who “go not astray” and thereby indicates a steady intentionality of the spirit absent of negativity (Kianfar 1985: 21)
perceive the light of divine knowledge "behind the curtain of nature" (Angha 1998d: 32).

Uwaiysis emphasize in their use of this metaphor that a clean lens provides the frame and the focus for the observer to see her object clearly, but should never cloud or distort the observer's vision. Thus, a teacher should not become another curtain between the salek and the Divine by leading the salek to an impure or incomplete version of the knowledge the student seeks (Angha 1991b: 15). Uwaiysis warn in particular against teachers driven by ego or desire for profit, who are not motivated to lead the student into the freedom of unity but rather to keep the student bonded in chains of reliance to limited ideas which do not lead to knowledge of the self. As a whole, the Uwaiysi conception of the teacher contains within it a strong critique of what Dr. Kianfar calls, "the spiritual marketplace", where religious leaders "sell" a "faith" for their personal gain, without providing tools for the student to verify that faith within her heart (Kianfar 1996: 21). We stand vulnerable in the marketplace to so-called teachers who can take advantage of our psychological and emotional struggles to tie us to them in web of dependency (Vaughan-Lee). For this reason, Uwaiysis recommend that one who seeks knowledge must enter the "spiritual marketplace" with awareness and a clear intention of what she seeks so that she can carefully discern the teacher who will lead her to herself rather than a product of the imagination or an image of the teacher's own ego. The salek must take this intention with her on any path she chooses, so she can observe whether she advances towards her goals through her practice and evaluate the authenticity of the teacher.

Finding a Unique Teacher for a Universal Knowledge

Despite the often-confusing plethora of options for spiritual guidance and the difficulties inherent to judging with certainty the quality of various teachers, Uwaiysis do
believe that the individual with the longing heart will find a genuine teacher suited to her whose teachings arise directly from divine knowledge. This complies with the Sufi wisdom that says, “When you take one step towards God, God takes 10 steps towards you.” The heart that calls for God in darkness evokes a response that draws the light of a teacher that resonates with the tune of that call and who has the tools to lead the student to God. So, as the scholar and mystic Huston Smith puts it, the “master’s total self”, with his “unique and irreplaceable” character matter for the formation of the loving bond that draws the salek inwards to receive the universal knowledge of the Divine (Smith 7).

Therefore, the love within the longing heart leads to a relationship founded on the love between two particular individuals but yet drives towards the one source of love that gives rise to the individuals in the first place (Vaughan-Lee). The master-disciple relationship then affirms the sanctity of the uniqueness of the individual person and of personal relationship based on the connection of love while also calling for the dissolution of the individual into the ocean of the Whole. While Dr. Angha speaks to essential importance of the teacher to any student who seeks a “straight path” to the Divine, she affirms the primacy of the ultimate goal. “Ultimately, she writes, “it is not the teacher but the Divine within that one is searching for” (Angha 1998d: 33).

The Divine saturates every aspect of such as student-teacher relationship, by providing the impetus that matches the student to the teacher, the substance of love that binds them together, and the deepening understanding of reality that comes to the salek’s heart. A teacher who partakes in such a relationship therefore attains his or her position not simply through the vesting of a title but through an unquestionable introduction of teachership into the heart of a salek by God (Angha 1991: 14). This definition of a
teacher in the Uwaiysi school stems back to Uwaiys-i-Qarani who received the blessing to found his order through the material gift of the Prophet’s robe as an outward symbol, which encompassed within it the wholeness of the Prophet’s teachings on the Divine. When Uwaiys received the robe from a messenger of the Prophet after the Prophet’s death, he refused to wear the robe before praying over it for the Prophet’s people and receiving Divine instruction to put the robe on (Angha, M.T 43). Many seekers passionately drawn towards the Divine have, since that time, found Uwaiys and the Prophet within their heart as teachers for their journey without every having physically met him. Others, like most members of the Uwaiysi-i-Maghsoudi Tarighat, which has had a living lineage of Sufi Masters over the last 40 generations, find their master in physical form but still connect through their heart to the teachings carried on from Uwaiys.

Whether in spiritual or physical form, the Uwaiysi teacher “always accompanies the Qur’an” for his knowledge derives from the heart of Uwaiys and ultimately, Mohammed. The wisdom contained in the Qur’an\(^\text{13}\), as the transcribed “recitation” of Mohammed’s divine revelations, mirrors the knowledge within the teacher’s heart and so, the relationship of the student to her teacher and the Qur’an mirror one another as she aims to follow their signs and understanding the meaning behind their language (Angha 1998d: 32). And as with the student’s ability to receive the meaning within her human teacher’s instructions, the meaning of the Qur’an unfolds in deeper and deeper levels to the salek to the extent she can connect with it through her heart. Dr. Angha instructs her students to read the Qur’an as if it were speaking directly to them as individual readers,

\(^{13}\) Qu’ran translates to “recitation” in English.
and so like the human teacher, the Qur'an provides personalized guidance, to those attuned to its message, that fits the needs of the student in the moment (7/2008). Thus, the universe responds to the heart's longing by bringing towards it that which it seeks. In addition, the Quranic passage turned to at random by an assigned student at the Sufi gatherings held at IAS is thought to illuminate or expand upon the teachings of the night. This demonstrates the tri-part connection between the student, teacher, and the book. The Qur'an and the physical and spiritual teachers all contain at their core the light of the divine to which the student who follows the guidelines and signposts can open and finally, discover within her self.

The Interplay of the Physical and the Spiritual in the Student-Teacher Relationship

The core of the student-teacher relationship occurs within the heart, because in the heart resides the knowledge of unity to which the salek seeks to make a conscious return. However, this should not lead one to underestimate the value of the physical aspect of this relationship for the student who has the opportunity to work with her teacher face-to-face. Students begin from the framework of duality, in which we knowingly relate to the world largely through its constantly changing and ephemeral manifestations. This renders difficult a journey based solely off the guidance of a formless teacher who we must find within the essence of our hearts. Many individuals, like Uwaiys-i-Qurani, have traveled this journey to its completion without ever making physical contact with their teacher and therefore proven it quite possible, yet the physical teacher provides a grounding force that can help move the student beyond the perspective of multiplicity towards one of unity. At the same time, the one who has the opportunity to meet her
teacher in person faces the risk of relating to her teacher only on the surface level and failing to connect with the essence beneath.

These issues all come into play at the International Association of Sufism, as Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha teach about 50 students with whom they meet regular both in a one-on-one context and in bi-monthly gatherings for instruction, Zekr (Islamic prayer or “remembrance”), and meditation with the whole group. Dr. Kianfar advises his students to surround themselves with spiritual people, especially those who have achieved advanced spiritual states, because they possess healing energy which can restore the system to balance and help the student progress on her own path. Students at IAS and the newcomers who visit, indeed, remark upon a strong sense of peacefulness that they pick up on when they walk into the Khanegah where gatherings take place. So, for those whose hearts have not opened fully to receive the meaning of teachings, being in the physical presence of the teacher can help move them to a space where they can receive the message within their hearts more deeply. Further, taking part in group practices such as meditation and the Zekr expose the student to the collective energies generated by the focused intention of the teachers and the students combined. This can serve as a powerful vehicle for breaking through a student’s blocks and releasing her to another level of journey.

In addition, the bi-monthly Sufi gatherings at IAS and the individual meetings the student has with her teachers are useful check-in points for any student, especially those in the beginning stages of their journey who have not yet established a stable center within her heart. Dr. Kianfar aptly expresses Sufi wisdom when he says, “There is no distance between heart and heart, just as there is no distance between your heart and
God” (1/2007). It follows from this that no distance exists between the student’s heart and her teacher’s heart, which contains the light of divine knowledge and guidance. The beginner however may not consciously sense this presence on a continual basis and may fall into feeling like an individual undertaking a vast journey on her own. The more she stays true to the principles and practices she learns from her teacher, the more quickly she will move beyond the layers preventing her from witnessing the divine light reflecting within the united hearts of student and teacher. Returning to her teacher’s physical presence can act as an immediate and useful reminder of the rules governing the path, as the student not yet finely attuned to the voice of her heart may more easily intentionally connect to the meaning of words spoken aloud by teachers who she can see with her eyes. The Bible records Jesus, known as the Prophet Issa in Islam, as saying upon his return to Earth after his death to his disciple Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed” (John 20.24-29). Many of those revered as Sufi Masters in the Uwaiysi orders never saw their master yet cultivated the light of belief within their heart. Many others however find it helpful to see with their eyes and hear with their ears in their processing of awakening from forgetfulness.

Gathering with the teachers that bring together the whole community of students can further add to the student’s confidence and motivation on the path by exposing her to other humans undergoing parallel struggles in their journey from duality to unity. She may gain a sense of solidarity with her fellow students and remember through their example that the seeming silence of the heart the beginning salek experiences gives way to a deeper living silence that resounds with the presence of the teacher and the Divine. The physical aspect of the journey therefore can help remind the student of the ever-
present nature of the teachings, guidance, and light within her heart, despite periods where she might feel disconnected from their reality, and her ability to succeed on the path as a human with her own foibles and challenges.

On the other hand, physical presence in itself does not indicate spiritual presence and one who spends her whole life in close proximity to holy people may never develop a stable heart-based connection that allows her to access those people’s spiritual qualities. Uwaiys, who never met the Prophet, demonstrated a true friendship with his teacher based of an “agreement” of hearts, while Uwaiys called into question whether the second caliph of Islam who had frequent contact within the Prophet during his life ever really saw the Prophet. When Uwaiys asked the caliph whether the Prophet had connected or separated eyebrows, since that caliph had claimed to have seen the Prophet’s face, the caliph could not answer (Angha, M.T 43, 44). This indicates that while caliph looked upon the Prophet daily, his attention lacked the care of one in love who notices with care the finest subtleties of their beloved’s face. Uwaiys questioned further into the caliph’s behavior and finding the caliph’s loyalty lacking, concluded, “You saw but the cloth and not the reality of him” (Angha 1998b: 36, Angha, M.T 44). All humans potentially face the same difficulty as the caliph, who upon hearing Uwaiys’ criticism apprehended a new level of meaning in the word “friendship.” We may sit at the feet of holy people we believe to esteem, but never even fully see these peoples’ faces much less benefit tangibly from proximity to their elevated spiritual states.

Developing Presence in the Heart at the Presence of the Teacher

“The more direct our heart connection with the teacher,” Dr. Kianfar has said, “the more knowledge we receive” (2006: 21). Yet in order to establish and maintain the
heart connection, the student must learn the “art” of being present at all times in the heart where she receives the meanings of the teachings and the teacher’s healing energy. The student must particularly keep an intentional awareness and presence when in the immediate physical area of her teacher in order to avoid the illusion of closeness, like that harbored by the second caliph, in which she does not see or hear the reality of the teacher but merely glances the “clothe of him.” This requires, through careful attentiveness in the heart, quieting the busy mind’s chatter and stepping out of the continuous mental and physical distractions that can absorb our attention and cut us off from the teacher and his teachings (7/28/2007). In addition, the student must learn to listen to the teacher’s words without filtering, adjusting, or distorting their meaning according to her pre-formed connotations of the word and any fears and insecurities that may arise naturally by teachings that challenge the student’s initial conceptions of self and through her interpretation of her relationship with the teacher. In the worst cases, the mind subverts the peaceful core of teachings’ message for destructive and manipulative purposes, assigning something “beautiful” an “ugly and terrible” face (Kianfar 1/2007). We see the most extreme results in the news daily in the terror evoked by militant Jihadist movements that justify the systematic taking of life from teachings praising the value of life and human potentiality to overcome negativity within. Such patterns occur across all religions and again, reaffirm the essential importance of aligning the mind with the heart’s wisdom and remaining present in the heart to receive the meaning of teachings. Dr. Kianfar calls intentionality a “sharp knife” can tremendously help the student maintain her presence in the heart (7/28/2007). However, the student must practice bringing this intention with her wherever she goes throughout the day in order to create a
space within her heart that she can return to with ease, whether physically near or far from the teacher.

In the Uwaiysi Order, students receive practices which they separate from the other elements of their daily routine, such as salaat and meditation, but whose principle they carry with them throughout the day. Those who seek to receive knowledge most clearly from their teacher cultivate the remembrance within that we can use every moment for practice. Amineh has experienced this as a process of moving from an original dualistic outlook where she saw spiritual practices as separate from the rest of her daily routine to an understanding of practice, several years later, as “more integrated” and continuously “enriching” throughout the day. “That is the meaning of La illaha il allah\(^\text{14}\),” says Dr. Kianfar, referring to the core Islamic principle, known as the shahada, of divine unity which makes it possible for the salek to draw closer to an experiential understanding of divine teachings in every moment (6/9/2007).

For this to happen, the student must direct her intention of maintaining a presence in the heart to following the practices given to her by her teacher exactly. Imam Khorasani, an Iraqi-American friend of Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha who established and leads the Islamic Society of California, illustrated the meaning of this at a Sufi gathering at IAS once with a story from the life of Amir Al-Moumenin Ali who Muslims call the Vali or the guide who lights the path for the salek. A man saw both Mohammed and Ali together at the market and knew that Mohammed had come from the mosque. When he observed only one set of footprints heading from the direction of the mosque to the

\(^{14}\text{La illaha ila Allah translates to, “There is no God but God.” Sufis and Muslims express this statement in a number of different ways, such as, “There is no reality but the Divine” and “There is nothing but God.”}\)
market, he asked Ali from where he had traveled to meet his master. Ali replied that, like Mohammed, he too had come from the mosque. “How could this be,” replied the man, “if there are only one set of footprints?” Ali explained that he had made no new marks in the dust, because he had carefully placed his feet step by step in the tracks of the Prophet, who had walked ahead of Ali. Imam Khorasani then questioned those seated at the gathering, “Can you follow his footsteps exactly? Your Pir? The light is beyond the curtain. You have to remove the curtain” (7/28/2007). The story reveals that to remove the curtain and find the light within, the Sufi must match her footsteps exactly to those of the teacher who has traveled the journey in advance and has laid out a straight path to knowledge. Amir Al-Moumenin Ali, who the salek calls upon within her heart to receive to receive the light of his direction, took the utmost care in aligning himself with the way of his teacher even for the mundane task of walking to the marketplace. Uwayysis, like Amineh, therefore seek to cultivate an intentional awareness for following precisely their Pir’s example and the teachings they receive in all spaces and moments of their lives.

As already explained, the one who seeks to discover divine knowledge within embarks into the unfamiliar terrain of the soul for which she needs a guide. The salek must follow this guide so closely because by taking one step off the path on such an infinite journey, she begins a trajectory that will end far afield from the point in the spiritual heart within the physical heart where existence resides. If the salek modifies the practices and teachings according to her personal tastes or out of laziness, she reinforces the habits of her mind and fails to reap the benefits of practices precisely designed to prepare the practitioner to receive knowledge. Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar relate this to

\[ ^{15} \text{Pir is a name for a Sufi Master.} \]
the student's interaction with the "spiritual marketplace" and strongly advise against "shopping around" amongst religions to pick and choose one's own "collection of beliefs and practices" (Angha 1998d: 7). While each tradition may map out a worthy path towards a divine knowledge, each tradition takes form within a particular system and structure that shapes the practices and language used. The practices of Uwaiysi Sufism work individually and with one another to harmonize the student with the universal laws of Being that Sufis have discovered within their hearts since Mohammed and thereby open the student's heart to knowledge. For these reasons, the student who seeks to "remove the curtain" veiling the reality beneath the natural world must follow Ali, who walked carefully within each footstep of his teacher.

**Discipline as the Result of Love within the Salek's Heart**

"You cannot fake that love. 
It has to come to you. It has to open in you.
It does not matter if you live or die.
It matters to come to this life and know the Creator."
--Dr. Angha, Sufi Gathering, IAS, June 2007

The discipline that underlies the path must arise not just from the cold determination of will but through the love within the longing heart. For the Uwaiysi, the journey of the heart begins and ends in love, "the binding of the book of creation" that brings all matter into existence, and no traveler can reach her destination where she experiences the meaning of *La illaha ila Allah* without the attraction of love pulling her towards recognition of the Divine (Angha 1998d: 25). The force of love opens the student's heart, so that she can cultivate a genuine presence that enables her to see and hear the teacher and receive the meanings expressed by the teacher. The student who
seeks to align herself with the rules of being through her practices therefore, must remember in all her actions this most fundamental rule of being, love.

Love compelled Amir Al-Moumenin Ali himself to follow the Prophet’s way with meticulous care and out of respect for the greatness of love, Ali offered to lay down his life. Dr. Angha, in Sufism: The Journey of the Lovers tells a story of Amir Al-Moumenin Ali in battle that complements Imam Khorasani’s metaphorical depiction of Ali’s discipline. While fighting in a battle unnamed in the The Journey, Ali comes up against a young man whom it soon becomes clear Ali can defeat. Ali offers the man a chance to flee the battle and so save his life. The young man, however, replied, “My beloved promised me that if I return victorious, she will marry me. I love her so much that I have no choice but to fight and to die if I fail.” Ali saw that both he and his adversary fought for their beloved, the former for Allah and the latter for his lady, and for this reason refused to “be the cause” of the separation between the young man and his lover. Ali said, “Be at peace...go ahead and kill me so that you may become united with your beloved” (Angha 1998d: 30). While the young man in fact converted to “the religion of love” that he saw Ali practiced and neither of the men died at the sword of the other in the end, Amir Al-Moumenin’s Ali’s words and actions show that love encompassed the character of his journey. He fought from the strength of his love for his beloved and demonstrated a willingness to give his physical life for the sake of love in itself. Love takes on a purpose for Ali that is greater than him self yet in no way can be separated from Ali. Love completes Ali’s life, propelling him towards recognition of the Divine, and exudes from within him to promote the union of the lover with the beloved throughout the rest of creation. The powerful force of this love stands far apart from
mental determination divorced from the heart and overcomes the complaints and the fears that can stop the 
salek in her tracks. Soraya eloquently expressed the loyalty inherent to such love that motivates action: “Love is enduring and timeless and it’s not ephemeral...It’s a constant willingness to drop anything [for the beloved] despite whatever might happen to you.” Ali’s love resulted in “intoxicated” dedication to the teachings of the Prophet, through which Ali came to “remove the curtain” that veiled his beloved and so stands as an example for Sufis and Muslims alike who pray five times a day for the light of his guidance (Angha 6/2007).

We hear and tell the story of Ali’s great and magnanimous love, but we should not forget about the realities of the majority of students on the path who cannot always claim a state of rapturous devotion. The student may experience stages in the beginning of her journey or farther along the path in which she does not even feel the presence of love within her heart and during that time, she might unknowingly slip into a mode of practice best defined as habit, monotonous routine or even mortification (Newman 23). In this way, one may loose sight of the “beloved” and become a slave to an idea of the “punishing” God as an entity that exacts the student’s practice and worship in return for sparing the student from “hell.” Attempting to listen to the teachings of the Sufi master at this point can feel like a draining chore during which the student ceases to value her moments and instead counts them down. Such a mindset, so far removed from the heart, cannot advance the student towards her goal of knowledge, which if she recalls mentally lacks the certainty of the heart.

Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha flip on its head the conception of the needy, demanding, wrathful God, into which those by practicing without the attraction of love in
their hearts may fall, by framing the Uwaiysi path in the light of blessing. “Do not do it for God. God does not need anything from you,” has said at a Sufi gathering, reminding his students that the Uwaiysi path does not assign practices as a duty or obligation to something abstract and exterior (7/28/2007). On the contrary, Uwaiysis practice to experience direct benefits, by which they become alive to life through love so consuming that Dr. Angha’s words take on their meaning for the student— It does not matter whether you live or die. It matters to come to this life and know the Creator. With the guidance of a teacher, and a strong intentionality on the part of the salek, the salek can move out of unconsciousness of the presence of love and divine unity, what Uwaiysis call “hell” and the bars of the cage that trap humans in a state of limitation, and into a state where love has turned the salek into a “lover” and “love saturates every cell and every moment” of her being” (Angha 1998d: 25).

The teacher acts as a concentrated center of spiritual energy which can help the salek collect her energy from a state of dispersal, or distraction, to a more concentrated state in the heart through which love grows (Angha 1991b: 15). By consistently focusing her intention on love and recalling the reality of the existence of love within the spiritual heart, the salek can work with her teacher to spark the attraction between the lover and the beloved that breaks through the frozen surface layers of the closed heart. The memory of love implanted within the student’s being and the example of her teacher’s and fellow students’ way of relating to the world provides the salek with proof of love’s ever-present and inextinguishable nature and serves as a source of hope and motivation for the times when love seems absent. The love that arises in the heart creates a strong pull within the student towards Divine Knowledge, enabling the student to sit in the
presence of her teacher and follow in his footsteps carefully. Like Amir Al-Moumenin Ali, the student has the capacity through love to align herself with the lens of the teacher’s heart and find her source of light within.

**The Structure of Sufi Gatherings at IAS: Adab as a Manifestation of Respect and Love**

As with discipline, the intentionality that both fosters love in the *salek’s* heart and springs from the love already present therein underlies the code of conduct known as *Adab*\(^{16}\) that outlines the standards of behavior for the student in regard to her relationship with her teacher. Students at the International Association of Sufism exhibit the respect for their teachers that comes from love, what longtime student of Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha calls the “fundamental principle” of *Adab*, in their observance of a particular etiquette that colors the bi-monthly gatherings (4/5/2008). The undercurrent of respect at the gatherings manifests throughout the stages of the gathering; in the hushed tones of students’ voiced during conversation, in the way they enter or leave the meditation room, in the focused presence the hold during when the Sufi Masters teach, in the various tasks they take on that give the gathering its rich multi-dimensional character, and in the special consideration they show the teachers through their actions. The practice of respectful attentiveness at the gatherings allows the students to connect with the heart of the teacher and understand and benefit from their message.

Students waiting for the arrival of the teachers before the start of the gathering chat quietly in the vestibule of the *Khanegah* or sit in meditative silence in the main room where teaching takes place. The students who have avowed their submission to the

\(^{16}\) *Adab* translates from Arabic and Persian to “behavior.” Adab, as an etiquette system, extend beyond the student-teacher relationship into all aspects of the student’s life.
teacher as their guide wear “whites”, an all white set of simple and generally unadorned clothing that has been blessed by the teachers and symbolizes the pure heart that reflects the light of the Divine. The students bring their intention for purification to the gathering, which entails leaving negativity and distraction behind when they step in the door of the Khanegah, out of respect and love for their teachers and a desire to benefit as much as possible from their physical presence.

While the other students wait inside, one student, often a sheikh such as Jamal, holds a parking spot for the teachers directly in front of the building. The sheikh opens the door for at least one of the teachers when they arrive and at that time, the students inside end their conversations and stand up from meditation to await their entry. The teachers enter the building, greeting the students in the vestibule and stopping to speak personally with some, and proceed into the meditation room where they take a seat on cushions at the front. The students in the vestibule line up outside the meditation room and each enter in turn, first placing their hands over their heart with their head bowed while standing in the doorway and only moving in when the teacher acknowledges them and nods for them to do so. Through this procedure, the student aligns and affirms her intention of respect for her teachers and presence at their presence through which she receives the meanings of the teachings. Placing the hands over the heart directs her attention to the spiritual center within from which she sources her connection to the teachers.

Each student has her own spot at the gatherings in the meditation room that remains open when this cannot attend, perhaps signifying her unique place within the community and personal connection to the teachers. Just as in a classroom at school,
invested students at IAS remain quiet and actively attentive in their place while the teacher leads the gathering. Dr. Angha typically begins the gathering with a guided “heart-beat” meditation in which she instructs the students to “be in this present place at this present time.” The students practice quieting their thoughts that disable them from being fully present by focusing on their heartbeat and collecting their energy within their heart. Returning from the distractions of the mind allows them to settle into their heart connection with the teacher and receive the meanings of the teachings beyond a theoretical or mental level.

Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar follow the meditation with teachings that address a specific aspect of Uwaiysi Sufism. The farther the student has progressed along the path and the more present she can remain in her heart at the presence of the teachers, the deeper the meaning she can take from the teachings and relate to her life. For this part of the gathering, Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha frequently assign students a topic to speak on that challenges the student to reflect thoughtfully on the path and contribute to the group’s understanding of the teachings in a particular way. Often these talks ties together the student’s experience on the Sufi path and her profession. Amineh and Jamal, for example, frequently discuss a theme in Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha’s teachings in light of their respective expertise in East-West Psychotherapy and Transpersonal Psychology. Jeff McCullough, a student of over two decades at IAS whom I interviewed, has done the same using his knowledge of computers and circuitry. Another student will open the Qur’an at the appropriate time with a focused attention meant to illicit divine guidance in turning to a Sura (a chapter) that expounds upon the meaning in the night’s teachings. He then translates the Sura verse by verse, avoiding using the translation by the author
within the book so as to choose words agreed upon by both his mind and his heart. Dr. Kianfar interprets the meaning of the passage, relating them to the teachings, as the student reads aloud. Together, entry into the room and meditation, through which the students set their intention and establish their focus within their hearts, teachings by the Sufi Masters and spoken contributions by the students, and the reading from the Qur'an comprise the first section of the gathering. Even for the student who does not have a specially defined role, following the *Adab*, or staying in a state of respect, means maintaining a very active spiritual presence in the gathering aided by the attraction of love.

The next part of the gathering consists of *salaat* and the *zekr*, the chanting of the Divine names that release the *salek* into ecstatic union, in which the Sufi community practices “remembrance” of the Divine together. The experience of the student during *salaat* and the *zekr* depends on her level of concentration within the space of her heart as well as the effect of the collective energies generated by the united intention of the group. The student therefore at once has a very personal experience of prayer while participating in a communal experience of movement towards union with the Divine. Women wear a veil during *salaat* and the *zekr* for the physical layer of privacy it provides and men and women separate themselves into lines on different sides of the room. *Salaat* involves bowing and prostration and so separating the students by gender helps avoid unnecessary distraction or discomfort that could occur in the compact space of the *Khanegah*. Respect, again, lies at the heart of this *Adab* that clears the way for focus that allows the student to connect to the teacher and receive the meaning in her heart.
Students also have individual roles that require concentrated presence during this second section of the gathering as well. Sheikh Salman begins *salaat* with the "call to prayer", which signals the group to assemble for prayer. At the close of prayer, Jeff passes around the long string of beads onto which the individuals of the group hold during the *zekr*. The students and teachers here chant the names of God, with the teachers and certain students guiding the words, rhythm, and tone of the chants. The chant reaches a climax and slowly becomes softer until it fades out. Upon Dr. Kianfar's request, Jeff closes *salaat* with a recitation of the *Fatiha* (the opening verse of each unit of *salaat*). The concentration of these individual, their presence in a state of love, affects their ability to at once sound out a call to the group that leads others into their own hearts towards the Divine and also journey inwards themselves towards union.

A final segment of the gathering follows the *zekr*, which involves food, music, and more back and forth conversation with the teachers. The atmosphere marked by respectful *Adab* remains but takes on a less intense and slightly more jovial flavor. First, a few students who skipped the *zekr* to prepare in the kitchen serve tea and light deserts to the group in agreement with the instruction of the Prophet to "greet people openly [and] offer them food" (Angha 1995: 21). Those serving offer food and drink to the teachers and their guests ahead of students and in special glassware and plates used only for these individuals. Teachings may continue, giving the students the opportunity at this time to raise their hand and ask questions, or the group may engage in a more casual conversation that strays from the topic of the night's teachings but still marked by the distinctive qualities of Uwaiysi thought. Side conversations may occur between students and teachers, as the individuals enjoy their tea and desert, but the individuals keep their
voices at respectful levels and remain aware of the teachers' presence and whether the teachers are addressing the group. Taneen, the Sufi music ensemble in which Soraya, Jeff, and Sheikh Salman all take part, usually performs several songs that serve as a closing testament to the beauty that exists within and without on the path. Just as those that lead salaat and the zekr, the students balance a concentration that engenders love within the individual and in the audience that draws each towards her own source within the heart.

When Taneen finishes, the teachers rise to close the gathering and the other students follow suit, many placing their hands on their heart. The students wait for the teachers to leave the meditation room first before they themselves exit. At this point, the teachers may take individual students aside in the room or make use of one of two conference rooms to discuss fine points surrounding the student's practice. The teacher may give the student new practices or adjust her current practices according to the individual's particular needs. The volume raises slightly in the Khanegah and activity stirs once the teachers leave as leaders of the various projects, forums, fundraising efforts, and committees logistical aspects involved with operating a non-profit make announcements. Students engage in conversation with their friends in the Uwaiysi community and a crew assigned for the week begins clean up, washing dishes, vacuuming, and organizing the cushions in the meditation room. Students finally filter out, alone or with family members, between three and four hours after the teachers arrived at the gathering's start.

Looked at as a whole, one can see that gatherings at IAS have personal and communal undertones throughout them that call for Adab based in loving respect. Each
student attends the gathering as an integral member of the Sufi community, having a particular physical place and role to play in the group. She may contribute to the smooth functioning of the gathering through particular outward actions or by remaining present in the space of heart. At the same time, her presence allows her to receive the maximum benefit from the experience of the gathering and take these benefits with her into her daily life. By remaining in an intention of establishing a heart-connection based in love through her practice of the various facets of Adab, she facilitates the growth of love within that opens her heart to the guidance of the teacher and the reception of divine knowledge.

**The Alignment of Hearts in the Student-Teacher Relationship: A Summary**

In this section, I reviewed the significance of the teacher to the journey of the student, who necessarily requires a guide to venture safely and productively into the expanses of “the universe” of her soul towards knowledge of the divine. This guide must have traveled the journey in advance and so have the capacity to acquaint the student with the signs and rules that will keep her on track during her journey. The core method of teaching in the Uwaiysi school depends on the connection between the student and the teacher resides takes place within their hearts, between which “there is no distance.” By establishing a strong and stable connection to her teacher, the student can receive the meaning within the teacher’s instructions and the light of divine knowledge from within the heart of the teacher. Sufis liken this manner of receiving knowledge by the salek to one witnessing the sun’s light reflecting off the moon. In this sense, the teacher must act like a clear lens that brings the Divine into focus for the student but does not blur the student’s vision by inserting his personality or ego in between.
The teacher who leads the student to the Divine does not have merely a self-appointed title but has been received the message of his teachership in the light of his heart, and it is believed that the seeker whose heart longs for Divine knowledge will be brought such a guide uniquely suited to her. For the Uwaiysi, the *salek* may find the teacher solely in spiritual form within the heart or she may also meet the teacher in his physical form as well. Whatever form the teacher takes, the Qur’an always accompanies the teacher as their message both derives from the same Divine source with Mohammed as the messenger who initially revealed the message.

The student faces particular challenges and benefits depending on whether she interacts with her teacher solely through her spiritual connection to the teacher within the heart or also through physical means of communication. Many famous Sufi masters have come to understand the Divine with only the guidance of the spiritual teacher within the heart, but many making their way from duality to unity may find it difficult to stay carefully attuned to the message in their heart so as to progress far along the path. Many individuals therefore benefit from the presence of a physical teacher to reinforce their understandings of the teachings and help them connect within the heart. Group gatherings with the teacher can serve as powerful events that can unblock the student by exposing her to healing energy and enable her to receive meaning from within the teachings. In addition, having a place within a community can provide reassurance and motivation for one who may feel at times feel isolated on a very demanding path. Benefiting however from the gatherings does require fostering the ability to be present at the presence of the teacher, rather than absorbed in thought or physical distraction. The *salek* must also avoid creating the drama that often accompanies human relationships in
her relationship with her teacher in order to nurture her heart connection with the teacher and move towards understanding of unity. We may review the story of Uwaiys and the second caliph to illustrate the primacy of the internal connection: the second caliph saw the Prophet’s face every day yet only knew “the clothe of him” whereas Uwaiys never saw the Prophet and by experiencing his teacher’s reality, his true face within the heart, Uwaiys came to know the Divine as well.

Learning to see and hear the teacher accurately and beyond the surface level requires learning the “art” of presence in which one receives meaning with the heart without filtering the information with the mind according to previous connotations of concepts within the teaching. From the human mind’s tendency to distort the meaning of peaceful teachings have arisen movements across the world religions that use the teachings as a justification for violence. This serves as an extreme example of the importance of learning to hear and see the teacher correctly so one can receive meaning in its pure form. Disciplined following of the teachings, as exemplified in the life of Amir Al-Moumenin Ali, can help the student route herself in the heart, so that she can strengthen her connection to the teacher and learn presence. Discipline, however, that leads to divine knowledge must arise from love. The force of love compels the student towards her goal such that knowing the Creator, her beloved, becomes her all encompassing intention that guides her steps. Fortunately, the intention of love can spark actual love in the salek whose heart has been hardened. With the aid of her teacher, she must consistently hold an intention to connect with the teacher and the Divine message out of a space of love.
Finally, I bring this discussion to the example of the students at the Uwaiysi gatherings led by Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar, in which the group follows a particular structure for the gathering and observes a behavioral etiquette known as *Adab*. Following the *Adab*, as a form of discipline arising from respect or the intention of respect, prepares the student to fully benefit from and contribute to the gatherings. The student connects personally with the teacher through her heart in these gatherings and also acts, through this heart presence, as a member of a community of people all directed towards the same goal.

Thus, the student-teacher relationship is at the very center of the Uwaiysi’s path. Finding the teacher marks the beginning of the student’s journey and provides her with the tools to advance along the path. The teacher works through the connection within their hearts to personally guide the student, in the words of Dr. Kianfar, like a “vessel” through the stormy seas of existence to the secure shore within where knowledge resides. Moving towards the secure shore the student finds that no separation exists between her heart, her teacher’s heart, and the Divine.
Chapter 6
Movement from Darkness to Light: Purification and the Reception of Knowledge within the Heart

The process of purification intimately connects with the process of becoming present within the heart connection to the teacher as purification entails shifting out of a state of distraction, desire, and absorption within the material world to one of balance in the stable center of one’s Divine essence located in the heart. Purification in Sufism centers on the “alchemical” transformation of the nafs, the Sufi concept of the self as a whole including the ego, the senses, and the personality, from darkness to light. The salek must face the challenges during this process of aligning the mind with the heart—putting her heart firmly in command—and owning up to and overcoming her faults and weaknesses. The salek seeks to remove the negative qualities that serve to veil her true identity in order to reveal the Divine reality that exists within and to understand the meaning of the “self.” Purification, which Sufis often refer to as “polishing the mirror of the heart”, therefore results in Knowledge and fundamentally alters the salek’s perception of the world. In moving out of the ego and into the space of the purified heart, she becomes annihilated into her identity in the Unity. In this way, the Sufi truly comes to live just as she dies to her previous mode of existence and within and without, sees only reflections of the Divine.

Sufis over the ages have likened the purification of the nafs to “alchemy”, whereby base metals undergo transmutation into the “elixir” of uncontaminated gold (Hammerle 2000: 20). The nafs of the beginning student serve as dense covers over the inner heart, where the substance of gold resides, and reflect her immersion in a dualistic
vision of reality. The ego, with its identification with a particular personality and character, commands her thought, speech, and actions in this stage and fixates upon sensory desires and attachments in order to obtain temporary gratification and fulfillment (Hammerle 2000: 2). Uwaiysi Glen Pascall calls the rule of the “ego-will” “true tyranny” as it “constantly issues a stream of orders that are conflicting, inconsistent, very demanding,...exhausting, that lead you zigzagging all over the place” (4/2/2008). The beginner submits to “tyranny” of the nafs because she sees through the lens of the limited viewpoint of the nafs that has the illusion of reality. Under the influence of the nafs, the new student sees her self as separated from the rest of creation and takes on negative qualities, such as jealousy, anger, and self-centered egotism, which serve her individualized identity and desires (Hammerle 2000: 4). Annemarie Schimmel, in her book Mystical Dimensions of Islam, ascribes nafs al-ammara, “the soul that commands evil” to the lowest level of the nafs (25). The individual operating within the grips of the lower nafs has no sight of or appreciation for the illuminated Divine within the spirit of her heart from which her life springs nor can the individual become present to the teacher’s spiritual essence when subject to the nafs’ changing whims. “Ego is but a wasteland ruining a seed,” writes Moulana Shah Maghsoud: Thus the beginning student must follow a disciplined practice, underscored by the intention of love, to tease out her dark qualities that bind her in ignorance and “imprison her spirit” (Angha 1998a: 90; Hammerle 2000: 2). She must strive to utterly transform from a “base metal”, in its impurity and commonality, to rare gold that reflects divine beauty.

The process of transformation can be difficult for the student as it requires her to take responsibility for and confront her “shadow side”, the ugliness within, that humans
often choose to ignore (Kianfar 4/28/2007). Soraya, during our interview, commented on
the role Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha played in pushing her to “face [her] inner demons.”
The teachers “are the mirror”, she said, “so sometimes you are in their presence and all of
the worst of yourself comes forward” because she cannot conceal anything from their
reflective surface. Her actions, her words, and even her thoughts all reveal the student’s
inner qualities to the teacher and to the student, depending on her self-awareness while
with the teacher. The student exposed to her weaknesses who wishes to progress on the
path must not hide from these weaknesses and “push them under the carpet” but make a
commitment, however painful, to keep them under watch and move beyond them.

The teacher and, according to Dr. Kianfar, the entirety of existence work with the
student, who undertakes a genuine quest for purification. The student may begin to hear
the voice of conscience within her heart as the spiritual center, and also even through her
eyes, ears, and skin, that serves as a witness and critic to her actions and steers her to a
more just state of being (Angha 5/12/2007). This student transitions to nafs lawwama,
which Schimmel calls “the blaming soul” that “warns [the student] at every step” (86).
Amineh illustrated the impact of nafs lawwama on her work life through her explanation
of her increased ability to stay in balance. She has learned to identify and avoid
following the impulse to “get angry”, although she might “really want to” do so, because
she can perceive the farther-reaching consequences of the action on her own stability and
on others. Nafs lawwama ensure that as the student heals one area of darkness within
herself the others that lie in wait will surface to her attention. The ongoing nature of the
purification process, which Sufis relate to removing one-by-one the many covers that veil
the heart, carefully sweeping away the dust that has settled over a masterpiece work, and
transmuting the common stone into pure gold, makes purification all the more challenging as the Sufi must remain strong, patient, and confident in her divinity even as she becomes aware of many more “leaden” traits within herself than she ever knew she carried.

Purification parallels any other discipline in Sufism as it calls for submission in love to the guidance of the inner heart. The Sufi uses meditation, deep prayer, intention, and awareness to foster her release of attachment to her negative nafs in order to allow divine qualities to emerge in their place. Soraya relates this process to, “the phoenix going into the fire and getting burned, completed burned away and rising up again through the ashes.” The Sufi, she says, enters into dark space where she sees her identification with ugly nafs that cut off the light of the Divine and “at one point [has] to give up; and it is in that giving up that [she] opens up to the possibility of guidance.” The fire of love kindled through the Sufi’s practice completely consumes her negative characteristics, engulfing them in its flames, so that a pure gem remains. The Sufi, however, does not enter into a state of “relaxation” but must remain aware even having come out the other side of purification as she continues to live as a human in the material world and therefore potentially susceptible to allurements of desire and the ego that can narrow her vision (Angha 1998d: 18).

The Sufi uses a set of “refined” practices and techniques in her process of purification that bring the “untrained nafs”, including the mind, under the rule of the heart. The Sufi uses the intentionality and logic of her mind to direct her energy towards her heart, but must silent its chatter and self-inflated directions in order enter into the expanse of the heart where submission occurs and love ignites (Hammerlee 1989: 43).
The poetry of Sufi Masters gives insight into the goals of meditation: “The human stepped out from the dust, a single point gathered all into its being,” writes Moulana Shah Maghsoud (Angha 1998a: 82). Rumi calls to the reader, “Why do you stay in prison/ when the door is so wide open?/ Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking./ Live in silence (Rumi 36). In addition, Rumi writes, “Love opens my chest and thought returns it to its confines” (47).

In Sufi meditation practices, and in the Uwayysi tradition in particular, the heart serves as the focal point of being in which the student seeks to gather all of her energy. The student transfers her presence from the busy life of the mind into the heart, and so steps out of the “dust” of impermanence and into the unchanging source of life. Love arises within the heart and opens the student to the experience of the expanse of the Divine within where she witnesses the “greater ‘I’.” Sufis relate this expanse of the heart and the beat of life within to an ocean with the power of its waves that break the confines of the sandy shore (Angha 1998a: 92). So too the Sufi who concentrates herself in the heart breaks beyond its restraining confines of the dense physical dimensions into the freedom of the spiritual heart. Conversely, loosing focused awareness within the heart cuts the student off from her connection to the Divine through her return to thought and distraction. The salek becomes enclosed again behind the bars of the limited “I” of the ego (Arife 2008).

The student gradually tames the mind through her continual practice, not by forsaking or eliminating the mind, but by aligning it with the wisdom of the heart for correct use an essential component within a whole and unified creation. Through concentration and meditation practices that flow into the moments of her every day life,
combined with prayer practiced periodically throughout the day, the student harmonizes the many elements of her *nafs* and converts them into “useful tools in service of God” and her relationship to God (Schimmel 113). The *nafs* no longer imprison the spirit under thick covers of ignorance and deception and the “breathe of the Divine” illuminates the purified heart.

**Annihilation into the Heart of Knowledge**

As one moves through the process of purification and the rays of divine knowledge begin to penetrate the veils of the *nafs*, the *salek* increases her understanding of spiritual truth as she comes to witness it within herself and to reflect it through her *nafs* (Soraya). Sufis say that the heart shines like a polished “mirror” that reveals the *salek*’s “beautiful face”, because by looking inward through the eye of the heart, the Sufi experiences in its fullness her stable identity as unified with God. Here, writes Dr. Angha, the “microcosm annihilates into the macrocosm, the veil of nature falls to reveal the unchanging essence, and Unity becomes manifest from behind the shimmering curtain of multiplicity” (Angha 1998d: 20). The word “annihilation” indicates destruction, obliteration, and death and so, its use to describe a supposedly desirable state may be alarming to many. However, in the Sufism, one lives for the first time only by stepping beyond the ego, which has only the partial and distorted vision of the self and existence, and into the reality of Divine knowledge (Newman 13). By experiencing Divine knowledge, one witnesses unity by dissolving into unity. The soul of the lover, like Rumi, “melts into meaning as sugar melts in water” (Rumi 55). Any other form of knowledge remains only in the theoretical or mental realm for the student.
Sufis place such importance on the attainment of Divine knowledge because of its permanent nature that stands in opposition to the temporary quality of knowledge acquired by the mind and senses. In recognizing Divinity, we recognize our “self.” Since Divine Knowledge does not exist apart from our selves, this knowledge does not fade or alter with time nor does it depart with physical death. The person who sees by the light within her heart carries this knowledge with her beyond any changes brought by time and in this way, secures her survival within the Divine after death. On the other hand, the individual retains mental knowledge to the extent that her memory keeps it fresh. As the incident that generated the memory moves into the past, fact becomes mixed with imagination and the memory morphs until she finds herself with only a hazy recollection of a once vivid mental scene. The individual may also loose acquired mental knowledge in an instant through an accident resulting in injury or death. Mental knowledge, like the mind, clearly plays a necessary and vital role in the healthy functioning of the human and the advancement of society (Newman 13). Uwaiysis do seek to make clear, however, the transience and limitation of this knowledge, which does not remain with the individual indefinitely and cannot open within her an understanding of the nature of Being at the source of existence.
The Sight of the Purified Heart: Emergence into a Unified Vision of the World

The one annihilated into the Divine within the purified heart emerges into life alive for the first time with a transformed vision of the world unified in its Divinity. She witnesses the face of the Divine everywhere she looks, whether it be directly into her own self or outwards into existence. Ibn I’Arabi, the thirteenth century Sufi Master, expresses this experience in words saturated with love:

*My heart has opened unto every form: it is a pasture for gazelles, a cloister for Christian monks, a temple for idols, the Ka’ba of the pilgrim, the tables of the Torah and the book of the Qur’an. I practice the religion of love in whatsoever direction its caravans advance; the religion of Love shall be my religion and my faith.* (Mijares)

The heart becomes the center for worship and every aspect of creation a cause for celebration. The heart purified into beauty only senses beauty and welcomes all within the Unity into its temple for prayer (Hammerle 2000: 47). While One Divinity underlies this creation, the seeing heart rejoices in the particularities of the unique manifestations of this Divinity. The *salek*’s immersion into Unity does not wash over difference and nullify the significance of diversity, therefore, but instead enables her to fully appreciate it as indispensable components within a complete creation.

The Sufi’s immersion into consciousness of Unity begins with the Self in that every cell and particle within the human becomes aware and alive to the reality of Unity of existence. The Sufi first expands into Unity through the magnetic center of the spiritual heart located within the physical heart. The Sufi soon begins to receive the powerful message of Unity throughout her body as it opens within the very “heart” of each of her cells. In this way, every cell, organ, and system in the body becomes
nourished by Divine light and restored to balance and health (Hammerle 2000: 57). The individual discovers then that the smallest particle to the universe in its entirety repeats the code of existence, La illaha ila Allah (Kianfar 1/2007). There is no God, but God. There is no existence but the Divine. There is no Real but the One. The heart of the individual becomes the Ka’aba in Mecca, the Cloister, the Qur’an, and the Torah in which echo in one unified voice all praises. Each cell in itself becomes a temple as well worthy of respectful presence and voices hushed in love or ringing with jubilation. Thus, the student who polishes the mirror of the heart and finds her illuminated face reflecting from its surface discovers the fact of Divine Unity evidenced throughout her Being.

Focusing outward through the lens of the heart, the individual witnesses this same Unity pervading the infinitude of creation. Arife Hammerle, who has practiced under the guidance of Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha for several decades, touched on Ibn l’Aribi’s experience of “open[ing] unto every form” during our interview. She said:

“I don’t see any separation between any of us anymore. So they’re all part of the whole, and that includes the planet, that includes the cosmos, the chair next to me, it’s everything and everywhere...we’re all in one family basically....I see different colors, but in all the different colors there’s one rainbow, truly, and one Flower, and one One. I just see Unity in the way I live.”

The individual who has not traveled path towards Unity may feel recognition within her heart of the wisdom underlying such a statement, yet can have no real perceptual understanding of its meaning. To the one operating within the dualistic framework of the egoic nafs the “chair”, for example, necessarily remains exterior and apart from the individual. “The planet” and “the cosmos” moreover can exist within the consciousness of this individual only as an abstract idea. Annihilation into Unity allows the human to
experience the whole Reality within one point in her being and without the illusion of separation created by distance.

The human becomes attuned in this way to Being in its entirety— one rainbow formed from an infinite spectrum of colors, without each of which the rainbow would not be. Just as with her cells, the human hears the melody of *La illaha ila Allah* recited by the coordination of the whole universe; Rumi describes this with the metaphor of the world’s harp. “We have fallen into a place,” he writes, “where everything is music” (46). The others senses too have their share in witnessing the Divine permeating the Whole as One and as particulars. Ezzeddin Nasafi, thirteenth century Sufi scholar, speaks of the “fragrance of love” that “saturates the universe” while the scent of *Rachman*, Divine Grace, reached the Prophet on the breeze from the heart of his purified disciple Uwaiys. In addition, the tongue tastes the sweetness of the Divine through lover’s kiss. This imagery runs throughout Rumi’s poetry, with its expressions of love for one man, Rumi’s teacher, Shams of Tabriz, who also represented Truth. According to Sufi Masters and poets, this love identified by all of the senses binds the universe together in its praise of the Unified Divine, keeps the planets on their axes, and brings the “stars... up spinning at night” (Angha 1998a: 98; Rumi 38; Kianfar 1/2007). The one consumed by love, annihilated into the unity of existence, invites the whole “caravan” into her heart that looks out onto the world and sees the image of the Divine reflected towards her from every direction.

The Uwaiyisis I interviewed provided valuable insight into the practical significance of the perception of Unity by an individual living within the multiplicity of the natural world on her appreciation for diversity. Jamal explained that, “difference can
become threatening or problematic” for the one who sees only through the lens of her ego. Without awareness of the thread of unity that ties humanity together within the spiritual heart, humans often knowingly and unknowingly place differences in the category of “dangerous outsiders” and create unnecessary tension and division based in illusion created by limited vision. Other the other hand, Glen Pascall remarked that when the individual observes multiplicity from the perspective found within the pure heart, he gains the freedom to “celebrate difference since each one is a unique expression of the absolute uniqueness of Unity.” The emphasis placed on the ultimate realization within the salek of the meaning of La ilaha ila Allah brings together the “diversity of beauty under the umbrella of Unity”, as Dr. Kianfar has said, as a complete and perfect whole. Sufism therefore, as the mystical underpinnings of Islam, provides its own unique pathway into understanding diversity that, according to Glen, “works in the direction of embracing all cultures, all people, and all contexts as part of the whole.”

Further, Sufism gives us tools to address negative qualities within the context of unity in a non-judgmental manner. As Glen suggested during our interview, and as the many psychotherapists at IAS incorporate into their practice, we can relate to destructive qualities exhibited by humans through the conceptualization of the nafs. The Sufi, or at least the Uwaiysi, understands most detrimental behavior exhibited by humans as the result of ignorance, rooted in absorption in the nafs that veil the Divine within the heart, and imbalance, also rooted in absorption in nafs that command the individual based on narrow-sighted desires and self-conceptions (Kianfar 6/2006). The nafs allow healers, such a spiritual masters and psychotherapists, to work with the individual from the standpoint of potential; Even the “soul commanded by evil”, nafs al-ammara, exists
within the Unity through the life of the Divine. But if the healer can work with the individual to develop the beginnings of awareness and make an inlet to connect with the heart, the individual can nurture the seed of positive qualities within the heart that can overcome the negative (Hammerle 2000: xiii).

From Vision to Action: The Purified Heart in Service to the Rights of “Being”

A sweeping social ethic naturally arises from the Uwaiysi path on which the salek awakens from the sleep of ignorance to a rapturous love for the Divine Unity that spills forth from existence. Dr. Angha writes in Sufi Women: The Journey Towards the Beloved, “The world bestows the gift of being on all...Divinity breathes through the heart of every cell; it is the knowledge of this truth that teaches us to honor all and ourselves remain honorable” (14). The Uwaiysi who becomes annihilated into truth does not simply know this fact with her mind and so have the informed option to choose to honor Being in all its manifestations. The Uwaiysi annihilated within the heart frees herself from the ego-will into servitude to the Whole. This service stems from the purified heart illuminated by love and leaves the Uwaiysi with no other realistic option than to honor the Divine through the totality of her life. The Uwaiysi grows into her full expression as a “reed pipe” through which God’s “breath blows” and so can play her unique note while acting as healing force for all of creation. Through her simple presence in the world she exudes Divine qualities that infuse light into humanity’s troubled darkness. In addition, the awareness that throbs in the Uwaiysi’s heart of the value and potential of the human being juxtaposed with her sensitivity to the pain within the unified existence causes many Uwaiysis, and Sufis in general, to actively pursue life callings to push civilization
forward to a full recognition of human and non-human rights and create the circumstances that allow human potential to come to full blossom. Individuals at IAS have pursued this vocation through a variety of professions, advocacy work, out-reach projects on individual and systemic levels and create ripple effects that extend far beyond the reaches of their personal communities to the greater world beyond.

Each of the Uwaiysis whom I interviewed for this project indicated that service arises from presence within the heart as opposed to identification with the limited “I” of the ego-self and is therefore inseparable from a moment-to-moment way of life. Through the lens of the heart, they explained, one witnesses the Divine Unity of creation and one’s place within the Unity. One remains anchored within this space within the heart through the concentrated force of love, which the Sufi in turn extends outward to the reflections of Unity saturating the creation that surrounds her. Love that takes the form of caring, compassion, empathy, wisdom, and understanding heals creation by returning it to a remembrance of its wholeness within Divinity. In this way, service becomes integrated into all facets of the Sufi’s life instead of categorized as discrete actions that have the outward appearance of service.

Jamal, Arife, and Soraya each explicitly pointed out that, service requires, as Arife said, an “emptiness of the ego self” that “has to keep happening.” “The minute I put myself in there, I get in the way. And then I can’t be in service”, she said. Identifying as “the do-er”, who “helps others” for “their benefit”, cuts one off from the source of service located in the heart because the individual has reverted to perceiving and acting from the framework of multiplicity within the mind. One who serves from the heart, when annihilated into the knowledge of Unity and the meaning of La illaha ila
*Allah* does not serve for the benefit of an external other. She serves without the expectation of getting anything back because in serving creation as the manifestations of the Divine and serving the source of being that “breathes through the heart of every cell” within creation she in fact, serves herself. The Sufi who resides in the presence of her heart becomes conscious of her connection to the whole of existence and so cannot divorce herself from the pain and darkness that abides within the creation. Dr. Kianfar writes the following in a 2004 article titled “Reflections on Peace”:

“If anyone, in any spot on this planet, is in pain, the others should also be in pain. Even if we do not feel the pain of the others due to our ignorance and ego, the truth is that good and bad energy affects everyone according to the rule of the whole. If one part of our body is in pain, the whole of our body suffers. If one part of humanity is suffering, the whole of humanity suffers.”

Service becomes a lifestyle, then, of intentionality and purpose rooted in the awareness of the heart. Service reflects itself as a continuous state of prayer in which the heart in service to the Divine spreads light into creation. Such a heart fundamentally serves not just an “other” but one’s own self.

Service colors even the smallest actions of the purified individual and also transforms the nature of her life’s work on a larger scale. At a Sufi gathering at IAS, Dr. Kianfar once told his students a story that illustrates the extent awareness reaches as well as the compassion that results. Dr. Kianfar described a time when he was working at the desk in his office and upon looking out his window into his garden, saw a beautiful rose opening to the world. He decided to cut the rose in order to have it near him in his office where he could look at it closely and smell its scent while he worked. When he approached the rose with shears to cut it, however, he could not complete the act. As he explained why, Dr. Kianfar touched his arm and hand and said that he could anticipate
the pain the rose would feel upon cutting it. Instead of cutting the rose so that he could have it near him, he decided to enjoy it from his window as it lived and grew within the garden. Such empathy harks back to Uwaiys-i-Qarani’s example in which Uwaiys could feel his teacher’s physical pain after the Prophet’s opponents threw rocks at the Prophet that knocked his teeth out. Uwaiys demonstrated solidarity with his master that bridged the material and the spiritual dimensions by removing his own teeth. Thus, through the heart we come to “accept the pain of [our] neighbor as [our] own pain” and we expand our understanding of neighbor far beyond those people who live immediately next to us to include all of Being (Kianfar 2004: 3). “We’re all in one family basically,” said Arife during our interview, embracing within this statement “the planet”, “the cosmos”, humanity, and even “the chair next to [her].” Service, therefore, flows from the purified heart through the most subtle actions—than man who stops with his shears before a rose—to ones more pronounced and recognizable as service to people at all levels of spiritual sight because this heart can recognize and honor Being in all of its forms.

The call to service also underlies and directs the focus of the lives of committed Uwaiysis and finds expression according to the unique skills, qualities, talents, and interests of the individual. Arife, Amineh, and Jamal, for example, each work as psychotherapists and incorporate their knowledge of the value and potential of the human being into their practices as part of a holistic approach to healing. Amineh works with individuals living in poverty, many of whom have substance abuse issues and suffer from mental illness. Using the framework of the nafs, Amineh can relate to her clients beyond the labels for dysfunctions applied widely within Western psychiatry and view them in the non-judgmental light of their positive qualities which they may foster and use to
transform. Jamal, likewise, spoke during our interview of the experience as a psychotherapist of “sitting face to face with another human being who wants to find himself.” By finding himself through presence within the heart Jamal hopes to “potentially become a mirror” that will help his clients to see themselves clearly. In this way, Jamal plays a parallel role to his Sufi teachers who reflect to Jamal his own being in order to help him improve and grow on his spiritual path. Arife, in addition, spoke to the energetic bond that she forms with her clients which allows her to act as a healing agent. This connection stems, again, from presence in the heart that opens up space for God to reside within and through it, she holds the “whole person”, body, mind, and spirit”, “all the way back to their own origin” in the Divine. Arife, Amineh, and Jamal each describe a practice of heart-based service through which they help return their clients to wholeness by generating awareness within their clients of their “self” as Divine in origin. They help their clients nurture the positive qualities that constitute their true nature as opposed the acquired and unstable negative characteristics of the lower-level nafs.

Sheikh Salman too brings his vision of human potential to his approach to his work in social services with juvenile delinquents. He coaches young people who are often “rude and disrespectful” and lack a sense of appreciation for the gifts in their lives. Sheikh Salman applies stories and messages of spiritual figures such as Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar, as well as Mohandes Gandhi, to teach the youth that they have the power to change and that change begins “now.” Sheikh Salman seeks to help the youth shift into a positive outlook based in appreciation that will foster this change. The youth, for instance, can “step into the classroom” in juvenile hall and “value the little education” they receive as well as recognize that they benefit from the shelter that comes with their
incarceration that prevents them from resorting to sleeping on the streets. In addition, Sheikh Salman teaches the youth to recognize and value their own worth. To the young girls who have become prostitutes, he tries convey the message that their “body is sacred.” To the men pulled into detention for selling drugs, he hopes to communicate that they were “not born into this world to sell dope.” These young men and women, instead, “have the capacity within [them] for greatness.” Among these Sufis, Sheikh Salman, Amineh, Arife, and Jamal, one can see a pattern in which they each have taken on a commitment to service in their lives that centers on helping the individual achieve her full potential as a human being. The knowledge they have discovered within their hearts as saleks on a spiritual path provides the vision and the drive that motivates their work at its core.

Uwaiysis also exemplify service in their work through broader outreach efforts in the form of publications, workshops, advocacy and projects that have notable impacts from the community to the global level. Glen Pascall, for one, has increasingly targeted his work towards “projects that are directly spiritual and projects that address the future of the human race and the planet” over and above those that simply contribute to the operation of the “current economic system”. To this end, he and another Uwaiysi Sufi student recently compiled a series of quotations taken from Dr. Kianfar’s teachings to create *Seasons of the Soul*. The book gives the reader one saying to focus on throughout her day every day and orders the sayings thematically so that the reader may develop an awareness and understanding within her heart of important spiritual concepts. The sayings remain open to individuals eager to grow regardless of their creed as the sayings do not require any statement of belief but only a willingness to seek the light of belief.
within. Glenn balances his promotion of humanity’s spiritual development with those concerned with securing the ongoing possibility of thriving human life on the planet. Currently, Glen is collaborating with a “delightful group of colleagues” to “[accelerate] the pace at which the transportation system moves away from carbon-based fuels” and increasing use of “alternative fuels”. Human use of carbon-based has spurred climate change and the destructive consequences it entails and so, projects like these that aim to significantly reduce carbon consumption can “really help prolong the life of the planet.”

Glen has always responded to the call within him to work for justice, but over the course of his journey on the Sufi path this calling has intensified such that he has sifted out other foci in which he cannot at this point find deep meaning.

The individuals within IAS also bind together in their service to project a unified and far-reaching voice in support of the rights of Being and human potential and to combine their skill sets and specialized knowledge within their fields to formulate innovative approaches to solving complex issues. The Sufism and Psychology Forum, for example, does just this by bringing Sufis together from around the world and across orders with the purpose of linking Sufi wisdom with psychological research, theory, and practice to refine and advance clinical modes of healing (IAS Departments). The forum holds seminars, lectures, and meetings on particular aspects of Sufi psychology, maintains a flow of communication between its members through its email list serve and web bulletin, and strives to effectively disseminate its findings through quarterly newsletters and publishing books. Humanitarian work in the Uwayysi order takes on many other forms, including protecting and advancing women’s rights and sharing the diverse contributions of Sufi women to society through IAS’ Sufi Women Organization,
encouraging youth to probe life’s existential questions and develop an ethical sense through Sufi Youth International, and also leading meditation classes and substance abuse education workshops for prisoners, and participating in letter exchanges as well as collaborative efforts to bring college level education to inmates all through the IAS Prison Project (IAS Projects). Also, Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar have worked consistently over the years to unravel the stereotypes that blur society’s vision of various world religions and prevent honest communication from occurring between them. The place high importance on interfaith dialogue because of their understanding of the peaceful message affirming the value of life that strings together these religions and thereby makes them potential catalysts for powerful positive change if their members can work harmoniously with one another. Uwaiysis reach out in many ways across social categories and boundaries to break down the veils of ignorance and darkness that prevent humans from witnessing the light that resides within them and that connects them to the whole of creation.

Finally, Uwaiysis’ pursuit of the arts as a means of expressing the ineffable and drawing the audience closer to the source of meaning and beauty within themselves is a form of service. Glen Pascall pointed out in our interview that the centrality of the arts in Islam dates back to Imam Ali (Amir Al-Moumenin Ali), who encouraged craftsmanship and musicianship. Imam Ali has had a particularly strong influence on the Uwaiysi order, which continues to live on through the artistic sensitivities of the order’s members. Soraya, as described earlier in this paper, has delved into the arts as a singer in Taneen and also through her budding career as a painter. Like the psychotherapists at IAS, Soraya’s work as an artist serves as a healing force for those who experience it. Soraya’s
song arises from her center, clearing out her ego and transforming her into a "medium" for the Divine breath. This breath in turn draws her audience members back to their own center, according to the reports of many of Soraya's listeners, and one woman even remarked after the performance that she felt like "all of [her] cells had been rejuvenated."

Five other Uwaiysis, men and women, bring their own melody to Taneen and other members of IAS have their own artistic practices such as photography or interior design, which they may share for the benefit of the Sufi group or society at large. Glen calls beauty an entryway for gratitude, a state of heart that can transform the student on the path and open any individual up to the wonder of living. Artistic expression kindled in the awakened heart can open others up to the beauty reflected in creation and within themselves and therefore is an important form of service.

Rumi writes, "God picks up the reed-flute world and blows./ Each note is a need coming through us,/ a passion, a longing-pain./ Remember the lips where the wind breathe originated, and let your note be clear." "Sing loud!" he calls (47). The rare Sufi who has uncovered her purified heart behind the veils of multiplicity and has become annihilated into knowledge follows the deep longing within their heart towards Unity, which creates the passage for the Divine breath to flow. Their notes sound out to all of creation as a reminder of its Divine origin and a call to return home. The Sufi thereby serves as a healing force simply through her presence that embodies the Divine qualities as well as through her active engagement in endeavors promoting recognition of the rights inherent to being. A look at the Uwaiysis at IAS provides insight into the diversity of directions such work can and must take in this multifaceted world in which we live and speaks to the powerful peaceful influence spiritual people can exert on our world.
Uwaiysis work to create true solutions to many of our world’s problems by addressing the key issue of ignorance at their root from the perspective of Unity that resounds within the reed flute’s call.
Conclusion

This paper has provided an outline of the Uwaiysi Sufi order, as a particular school under the umbrella of Sufism as the mystical dimension of Islam. For the Uwaiysi, the heart plays the most central role within the human who seeks to elevate herself to her full potential. The heart serves as the locus of spirituality within the human and the Uwaiysi must travel to its depths in order to see the reflection of her true identity as inseparable from the Divine Unity of creation. This journey requires first finding a genuine teacher who has made the journey to knowledge in advance and understands the rules of Being with which the student must harmonize herself to make progress. A genuine teacher acts as a clear lens that brings the Divine into focus for the student; the teacher must not place his own ego between the student and the Divine and so inhibit her reception of the light of knowledge. After finding her teacher, who is uniquely suited to her, the student must learn to align herself with the heart of her teacher in order to receive the meanings beneath the teachings. This process requires the disciplined following of the practices and teachings outlined by the Sufi Master and critically, love must motivate this discipline in order to assure the student reaches her final destination of union with the Divine.

Purification goes hand in hand with the process of alignment in the student-teacher relationship and continues until the student has completely transformed the leaden qualities of the *nafs* into gold. At this point, the student can witness the Divine light within the center of her heart and receive knowledge of the nature of the self, God, and the unity of existence. She receives this knowledge not through the mechanism of
the mind but as an experience of "annihilation" within the realm of the heart.

Annihilation refers to the Sufi’s shift out of the framework of multiplicity within the mind into a unified vision through which she can perceive the many colors, sounds, and tastes within creation with that heart that senses the One Divinity that underlies all difference. This transforms the Sufi’s outlook on the world and makes her fully able to appreciate diversity as the beautiful and creative reflections of the Divine. She can recognize and honor the rights of all aspects of life to “Be” as each contains its share of God.

The annihilation of the Sufi into knowledge coincides with her initiation as a servant of the Divine where she accepts the pain of others as her own. The Sufi has achieved a full awareness that makes it impossible for to claim a state of peace within the Divine while ignoring the suffering of the rest of creation. In this way, she comes to “play her note” loudly and clearly that calls humanity to rise to an embodiment of its essential nature that resides beyond the curtains of the ego nafs and within the illuminated heart. The Sufi brings light into creation simply through her being and through her mode of living may help rearrange the systems that perpetuate darkness, pain, and despair among humans and infuse them with characteristics that engender hope and spur progress. Uwaiysis, as the particular focus of this paper, in many ways contribute to the advancement of human society to foster justice, friendship, communication, and appreciation for the rights of being.

I have also intertwined within this paper my personal story as an individual who desires to know herself and understand the source behind the beauty she finds apparent throughout creation. In my understanding, Uwaiysi Sufism offers the tools for humans to
discover the meaning of their existence on Earth so that each moment becomes a precious gift in which we can experience profound love and draw closer to the Divine within ourselves. For the one who has the fortune to find a teacher, whether physical or as guidance found directly within the heart, Sufism lays out a path on which we can come to say, “I am” with the confidence of the heart seated in the wellsprings of life. We regain the knowledge of our worth that makes us sing with such poignancy the song of the reed flute that tells the world the story of its Divine origins. We become healers for humanity who take the most for ourselves only by humbling ourselves to serve the existence as a Whole and in its particular manifestations. I believe that we as a race have much to gain, especially now, from the knowledge of the Uwaiysis who learn to value themselves and creation heartbeat by heartbeat.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the many people who made this thesis possible through the support, encouragement, inspiration and direction they have provided me along the way.

I am deeply appreciative of my thesis advisor, Steve Hopkins, who has unfailingly served as a source of critical insight into my research, writing, and planning processes while supporting my work on a topic in which I have a dear personal investment. I value Steve’s input as both an academic mentor and friend.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my teachers, Dr. Angha and Dr. Kianfar, who have taught me to seek my self in the purified mirror of the heart and from whose wisdom and generosity this work has arisen.

The whole Sufi community at the International Association of Sufism has provided the impetus for this work, as the members of this community exemplify the potentiality within the human to become the “reed flute” through which God blows of which Rumi poeticizes. I would like to thank, in particular, Soraya Chase Clow, Jeff McCullough, Jamal Granick, Sheikh Salman Baruti, Arife Hammerle, and Amineh Pryor for sharing their experiences and reflections with me as students on the mystical path and for readily answering follow up questions that arose after our interviews. In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to Halima Haymaker who has provided quick and thoughtful replies to my inquiries regarding the Uwaiysi Order over the course of this project. Halima also has helped me remember to stay balanced and attend to myself even in the midst of a highly demanding academic life.

Finally I would like to thank my friends and family who have had open ears, open hearts, and open arms for me as I have progressed through the joys and trials of writing my first thesis. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my mother, Mary Hendrickson, for her loyal friendship and intelligent advice. I would like to thank my best friend, Diego García Montufar, for always相信ing in my abilities, reminding me to stay positive, and making me laugh. I offer thanks to Mark Dlugash for his editing advice and always-encouraging smile. Sasha Grenier, Anna Grant, Lucy VanEssen-Fishman, and many others have each brightened my semester in their own unique way through their warmth and love.

Finally, I express my gratitude for the gift of “being” in itself and the opportunity to overcome my weaknesses and build upon my talents and skills through this thesis so as to come closer to an understanding of the meaning of my humanity.
Appendix A

Phone Interview  
Date: March 28, 2008  
Interviewee: Arife Ellen Hammerle (AR)  
Interviewer: Ashley Werner (AS)  
Formatting note: Ellipses used where sound recording was inaudible.

AS: In one of Moulana Shah Maghsoud’s books, *Psalms of Gods*, Dr. Angha writes that the path of the mystic is the most difficult path ever taken by mankind. But then at the same time Dr. Kianfar stresses the fact that this is the straight way and that therefore it’s the easiest one if we can learn how to put ourselves in alignment with this straight way. In your experience, how do you understand these statements of this path being a difficult path, and the most demanding, but also in a sense easy or natural?

AR: I think that the path is a natural process that returns us to our origin, which is the original light of God and in that sense its... we’ve lost sight of it, we’ve become veiled from that essence, and so unfortunately what requires a lot of effortfulness is more removing the veil, healing what has happened to us over the years of our lives and also developing discipline in terms of being able to keep walking on the path. And actually for me the process of transformation is a continuous deepening process. It’s a... constancy of moving forward if you will, but it’s quite circular in its evolution or evolvement.

So, I think the straightway is the best because you keep moving, you keep growing, you keep transforming. And that’s where the *Ayatol Khorsi*\(^1\) comes in- it is the straightway that facilitates the path. I think the path of the mystic is quite difficult because in Sufism the challenge is how to stay on the path and also that we don’t go to the monastery physically away from life so its very challenging to stay engaged in our work, in our lives, and allow that to somehow facilitate our transformative process rather than interfere with it or slow it down. And that’s the challenge.

I think the mystical process is also challenging, because we continuously have to confront our *nafs*. And even though we heal certain *nafs* there are other ones that come {chuckle}, that become clearer through that process. So, it’s difficult in that regard and somewhat painful at times. But I try to hold that in a positive frame as part of the healing process of the mystical path. I’m not sure if I answered your question.

AS: Yes. You did. That was a multi-faceted answer. I appreciate that. The next thing I was going to ask you comes straight from a quote in your book that you wrote about addiction. You wrote, “addictions are particularly painful because we suffer from a loss of control over ourselves and our lives” and essentially that it makes us a closed system

\(^1\) The *Ayatol Korsi*, Sura II, 255-257 of the Qur’an, translates to “the Verses of the Throne” (Newman ix).
and it cuts us off from our selves. And being a closed system we collapse internally... There are a lot of questions here. One is that often when we say “addiction” we think of its most obvious manifestations. In terms of smoking or drinking. But how [might your understanding of addiction] be something that can be subtler or more pervasive. I think of it too in terms of how Dr. Kianfar has said it, in that “our biggest addiction is to our mind.” So what does that mean and how does that really influence our lives if being a closed system in addiction can cut us off from our source?

AR: Yes. Well any closed system tends to stay locked within its negative dynamic or illness unfortunately. So that’s the helpfulness of the teacher to open the system back up, to help facilitate that process. But I do mean addiction in its broader sense, so I don’t mean just alcohol, tobacco-- the big ones that are used more. Like Dr. Kianfar said, addiction, I ...than to the mind. Most of us get so caught in the thinking, the intellectualization, the rationale of this and that that it actually prevents us from insight, from knowledge, from seeing through a different a different eye or lens.

And that’s one of the beautiful things of Sufism that shifting into heart allows you to actually find another lens to see through. And if we develop that capacity to see through another lens then it helps open the system back up and it can make an opportunity to heal in a different way those addictions and not just get caught in blame and be able to transcend that, the struggle that we are caught in.

And that’s actually what I think of going to the root of problems; Dr. Kianfar has often talked about that. When you start down your meditation or you start down some path and you start going astray, you go all the way back again to the root. You start all over right? It’s the same with the addiction, with getting lost in our suffering or our pain or the problem or whatever it is. It’s how do I go back to the origin of it and heal from that point or take action from that point.

AS: When I hear [Dr. Kianfar] say that to go back to the origin of the point, I sometimes have a hard time understanding of how he means to do that. Are you saying to go back to that point as a space in you heart rather than as something we’ve been dealing with intellectually in our mind?

AR: Yeah. It depends on what the issue is to me. If it’s a psychological issue it may require going back to the root of when it started growing. For me as a therapist, this may mean looking at some childhood stuff or trauma or some early point that something happened, that something started. Because if you can get back to that first if you will, often we can heal from that place, and that’s the deeper healing that needs to happen for the person to continue forward.

But if it is mind, if it is blame, if its some other part of us, and we’re just ...people spin a lot in our heads, they...on a thought or a pain or a problem. Working with that from its source. What is the origin of that thought and that process in the blame that’s going on for that person? So some of it requires going back to heart but it depends on what the problem is really. You have to figure out how to diagnose it.
AS: How widespread do you see this application [of the problem of addiction]?... How does this relate to the general person in broader society and how might [addiction] affect their quality of life?...

AR: Yes. It’s a strong word. Do you think it applies to the everyday person?

AS: I suppose I’m just asking a leading question. [I’m interested in] how we might not be living at our full state of being, how we might be used to standards of judging the world... and filtering... through the lens of our mind which might not allow us to live at our full level of being in touch with joy or being in touch with the appreciation for life that exists in the heart.

AR: I think of it that Sufi teachings and practices are applicable to every person. I think its fundamental to really becoming a human being. And that’s the meaning of life for me, engaging very deeply in that process of achieving that. And so in that sense I see it as applicable to anyone and everyone. Now, I’ve worked with enough people over the years to see that some people have a harder time even trying to understand how their... not fitting or how they’re not living a life of joy. They think that... they are so caught in their images. So for those people while I think they can go without directly adjusting that for them, it can open them to a new experience if you just work with them and sit with them and teach them breathing skills and meditation practices or heart beat techniques that Sufis use. And you start to see this very gradual shift in them that they slowly become aware of to, like they start feeling better or they start feeling more peaceful or they start becoming more aware of the appreciation or even of who they are, of themselves. So those people, if they are kind of blind or in their images or...there’s still a way to introduce the Sufi teachings and principles and practices in a way that they can transform. Even in not as conscious a state as maybe you or I, but it still has that shift.... You know it helps them and they see that. And it’s really interesting once they start seeing then they want to see more. Then they want to know more or they want to deepen their transformation. I see it as a process available for anyone; any human being could access it.

AS: Part of my paper I describe the role of the heart in Sufism and how its not only a physical organ it’s a spiritual organ. So when this is happening the person is essentially transforming from a closed system that was stuck in some sort of loop to an open system. How does that relate to what is actually going on with the heart? How would you describe that?

AR: The spiritual heart or the physical heart?

AS: Either one. However you want to answer.

AR: I see the heart as the center of life. It’s the organ that gives us life and that gives us our happiness as well, its source. Its the most powerful center of our being and in that center resides the spiritual heart which gives the light of knowledge. It’s the container,
it's the vessel, it's the...I don't know, I hate to use that...language confines a bit. But the heart as the spiritual organ is the passageway to opening, to inner witnessing, and to the healing process and the ...process. When we can actually sit in silence and connect to the rhythm of the heartbeat, it's such an incredible connection that then can lead us to the Divine. That it opens our eyes in a new way, our ears in a new way, and you actually see the world differently. And that's the opening of the system, that's awareness, that's inner knowledge if you will. So the heart is very fundamental.

Actually I’ve been writing more again about something I’m calling heartfullness. I’m juxtaposing it to mindfulness because really the essence of transformation for me is heartfullness is the capacity to cultivate that inner witnessing of that light that is within us. And once we can see the light of it enough that it’s the lens, which guides us in all that we’re doing in life, then everywhere we go we can share that with others. And I think that’s the source of compassion, and care, and service, growing out of that intentionality and presence within our hearts. And that’s my life’s work. I mean I’m a therapist and I run a program in social services working with HIV positive moms and kids so that’s how I live that experience through my day-to-day work. So it’s very integrated for me- I don’t have to turn it off. It can just be. I try to have it guide me through the stressful moments of running a program or coordinating things. It’s hard to do but as stable as I can hold I know that it helps me, it guides me through those moments.

And then, we haven’t talked about the breath, but the breath is such a powerful vehicle to help you hold that constancy within the heart. So it becomes very powerful that connection between breath and heart, heartbeat. ...that rhythm. So, the spiritual heart is fundamental to the transformative process of a Sufi.

AS: That connected to a lot of the questions I want to ask you in really great ways. One of the things I was going to ask is about this concept of becoming a servant. And Moulana Shah Maghsoud writes, “The rule in undertaking and beginning such an infinite journey is to become a servant, a true servant of God. But who may serve God and what does he serve?” Dr. Angha follows this saying that according to the Prophet serving the Divine is the greatest honor for mankind and I guess you just related serving to the sense of presence and being in your heart and being able to share that with others and it is a healing process. But can describe what to you it means to serve, with this concept of serving God, and how might this meaning have changed for you or evolved?

AR: To me service flows out of the heart. That’s the source of service, so when we can attain to a place of awareness and connection to God, it just becomes a part of that connection. It’s hard to put into words. It flows naturally from that awareness. I was having a conversation with someone yesterday about her service and she was very disappointed in what she was receiving back. For me, I do not have the intention of receiving anything back. The giving is an honor...It’s hard to describe. I’m trying to find the words. Its kind of a gift that’s given through God if you will to be able to do service or be in service because actually being in service helps one remain stable and concentrate our work. It actually frees us from a lot of distractions of life if we’re in service
throughout our moments, throughout what we’re doing in our daily life. The monk in the monastery is the Sufi in daily life, then, because it’s not separate. Its part of our essence, service. That’s part of our connection with the Divine its all One. So I can’t separate it out into getting something back.

AS: This makes me think of a couple things that I connect. One is how Dr. Kianfar talks about becoming the “reed pipe”, that you are the container for that wind to flow through that makes the beautiful sounds and about Dr. Angha in talking about concepts of becoming alive or annihilation says that annihilation is not disappearance or fully loosing yourself, but its being able to say, “I am” or fully becoming. It might be a difficult concept to describe because it’s coming from that center of our heart, and its maybe not just us that are acting but it’s also that gift that we’re being given.

AR: Yes. Definitely. When we’re able to empty ourselves enough from ourselves, our smaller self, the egoic self, then there is a space in there that’s created and that’s God’s residence. And then he, he/she, can echo forth from that place, from that source, from that seat, “I am.” In that moment, its not I “me”, it’s the greater “I.” But there is an emptiness of the ego self at some point that has to keep happening, because the minute I put myself in there, I get in the way. And then, I can’t be in service at that point. It doesn’t work.

AS: Could you talk a little bit about how this relates to the work you do and how acting out of this spot that is in the heart versus maybe one that’s in your ego would give a totally different thing to the client that you’re working with?

AR: Oh yeah. When you work from your heart as a therapist and in social services, it’s a different orientation so that actually you become more of a healer so that the energy that is created in you also flows to the client... so that hopefully there’s a connection between the therapist and the client through that presence, through the intentionality of holding God within us. That energy is very healing in and of itself. And also the relational process that develops and the therapeutic work allow the connection to deepen the work in a more healing way than other psychotherapy, standard psychotherapy facilitates. We hold the body, mind and spirit. We hold the whole person. We hold them very deeply, so much so all the way back to their own origin, which is that light. Right? We’re witnessing this process with the client in a very deep way. The heartbeat, it’s actually easier for me in a psychotherapy office to stay in this concentrated form if you will.

It’s harder when I’m day to day running a program because there is so much thrown at me that can disrupt that stability. And concentration, because concentration is fundamental to the stability and the challenge for me is not getting pulled off my center in those moments when I’m being challenged when I’m either moving, or when I’m confronting the way I’ve done something. How do I hold myself and remain in my spiritual presence while also responding to the intensity of what’s going on? It’s a challenge. It’s a good challenge because it constantly reminds me that I don’t want to loose my center of stability and I find that I work two different jobs because one is actually easier for me to remain that constancy in and the other challenges me to make
sure I don’t lose it. They actually provide a balance for me that way. So, fortunately I work in social services, which is kind of a natural flow in terms of being a student of the mystical path of Sufism.

I did practice law for a while and it was quite heady and intellectual and I really enjoyed that but at that point I was also a new and young student and it was very challenging to sort out how to stay, how to breathe, how to even concentrate energy at that point and provide that service, legal service.

It’s hard and all the work we do, it shouldn’t really matter what field we’re in. We should be able to hold that I think. And it was a challenge for me as a lawyer, so hopefully I...over the years. I’ve been practicing that for a long time as a student of Sufism...it’s a process.

AS: At one point and how were you initially drawn to Sufism?

AR: I’ll shorten the answer. When I was very young, I was trying to understanding what, who this God was and what ... meant. I was in Catholic school early on in my life and I would ask the nuns to try to understand the meaning of faith. I didn’t understand how one could just hold faith without knowing God, without seeing this thing called God at that point in my life.

So a lot of my young years were searching for the answers to these questions that no one could really answer for me. So I would just keep returning to it. I would go with a lot of my friends- I live in New York so there was a lot of different religions - and I would go with them to their churches and their mosques and their different religions and try to learn what they were teaching to. So it was very helpful, kind of an exploratory phase.

Finally I ended up meeting Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha at Soraya’s wedding, and felt their presence and was very drawn trying to understand what mystical teachings, how they could help with my quest. A few years after that I ended up in California and I went and met with Dr. Kianfar and felt very deeply connected. That here was a person who was a true human being and had walked down a path and that I could trust and be guided by that light. Then I might Dr. Angha and felt the same way so I started practicing and became a student of theirs, I don’t know, 24 years ago whenever it was. And here I am. Yes. It’s quite a process though and there is more to it. But it’s been a lifelong search and sometimes I just say “Oh I’ve bee a Sufi forever” but there’s more to that answer.

AS: Let’s see. Can you speak about how specifically progressing on the path...I had a great conversation with Dr. Kianfar when I was trying to decide where to go with this paper and he talked about self knowledge and about how having a greater sense of Unity gives us a much deeper appreciation for diversity because we can see it as all the different manifestations of ...having a share in the whole. And that that knowledge is healing for the world because we live in a world that is prejudice and racist, and we often live by judging other people, dividing them, and categorizing them as good or bad in different ways. So I’m wondering how you progress and self-knowledge has helped you
understand the value of other people and the rest of creation and how its led you to a
greater understanding of their potential or their true nature.

AR: Unity has led me to...I don’t see any separation between any of us anymore. So
they’re all part of the whole, and that includes the planet, that includes the cosmos, the
chair next to me, its everything and everywhere and so, I’ve come to openly embrace any
other person as if they’re my.... we’re all in one family basically. I don’t know. I don’t
see a separation though. I see different colors, but in all the different colors there’s one
rainbow, truly. And one flower, and one One. I just see Unity in the way I live.

I do think it has increased, capital “S” Self-Knowledge. It facilitates that. Because at
some point it’s true, we become part of the Unity. It’s like the drop in the ocean. When
you become the ocean its all one. And that’s the same with the human family, and the
cosmic family. We’re all part of the process; the Whole and we all have that potential to
join in the wholeness. Every person has that seed as Dr. Kianfar teaches us. If we can
find the seed and nurture it, it will grow. That’s the beauty of Sufism. It teaches us
practices and principles that will facilitate that growth, I think.

Unity is quite profound though. It’s a quite profound state. In my dissertation I tried to
correlate individual Sufi students’ experience of unity with Maslow’s work. Maslow has
that hierarchy of meaning and the top one was unity and peak experiences, so I tried to
understand if there was a correlation between the Sufi students’ experience of Unity and
unitive peak experiences in the psychological realm. It is fascinating and I think Unity, if
anyone ever has the capacity to witness it, it is quite amazing. It does bring us all
together as Dr. Kianfar.... If we could all find that we wouldn’t have prejudice and
discrimination and so much of the injustice in this world. It wouldn’t occur. It would
cease. I mean I don’t know why it is that we can’t all come together {laughs}, actually. I
don’t really understand why we’re all so divided, but that’s me.

AS: We have touched on a lot of what I wanted to ask you. I think I will just go back to
this question of wisdom. Dr. Kianfar has said that the “wise person is the one who takes
the best of every moment of life and that learning to use your wisdom is learning to look
down to the end of the line for the consequences of your action before taking the action
and that you’re not always going to know what those consequences are but you learn as a
student to be very cautious and careful before taking your actions. I’m wondering how
this was a process for you of learning to use your wisdom and if over the years [of your
practice] you [now] relate to this concept of wisdom, in taking care in each of your
actions maybe very differently from when you first started the path.

AR: Oh yeah. Definitely a change from I first started the path. {laughs loudly}. It’s kind
of scary actually.... Yes, there’s a lot more in terms of being careful. I don’t know if
that’s putting it the right way- really being clear about intentionality before action and
aligning the intentionality in the heart so that the action becomes rightful, becomes
positive. So there’s a whole synchronization that we really kind of talked about, that
energetically the synchronization from the heart of the student to the heart of the teacher
to the wisdom of the prophet as reflected through the teachings in the Qur’an, that
wisdom of all of that process is an alignment that is the grace of unity, if you will, in that. And the La illaha ila Allah of the Unity is the integration of the wisdom and you can experience that in one heartbeat- condense it all to that one point. And that’s the cultivation of the seed of knowledge. And for me, being able to find the Divine wisdom and carry it forward in those moments through the right action, that’s when it works, when it comes together. It is the wisdom of God and the teachers that’s guiding, that light that’s guiding me as a student, and I’m deeply appreciative of that. It’s very humbling to witness that grace and the gift. I treasure my life. I don’t think I was always able to do that- to hold life in that way or myself in that way. I deeply appreciate that and the message of La illaha ila Allah. If one can actually explain that heartbeat that unity, it’s amazing. That breathe of light is powerful.

But I wanted to backtrack for just one second. I forgot to say something about faith that I was trying to say when I was searching as a young person. That’s something that Dr. Kianfar beautifully teaches about the meaning of faith and the meaning of religion. It was one of those eye opening moments for me when I had spent so much of my life searching for the meaning and people kept telling me “you just have to believe, you just have to believe” and Dr. Kianfar told me, “you believe by seeing, you believe by witnessing the...of God. It’s that that leads to faith. And once that has been... or the confidence of sight, it increases the faith. And increasing the faith helps you travel down the path. It guides me through the process and through the difficult moments, through the darkness as well. When I get consumed by nafs and the darkness. It helps get me back out of that. Anyways, the faith thing is important. I really appreciated how he teaches that.

AS: Yes. I know. I think it is a beautiful teaching and it really flips religion on its head...it gives an alternate view of the human being that we’re not just here to take a message from somebody else about what the truth is. You have truth when you find it yourself and then it can be your guiding force.

AR: Exactly. Hopefully that answered some of your questions and I’d be happy to answer any more as they come up. I’m available.
Appendix B

Phone Interview
Date: April 2, 2008
Interviewee: Glen Pascall (G)
Interviewer: Ashley Werner (A)

A: Hi. Can you hear me?

G: Hi. Yes.

A: Perfect...

G: I’ll start out by telling you about the area that I work in, because I think it’s different from anybody else in the circle. I am basically in journalism and public policy work and I have taught at 4 universities public policy courses and I have written for 4 different newspapers and I’m currently the economics columnist for a business journal in Seattle. So my work is applying Sufi principles of service and justice to political and economic and public policy dilemmas. So that’s my professional life.

A: That’s really interesting. I was just thinking of how I read this great article by you on "Hope in a Time of World Crisis" or something like that, I think I mentioned it in my message. And it documented generally your interactions with other faiths and how spiritually they influenced you. So how has your work transformed since you found Dr. Kianfar? I think that was 7 or 8 years ago? Because it seems like you have been on this spiritual path for most of your life.

G: Right. I think I met him in October 2000. Well, I would say this. Social justice has always been something I’ve cared a great deal about to the extent that I’ve brought my spiritual life into my professional life. Social justice has always been a focal point in terms of economic equity, equal treatment, economic opportunity. I’ve always been concerned when I saw situations where those things were lacking. And where Sufism fits so beautifully into this, you’ve already touched on one of the points and think there’s another one that Dr. Kianfar has talked to me about quite a bit lately...A key message of Islam and it seems to be in a way more sweeping and more complete on this point than Judaism and Christianity. There are other religions like Hinduism that are relatively complete on this point, and that is the notion of Unity. That everything is not only of God and in a sense part of God. And there’s nothing outside of God. And of course we rebel against that idea when we first hear it because there are things we consider evil or very uncongenial to us that we basically reject, whether we put the label on it or not we view those things as being outside of God. So it’s a challenge even for a Sufi to make no exclusions from the notion of Unity, to literally embrace everything within that, and yet even if you’re not a the point where you can completely do that, when there are certain things that you still have a really hard time including in the Unity, you know that that’s the direction in which your spiritual development is supposed to go, so you look for ways to understand a wider and wider unity.
And there are some connections, the most appropriate or I should say apt phrases that deal with it is from the social philosopher Richard Rorty, who is not a Sufi. You may have heard of him. He’s a very well known contemporary political philosopher, Richard Rorty. “R-o-r-t-y.” He just died recently. And he said, “The purpose of democracy is to broaden the circle of the ‘we’.” Of the “w-e.” On a political level that another way of affirming Unity.

So the emphasis given to Unity by Sufism, and in turn derived from Islam, really works in the direction of embracing all cultures, all people, and all contexts as part of the whole. And if they seem out of relationship with the whole, to work towards a more harmonious connection between them and the whole. That is a call to us.

And the other thing that Dr. Kianfar has talked a lot about lately, and he and I have actually been working on some statement of this is his view that “mysticism is utterly practical” and that mysticism actually has no real meaning unless it results in righteous action. And we he uses that expression, righteous does not mean self-righteous, it does not mean, “I’m doing this because I know I’m right.” Righteous means truly in conformance with Divine principles and if your own... path leads to inwardness or total preoccupation with personal development then it is not serving in the way that mysticism is supposed to, which is ultimately in its pious form to call people to service, and service also has not meaning unless its expressed in righteous action.

A: Yes. That is very well put and that leads me to one question that I have in here about service. Moulana Shah Maghsoud, or actually I think that it’s Dr. Angha who wrote it because it’s in the introduction, it was one of them, writes... that “rule in undertaking such an infinite journey is to become a servant, a true servant of God, but who may serve God and what does he serve.” And Dr. Angha follows this quote from Moulana Shah Maghsoud with that according to the Prophet, serving the Divine is the greatest honor for mankind.” So that brings up a lot of questions. As a Sufi, what would you say it means to serve God? And what does it means to be worthy to serve and how has this meaning evolved over time for you?

G: Well, this relates to the great paradox of Sufism to me that you only achieve complete freedom through complete submission, and in this case submission to the will of God and of course we don’t know right out of the box what that is. So submission to God means many things- submission to the mystery of God’s purpose even when we can’t see it in a given situation; it means patience, which is emphasized again and again as a theme in practice and in thought. The Prophet said in one of the Hadiths, “Patience is prayer in itself.” It means working to set aside one’s own ego will as the determinant of direction and effort and instead being receptive to guidance and the presence of God’s direction as a goal, that that would be an evermore constant reality in one’s life.

And the other paradox is the greatest among you is the servant. The greatest among you is the one who serves most greatly. And the notion that the more completely you submit yourself to the service of others, the more greatness you achieve as an individual in your
own lifetime. And when we look at all the Prophets, like Moses, the Hebrew Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Prophet Jesus, the Prophet Moses, the Prophet Buddha, they all would be defined as servants.

The story about Buddha is that he attained Nirvana and he was ready to depart all connection with the earthly plane and he put an end to the cycle of rebirth because he was perfected. But he returned to free the slaves. That was a voluntary decision on his part. And when you look at Moses, completely in service trying to help the people of Israel find their true home. And when you look at the prophets of Israel who were always at great risk warning the people about social injustice, and war and oppression and got no thanks for it except for being stoned or being put at the risk of their lives. And you look at Jesus who paid for his life by his teaching of liberation. And you look at the Prophet you every day of his adult life was called upon to perform acts of service on a continuous stream of situations that require that. “The greatest among you is the one who serves most greatly.” So that’s the great paradox because secular culture says the greatest among you is the one who has the most power to command others to serve him. So this is a complete reversal of that.

A: I want to see if I can get you to talk a little bit about the connection between freedom and submission. I have this other quote here from...Moulana Shah Maghsoud’s father, Mir Ghotbeddin Mohammed and he says, “You are the servant of whatever you are bound to.”

So, you were talking about how Dr. Kianfar says that this is a practical path. How might we as individuals find it practical to submit? I think there are connotations, misunderstanding of the meaning of submission in Islam, that it’s a loss of self, a loss of identity, and an ability to have your own freedom in life, when in fact in Islam you define it as having a full freedom. Can you relate that to changing...what you are bound to and why that might be in our interest?

G: Right. That’s a really good question and that’s a really good quote to illustrate it. First of all, in every religion there are people who want to be authoritarians. And Islam has no priesthood, there is no pope, there is no assumption that any class of religious people stand above humanity, and if we want to reach God, we have to go through that priesthood to get to God. That is not part of Islam and one of the great quotes from Mohammed is “I am a man just like you.” Dr. Kianfar always brings up the context of the Prophet saying, “If I did it, you can do it.”

So what is it? The question, “how is submission related to freedom?” First of all, submission is not submission to an authoritarian priesthood. Even though the Qur’an and the Prophet argued against any form of higher authority claiming that we must submit to them to get to God, there are certainly people within Islam who have set themselves up that way and have made that claim. And we certainly see it in the world today and we have seen it over centuries. That’s a form of corruption of religion that humans engage in.
When we say the greater the submission the greater the freedom, I guess that’s my formulation, what I mean by that, and Dr. Kianfar has said this, “If you’re not submitted to the will of God, you’re submitted to the ego will, and the greatest tyranny is the tyranny of mind. So, to be submitted to the will of God means to be patient, it means to be humble, it means to be open, it means to be receptive. It means to serve the unity of God’s creation and that is every liberating because, and the easiest way to see it is negatively by contrast, whatever you are bonded to is what you are submitted to. If you are not in that state, if you are in submission to the ego-will and the workings of the mind which is a true tyranny that constantly issues a stream of orders that are conflicting, inconsistent, very demanding, can be very exhausting, that lead you zigzagging all over the place. There’s a line from a poem, I think it’s from Edward Arlington, about a man who got on his horse and rode off in all directions at once. That’s sort of the way Sufism portrays the mind. I guess the clearest way to understand it is that you’re going to be in submission to something, even if its your radical notion of absolute freedom, and that will determine how you behave, act and what your inner life is like. And compared to these other forms of submission, the patience, and the openness, the humbleness and the service that comes with submission to the will of God is an infinitely freer way of living that these other so called freedoms where you try to empower the ego will or empower the mind.

A: Great. That’s an excellent explanation. So, the question that I usually start with, which I think connects to this...in The Psalms of Gods, in the introduction, Dr. Angha writes, “The path of the mystic is the most difficult path ever taken by mankind.” At the same time, Dr. Kianfar sometime points out that this is the easiest path, it’s the...straight path, every thing else is difficult.

G: Yes. He says the crooked path is the one that’s difficult.

A: Right. And he laughs about that. If you could talk a little bit about that and how there is this dynamic of the mystical path being the most demanding, that it flows into every aspect of our life, and at the same time it’s also one that should give us more energy and be empowering. And maybe how you have experienced that as a student traveling on the path.

G: Sure. And let’s take the apparent paradox between those two statements from Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha. There is a way to resolve that paradox and that is if you’re fighting it, if you’re resisting it, if submission to the will of God is really a struggle for you and you are very hesitant to let go of the control of the ego and the mind, then the attainment of that state becomes the most difficult in the sense that the other route, to live by the life of the ego and the mind, is the line of least resistance and if you went with the line of least resistance you would just indulge in your ego-driven mental processes all the time and they would come naturally so to speak. The problem is that the results generated when you’re in that state create an incredibly difficult, demanding and unfulfilling way of life that our society, which you were talking about earlier, that our society unthinkingly encourages people to live that life driven by the ego and the mind.
and it leads to exhausting and ultimately unfulfilling lives. But it does appear to be the line of least resistance if you just go with what appears to come naturally. And then this path is the most difficult in terms of your conscious intention and sticking with it, and catching yourself when you backslide. It requires more than any other path from that perspective, because its not the line of least resistance. You have to overcome the resistance of the mind to giving up control.

On the other hand, when you take this path, and during the times when you’re actually living it, it’s amazing how much peace of mind there is, because the mind is no longer struggling. You put the mind in a state of peace and that makes life a lot easier, because your mind isn’t fretting or nagging at you. So, it’s the most difficult in that it goes against the line of least resistance, but it’s the easiest in the sense that when you’re in that place everything is simple, straightforward, your patience and your humility and your openness smooths the path for you.

Also, there’s one other element here that’s enormously important, Dr. Angha talks about it a lot, and that’s gratitude and appreciation. Just really important. You can’t go wrong by being grateful. And if someone was an atheist and said, “That’s sort of stupid. Why are you grateful for something that is just random chance.” My answer would be that if that’s the way it turns out I would rather be grateful for something and to some higher power for gifts in my life even if it turned out that there was no higher power. I would rather run that risk than the risk of failing to be grateful for things that were due to the beneficent influence of a higher power that I had failed to acknowledge. There’s a risk you run either way but the whole matter of gratitude and appreciation is hugely important. It’s like Dr. Kianfar says about the teacher. The more the student listens, the more the teacher has to say, and by the same token, the more grateful you are, the more things there are to be grateful for. So, all of that’s really an important part of it.

I want to mention one outer limit aspect of this that would be the ultimate point of resistance for people and certainly don’t claim to have gotten to the point where I just blow this off and say “It’s not a problem. It’s not a challenge.” And that’s the whole notion of annihilation and fanaa, the merging of the self completely into the unity. It’s like it’s ego death, not just that you calm the mind and set aside the ego. It is literally that your individual self disappears into the unity, and that yields the mystical state called fanaa or annihilation. And people hesitate. It’s like being at the door of physical death and that is the ultimate challenge and I don’t feel that I can comment meaningfully on dealing with that.

A: In some degrees this has come up in my other conversations. And the way that Dr. Angha explains it as someone who has traveled down the path with her father’s guidance, she has a beautiful way of explaining it, having overcome any fear or trepidation around that, that that state of annihilation is the only way to really say, “I am.” It doesn’t mean that I’m gone, it’s the first time I can really say that I exist.

G: That’s a beautiful way to put it. That’s the best way to explain it, so that it overcomes fear.
A: Yes. And that’s probably the ultimate equivalent of that concept of submission that we were talking about, fully letting go that way. But it’s very counter to our culture which is...based on satisfying our own ego and basing our whole concept of self off the ego.

G: And that’s’ the other area that we touched on, in the opening frame that you provided. And it really is worth looking at. As Sanaa Joy Carey says, “the culture with weapons of mass distraction.” And it is. People can live their whole lives distracted, the whole way through. Never find a spiritual path because they are so distracted and because it’s never been defined for them as a reality that they should be looking for. The culture’s amazing. One of my favorite examples is the tabloids that are in the check-out line in the supermarket. If you look at the plotlines they are focused on stories that claim to tell you of the horrible misfortunes that the rich and famous people are experiencing in their lives, with the intent, at least it’s the only intent I can figure out, of making the reader feel better about their own miserable life because the people who are supposed to be at the pinnacle of that my life isn’t better. Well, that is really a case of two wrongs don’t make a right. And you can multiply examples endlessly.

In my own case, and I know this is going to far because that would be an overstatement, I have not watched anything on television since Bill Clinton’s first inaugural in January 1993. I know there is a lot of really good stuff on the history channel and the science channel if I turn it on, I don’t doubt that for a second, but I just haven’t. And I don’t use the electronic media at all for news. And I think another powerful form of mass distraction in our culture is getting the daily news in pieces that are put out each day especially in television with all of the pseudo-drama and the pseudo-significance and that tone of voice that the news people have of reading the news right of a teleprompter. And they are reading it as if they are giving you some important authoritative message when in fact it’s just a snapshot of a moment in time and it may be even a distorted snapshot. And there are millions of people hanging on that everyday and live their life in these little daily segments. And there’s always something dreadful going on, like the O.J trial or Britney Spear’s descent into mental illness or whatever. People just go completely bananas over that stuff. They follow it for weeks. You can spend your whole life in that mode.

A: That makes me think of two things. One is Al Gore’s book, The Assault on Reason, which addresses the way we obtain our information and that it’s no longer a democratic form like the [print] news media that forces you to use the rational components of your brain through reading it and processing it, that also allows you to contribute back in a more democratic way. Whereas now we have a few conglomerates that are profit-making organizations and the best way to suck you to the screen is to provide fast clips that glue your eyes that are ones that induce fear responses or shock, so we are getting distorted images of the world and one’s that inhibit our collective capacity as a nation to really process intelligently and respond in ways that are outside our amygdala and fear processing centers.
G: I just had a long conversation with Hamid, Hank Edson, about this and he has just written a book about democracy in the light of Sufi principles. So he would be a wonderful person to interview. I got his number right here. And we were talking about this. I worked in news media for years, most newspapers, but I’ve done a lot of television and radio. And his position was very similar to what you just said. And my take on it is that the real bias of the media is towards conflict. There really is no liberal bias in the media. There really is no conservative bias in the media overall but there’s always a bias toward conflict. I do think it’s true that television news channel now are biased, they’re delivery biased, and we have to realize that as a matter of fact, that’s exactly what newspapers were like at the time this country was created. They were violently partisan and when people were on opposite sides of a major issue, they would support various newspapers that became their mouthpiece in these battles. The newspapers were vicious. They engaged in virtual libel. They were not objective. And I think today, there are a lot of really fine analysts writing in print medium and in some cases, people have taken out blogs, and I’m not an expert on blogs but I think there are some blogs that are really excellent. But I think its like everything else. You have to be selective and if you are you can get tremendously good insight into what’s going on. But if you are not discriminating and you just tune in, especially to television news assuming you’re going to get a view of the world, every one of those stations has a plan. Some of them are conservative. Some of them are liberal. Unfortunately the pretense that you are offering objective news is gone.

And unfortunately it was there in the post-war era when people like Walter Cronchite and David Brinkley and...Huffley and I think a number of other people who were well known even today, but that has been supplanted by these partisan voices.

A: Yeah. This also makes me think of a quote...in the Qur’an and it’s about the role of images and making humans ungrateful. It’s in Sura 7 and it’s basically about how shaatan makes a commitment to ... suggest to humans and bring shame into their minds and that he will confront them in every single angle and because of that God will no longer find humans grateful. It’s an interesting tie to make to the structure of our society now as a society of “mass distraction”, how it might impact our ability to appreciate our lives when we’re in every way in every moment getting sucked into different desires and different images.

G: That’s really well said and that’s really a good point. The net effect of falling into this trap of daily distraction and focusing on media output that are dominated by conflict and then you have the huge stream of advertising for material goods that implies that that’s where you find satisfaction from buying things. So you are always in a state of wanting and unfulfillment. And the Prophet said once, “The greedy man is the poorest man,

---

18 I reference “shaatan” here with the understanding of the concept that I have received through my connection to Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha. I refer to shaatan as all that pulls the human away from his or her ability to witness the Divine. This relates to my use of the word images, in that they can become a superficial distraction and cover to the essence beneath things depending on how we focus on them.
because he is always in a state of want.” And that relates to the consumer side of this thing.

And the other side is many of my good liberal friends, and I live in Seattle so many of my friends are hard-core Democrats and left-wing liberals, and they are not happy people. They are just constantly frustrated. They are caught up in the political anguish of the time, and it’s been a tough time. This is probably the worst administration the United States has ever had. So these people are very frustrated and very unhappy. And it gets to the point where their following of current events, they don’t stop to smell the roses, because they’re so preoccupied with current events then they loose their sense of gratitude. And many of them are atheists or people who view religious beliefs with skepticism in part because they have no cause for gratitude in their life.

....I sympathize with that feeling but I’m just sorry that they get in such an upset about it that it block their access to a ready occasion to cause them to feel gratitude...It’s almost like the longing for unity is a dirty trick. Why do I have this unsatisfiable longing that can never be realized?

A: The next thing I’ll ask you is about...the development of wisdom. Dr. Kianfar says “that the wise person is the one who takes the best of every moment of life and wisdom is about looking from the point of the action to the consequences all the way down to the end of the line of the action and a realization that there are imprints on the universe of our thoughts and our choices of our everyday life.” What I want to ask you is how this has been a process for you of developing this wisdom. Is this something that can come more easily to you now or is this something that there are significant difficulties with and how in some ways is wisdom a practical tool for us to have at this moment in time?

G: Right. What you just quoted is very good. You can’t say it better than that. I think what happened. There’s a direct parallel here because you move from submission to the ego-will and submission to the workings of the mind and you move way from that towards submission towards the mystery of God within and being patient about having that revealed to you and trying to become ever more sensitive to messages that tell you what it is and ever more in tune on a more continuous basis with knowledge from that level. There’s a parallel thing that occurs, and that is when you’re on the first track of submission, everything is fragmentary. I’ll give you an example. I remember when 1 years ago I had been traveling across the country on an airliner and I was watching what they were showing on a big screen. I almost never brought a headset, but it’s hard not to watch even without a headset for part of the time. I would watch these commercials they had, promotionals and I started noting how long each of the visual images were on the screen. Two seconds each, two second.

So when you are “when you are in the grip of the ego will and the workings of the mind, the images, its just a kaleidoscope, things just flash back and forth, its all episodic, its all

---

19 I take this idea from comments made by Dr. Angha in Sufi gatherings and from Moulana Shah Magshoud’s Manifestations of Thought.
disconnected, and you act on a momentary image which seizes you and you say that’s what I’m going to do. And it’s only there for a short time, but you grab onto it as your attachment point and then you act on it. And by definition, that is totally without any awareness of the context that created the situation to which you’re responding, or any thinking through truly and openly the consequences of what you might do. All you do is impose on it the desire of the ego and the consequence will be what you want them to be and you act.

So as you move into a state of patience, humility, and receptivity, your whole time frame that surrounds each important decision becomes much longer and more continuous and you become more patient about waiting for guidance. And the Prophet has some sayings about if you’re in a state of uncertainty, take the smallest possible step, don’t take the greatest possible leap. And when you’re in the grip of mind and the ego, it’s so tempting to relieve your anxiety and frustration by taking the biggest possible leap, like, “I’m going to break free of all these shackles. And often it’s literally like from the frying pan into the fire, whereas in a state of wisdom, if you get to the point where Dr. Kianfar is you truly have an amazing ability to see everything from its original causality to final consequences, but well before you get there you develop a respect for the total context of each situation that is a wonderful protection against acting arbitrarily or impulsively.

A: It seems like in the long-run it would [conserve our energy], it would do us a lot of good in terms of not going through dead ends.

G: That’s right. I heard an expression that said, “Act in haste. Repent in leisure.” (laughs). And the meaning is obvious. The conservation of energy you’re talking about is lost when you overshoot the mark in action and then grieve over it after words. It’s a huge drain to be in that.

A: The next thing I want to touch on that I address in my paper is how self-knowledge on the path changes and morphs our sense of personal value, our self-confidence, our sense of our own abilities, and what we can accomplish. So this is not only in a mystical, spiritual sense, but in terms of our everyday life, impacting what our aims are for ourselves and what we expect out of ourselves. How have you seen this morph in your life since you’ve been a student with Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha? Has it changed your sense of what your goals should be, of what you hope to accomplish in your life, and what are your personal gifts?

G: Sure. Well, I’ll give you my perspective on it where it might be slightly different than some people. Where it’s really changed me is what is the priority I give to different goals in different areas of life. And this is the part where I might be different from some people. It has not changed me in another respect. I’ve always been a very project oriented person and I’ve always had the skill set of patience and focus and being able to break complex problems down into manageable parts and stay on task to get things done. That has not changed. But what has changed a lot is what would I consider a worthwhile use of my gifts. I’m at the point where there’s only two kinds of projects that make sense to me anymore. One is directly working on projects that have a spiritual purpose. And it
was my pleasure to work with Sanaa Joy Carey to put together the first collection of Dr. Kianfar’s sayings in the Seasons of the Soul.

A: Right. Which I highly appreciate, because I use it daily.

G: Wonderful. I do too and it’s not because I was involved in creating it. I just feel a hunger to reach for it to get his guidance everyday.

A: Yes. It’s a really great gift.

G: I just gave him at his request to read a second manuscript I put together and they’re all taken from quote from the gatherings. I don’t have to ask myself whether that’s an appropriate use of my God-given gifts.

But the other area is projects- well, I’ll illustrate with a project I’m working on now that I can totally get into and why I can get into it. I am connected with a delightful group of colleagues who I really enjoy as people who are working on accelerating the pace at which the transportation system moves away carbon-based fuels and getting on alternative fuels for transportation. And since transportation is the single largest user of petroleum and related energy that is something that would really help prolong the life of the planet. And that is something that I can totally get off of from putting energy into. I don’t need to ask myself whether that’s any appropriate use of energy.

And I look back at years of work as an economic consultant and the times I was hired by major corporations to do analyses for them and they weren’t necessarily evil, but they didn’t promote the higher good. They just perpetuated the economic system of material output of goods and services pretty much as it was, pretty much without raising any questions about whether that was adequate for the future.

So the two kinds of projects that meet the test now for me are projects that are directly spiritual and projects that address future of the human race and planet. And other stuff it just means carrot feeding of the current economic system for which I was very well paid, it just really doesn’t appeal to me anymore. So I guess that’s the shift. The approach I take to these projects hasn’t changed that much because early on I learned how to do projects, but the content has changed a lot.

A: It seems now that your projects are more on either spreading or helping to generate an awareness of spiritual teachings or spiritual potential or purely practical projects that are aimed at preserving value in the Earth or preserving life.

G: Right. And projects connected with social justice, I’ve done a number of those and that’s another area in which I would want to be open to further work.

---

20 I say this because the book that Glen helped create, Seasons of the Soul, 2006, compiles quotes from Dr. Kianfar’s teachings and are formatted to be read one at a time on a daily basis.
A: This is another question I have been asking most people. In terms of your work, has your practice of Sufism impacted your understanding of human potential and the world around you that you are giving to in terms of its inner value and it’s right to this work that you are giving it?

G: You know, you just used the key phrase. I just had a very interesting exchange with another member of Dr. Kianfar’s inner circle. And as you know, many of the people in the inner circle are in the fields of therapy and counseling, an extra percentage of the most active people are in that profession, and they work a lot with people who are struggling with serious problems and whose ability to attain their potential is burdened right now or being blocked in some way. And of course the goal of therapy is to remove those kinds of blockages and in effect the dialogue I got into was what’s the relative weight Sufism should give to human limitation versus human potential. You find me way over on the human potential end of this dialogue. I’m starting to begin to think really that the Sufism that the Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha teaches is thrilling in its liberation potential to liberate people into their potential.

And at the same time those who are from the field of counseling and therapy have a point in effect that Sufism has given the world probably the finest tools for understanding human limitation, namely the *nafs*. And the reason that the *nafs* are such a wonderful gift is that it’s a not judgmental, non-guilt inducing way of looking at human foibles, and quirks, and limitations and understanding them without treating everybody as if they were sick and also without getting pulled down by one’s own sense of guilt or self-judgment. It’s a way of looking at the mechanisms.

One issue within IAS, with students, in regard to the events we put together and the programs we provide, is what’s the relative balance between content that makes people wise about human limits and content that encourages them to achieve their potential. And these two things are directly connected because the teaching about the teaching about the *nafs* is to help people know thy self so they have leverage over the things blocking their way of fulfilling their potential.

A: That’s really an interesting balance there. I guess that’s why work in psychotherapy is so important for people with this knowledge. Because first you have to get to a state of balance before you can progress, and it’s critical to understand humans like they do.

G: I was talking to Dr. Kianfar recently and I mentioned Thomas Moore’s book, *Care of the Soul*. Thomas Moore is a Catholic, a psychotherapist and his whole point was that people go to counselors because they need a spiritual counselor, and then they go to the counselor as an agnostic and they don’t get what they need. And Dr. Kianfar said, yes that’s true, but there are also a lot of people sitting in church who also need a psychologist.

A: Yeah. Interesting. So I’ve gone through my list of questions and I just want to open it up to you in case you have anything else to you want to add.
G: I would add only one other thing that I think is real important and that I think is real easy to overlook and it’s partly connected to gratitude and that’s Sufism is very open to the role of beauty. We’re having the whirling dervishes at the Symposium this year and Sufism celebrates music and Imam Ali, who was really the patron Imam if you will of this school of Sufism and who was also the real father of the arts in Islam. He encouraged craftsmen and he encouraged music and other forms of art. And beauty is really important.

And I’m sitting here in my living room in Dana point looking out at the gathering evening light on the trees. And right in front of my here is a dozen roses that I bought down at the flower shop, four different colors, 3 different of each color. And as you know, Sufis love roses. And in Dr. Kianfar and Dr. Angha’s office at Phoenix Press, they’ve got photographs of roses in every room I think. So just taking time for beauty, it’s one of the entry points into gratitude. It’s probably the easiest entry point into gratitude because we all respond to it so readily.

If you look at our culture, our culture is starved for a lot of things like time, we’re in a time famine, and its starved for reflection and spirituality, but it’s also starved for beauty. That’s why sexuality gets so emphasized. In a culture that doesn’t understand it’s starving itself for beauty, it goes to sexuality thinking it’s serving the basic drive and that becomes a surrogate. And there are a lot of other aspects of beauty that are completely ignored and so it creates an imbalance. But Sufism really acknowledges the role of beauty in a healthy spiritual life.

A: I find that to be a really hopeful closing comment.
Bibliography


International Association of Sufism. *IAS Departments*
Retrieved May 11, 2008 from
http://www.ias.org/departments/sufipsychology.html

International Association of Sufism. *IAS Mission Statement.*
http://www.ias.org/aboutias.html

International Association of Sufism. *IAS Projects.*
http://ias.org/projects.html

International Association of Sufism. *About Uwaiysi.*
http://uwaiysi.org/uwaiysi.html


