

Earthy spirituality for an evolving planet

# CREATION

\$3.00

Volume Four, Number Four

September/October 1988

Deep  
Ecumenism

Matthew Fox: The Coming of the Cosmic Christ  
Rowena Pattee: A Modern Way of the Eternal Tao  
John Mohawk: Indigenous Creation-Centered Spirituality  
Elinor Gadon: The Goddess Tradition in Hinduism

M. THADDEUS - KUN  
1988



# Tawhid: The Sufi tradition of unity

*Remembering our oneness radically alters our way of acting in the world.*

**Abdul Aziz Said**

***“The prophet is someone who reminds us of what has always been there.”***



Among Sufis, who represent the mystical dimension of Islam, the most important daily practice or litany is called *dhikr* or *zikr*, which means “remembrance”; remembering where we come from, remembering what we are, remembering what we are part of. Unity is never absent from us, but seldom realized.

The role of the prophet (in all of us) is then not the notion of someone who can foretell the future, but rather someone who reminds us of what has always been there, bringing rejuvena-

tion to the world around.

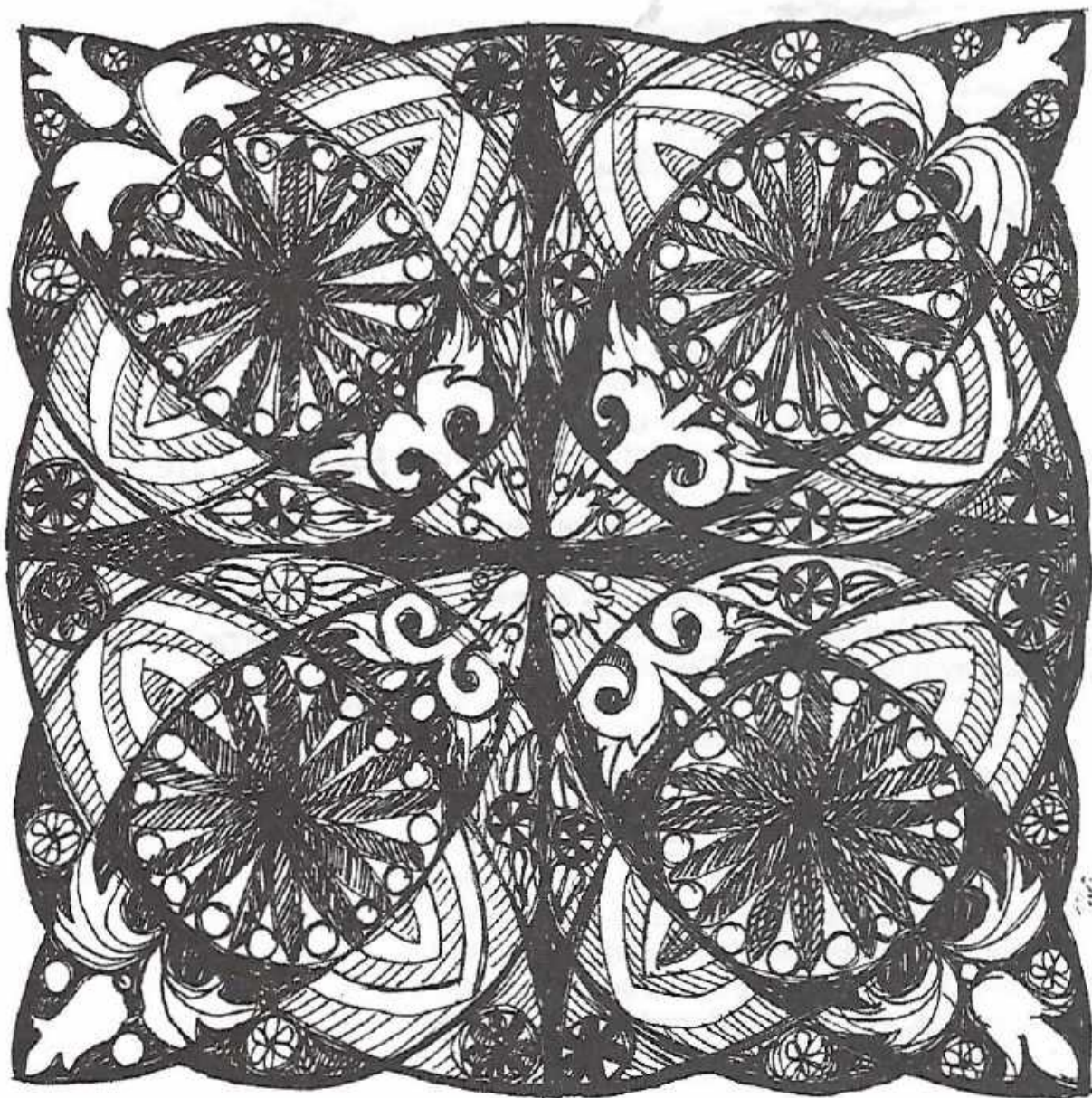
*Dhikr* invokes a state of mind called *tawhid*, the direct personal experience of Reality, the grasping of our relation to the absolute, and maintenance of harmony with the universe. Invoking this unity does not deny the apparent existence of a multiplicity of created things. Multiplicity is due to a single reality being filtered through differing points of view rather than the intrinsic nature of things. The world is more than a collection of persons and things.

*Tawhid* refers us to the overall harmony and patterning of the universe, Natural Law in the broadest possible sense, or to the place and fittingness and obligation of each individual human being in support of that pattern.

*Tawhid* expresses the necessity to live the Unity of existence. It is invoked in the phrase *LA ILAHA ILLALLAH*—there is no god but God. By repeating this phrase over and over it becomes a permanent activity. Such constant invocation prepares us to take the steps toward the truth. The first step is faith and invocation. Invocation of the Absolute, be it intuitive or in words, creates a space for the Absolute to come into consciousness. The Absolute becomes the object of our desire, our beloved. And it is in turn devoted to us, the lovers upon whom its belovedness depends. Every lover is a beloved and every beloved is a lover. Our faith in this gives us the strength to be constantly in a state of invocation.

*Tawhid* depends on a state of surrender. Each of us surrenders to the Absolute within us. We become accustomed to recognizing the quality of the Divine Presence in our hearts, and to allowing it to motivate and guide us. We surrender the illusion of separation for the truth of Unity. We simultaneously experience both God’s immanence and transcendence, beyond all concepts, states, forms, space, and time.

We realize *Tawhid* by paying rigorous attention to form. We become an active microcosm of the multiplicity of created things, a mirror





reflecting only Unity. Gradually we see more and more deeply into the great diversity of forms. Our essence is clarified and strengthened. Essence discovers itself in the mirror of form. There can be no barriers between us and Unity. There can be no movement of two things into Unity.

At first the multiplicity of things, manifested in the complex processes of daily life, acts as a mirror to us. We search out and discover the characteristics of Unity in all things and situations. Our being becomes sacred. God becomes human. The material world and the spiritual world become one world. The humanization of the sacred means the destruction of nations and idols so the Reality may live and be known in human life. The consecration of the human means the recognition that sacred activity is not apart from the immediate, the personal and the interpersonal. We experience the reinvestment of the sacred in our lives.

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

Tawhid leads to a profoundly healing vision of cooperative global politics. First, Second, and Third Worlds become one world. Oppressor and oppressed peoples become people experiencing life in all its vicissitudes. Civilization and barbarism become culture. Planning and spontaneity become one reality. Propositional and anecdotal knowledge change into the root of knowledge. Reason and intuition become faces of truth. There are no developed and less-developed states, only individuals and societies in development.

Tawhid leads to cooperative global economics based on love, sacrifice, and cooperation, supporting individual and communal self-reliance, a fair distribution of the earth's limited resources, care for the planet, and control of large-scale human destructiveness. Global and personal concerns become aligned. A cooperative global economy emphasizes sufficiency rather than scarcity. The purpose of production is to produce enough of the right goods rather than as much as possible of everything. The purpose of production in a cooperative global system is to provide everyone with enough to serve as the basis for approaching the non-material aspects of human life. Human capacities, strengths, motivations, and attitudes become primary

economic resources and the foundation of development.

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

Tawhid sees cultural pluralism and freedom of expression as the basis of existence. Each individual is a powerful source of transformation. Each one of us possesses a unique consciousness. Each one of us can participate in the creation of harmonious global institutions and the restructuring of existing ones. The impassioned mind and the informed heart can together call forth the energy to move the planet towards realization.

We discover that our work for transformation occurs in the context of the realization of God's consciousness. More precisely, God comes to self-knowledge in us. If all we know is our own consciousness, we may easily become confused. This is particularly important to those among us working for social change and the improvement of human life.

Often people who are working honestly for transformation become so involved with the struggles that their work entails that they either become frustrated and burn out, or, if they are successful, they have become by then so angry that they are no better than those they replace. Ego involvement is the major problem. The self becomes identified with the work so that one's perspective becomes narrowed in one of two ways.

In one case one reduces one's view to the extent that success becomes everything. One reduces the end to the means, and power becomes the fundamental concern. The archetypes of this pathology are the perverted revolutions in which the champions of the people during the fight for freedom and justice become the worst oppressors of all.

The second case involves narrowing one's perspective to one's concept of the ideal to the extent that it becomes an obsession. This may simply lead to incompetence, where the individual is blind to concrete everyday concerns. It

***“The consecration of the human means recognition that sacred activity is not apart from the immediate, the personal and the interpersonal.”***

**continued on p.39**



---

### Tawhid—continued from p. 25

may also lead to factionalism with people becoming so uncompromising that they spend more time struggling over abstract ideological issues than they do serving for their cause.

Reduction of one's perspective to the ideal also creates frustration because it involves raising expectations beyond what is possible. This may result in people giving up and dropping out even when they are making important gains. Or, the resulting anger may produce desperate or suddenly violent actions which may be counterproductive. In the worst case, overconcentration on the ideal leads to a single-minded ruthlessness in which people sacrifice all other values in the search for an abstract concept of perfection.

Tawhid brings an understanding of the importance of avoiding these common obstacles: by constantly seeking to maintain one's balance, by opening the heart more and more to the essence of the great diversity of human beings around us, and by always remembering that it is not us who is realized but the Absolute coming to self-knowledge—Tawhid appearing in time/space reality.

Sometimes we must retreat from daily life to remember the truth. We do this to be able to enter into the life of the outer world without losing our inner freedom. Whether we retreat to the desert, to nature, or just to a quiet room for

a while, we are building the basis for detached participation in everyday life. Through detachment we can work for transformation, for a global cooperative order, while constantly remembering God and not allowing ourselves to become identified with anything.

Because inattention separates us from the Absolute, we must strive to become more and more awake. As we breathe we can place our attention on each breath and be aware of our own presence. We can watch each step we take and remember where we came from and where we are going. We can learn to remain watchful, to keep our attention on what we are doing, whether outwardly or inwardly. We can observe what catches our attention and why. At all times we live in the moment, yet our heart must remain in attention.

To experience Tawhid we adhere rigorously to these forms. We adhere rigorously to form only in order to transcend form. We cannot transcend what we do not possess. Form is the gateway to the formless. Tawhid is the Unicity of God, the FORMLESS. ○

*Abdul Aziz Said is a professor in the School of International Service, The American University, Washington, DC. He is the author of many books and articles on current global issues and active in many peace organizations.*