



## **Sufi Ruhaniat International INCLUSION ~ It could be me**

### **Suggestions and guidelines for Inclusivity and Diversity in the SRI**

This is cutting edge work, this call to opening our Path of the Heart to be ever more conscious and ever more inclusive. Some simple internet research suggested that few (if any) Sufi Communities are presently busying themselves with this work. Surely this is the heart of our path “Toward the One”. “La illaha ilAllah HU” *includes* everyone and everything and does not exclude *anyone* or *anything*. Some of our Buddhist communities, Christian communities and secular organisations are leading the way here. Let us hear the call!

#### **Aims and vision**

Our aim and inspiration is and remains “Towards the One”. This implies continually learning and re-orienting to open our awareness to see and/or find out who are we *not yet* catering for? To keep our eyes, hearts and hands open to the basic dignity and humanity of each individual. To treat each other with respect.

Through this work we will cultivate our Adab and Khatir. To quote Hazrat Inayat Khan:

“A respectful attitude is the first and principle thing in the development of personality.”<sup>1</sup>

“The highest expression of love is respect.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Wisdom of Sufism - Hazrat Inayat Khan III.3(Element books, Shaftesbury, Dorset 2000)

“Khatir means consideration for someone which is shown in the form of respect, help or service... for a Sufi this quality becomes their moral.”<sup>3</sup>

## **Inclusion as a core part of our spiritual path**

To raise consciousness and awareness of the necessity of Inclusion is our core business as people heading (Insh'Allah) 'Toward the One'.

As we raise our awareness of the differing needs of others, we will surely become more comfortable with our own quirks and areas of discomfort. In Soulwork terms our inner family will have the opportunity to become more integrated and at home with each other. This is a basic message of inclusion which is about ALL OF US and all of our inner and outer family.

Looking into our own hearts to see how wide (or limited) our own understanding of inclusion is. It's easy on our Path of the Heart, to sit back and feel very sure that 'We are already doing this.' Whereas when we are 'on the receiving end' of our inclusion, we may find we (as Ruhaniat) are not as accessible as we think we are.

*This is an on-going process.* We may think or feel we are doing this work of inclusion for 'others'... who is 'the other'? It could be me, it could be you any day, any moment. Part of the raising of awareness is the understanding and embodiment of: 'there is *no other*', and the "real-eyes-ation"... it could be me at any moment. No one has a guarantee of good health, many of us are entering or in the last stages of life... We need to make these quantum leaps for the good of the whole of our caravan, and we are part of that whole.

## **Recommendations:**

### **1. Accessibility and physical environment**

Minimising, as far as possible any barriers to participating in events and retreats.

- 1) Wherever possible, consider using fully accessible venues. If not, consider why not?
- 2) This includes considering accessibility for those with limited mobility, wheelchair users, those with hearing and visual challenges.
- 3) Practical adaptations can include access to ramps, elevators, walk-in showers/accessible toilets at residential facilities, hearing loops, large print prayers or other printed materials.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid III.4

<sup>3</sup> Ibid III.6

- 4) On flyers and registration forms ask people to get in touch about their challenges when they are considering coming, so we can be open and be up-front about what we *can* offer.
- 5) On registration and administration forms add a line asking how the participant wishes to be addressed. (This could also be part of the first introductory circle in a group: "Please tell us the name and pronoun by which you wish to be addressed.")
- 6) Enquire (regularly) as to what people's physical needs are. And find out whether you can cater to them or not. If not, why not? Could something be changed to help that person continue their connection?
- 7) Be aware of simple things. If people chat in a small breathing space between one dance or practice and the next this could mean a person near you can no longer understand what is being said. The same for visual connection. Hold the focus, the concentration of the practice/mantra between Dances/ Practices. We can encourage our participants to *be aware of how your behaviour may affect someone else*. Likewise, shoes left in a corridor or doorway may cause somebody with restricted mobility to lose access to a room.
- 8) Have large print copies of prayers available for participants, either available on request and make sure it is *known* they are available, or have them set out for people to see and use.
- 9) Lighting sometimes makes a big difference for elders and those with partial visual impairment. Ask what helps.
- 10) Consider asking a volunteer to help any of our dervishes with needs relating to a disability eg. Help with meals for people with restricted mobility or visual problems.
- 11) Wherever possible, at retreats and camps, ensuring differing dietary needs are catered for. (Various ways to do this including using separate pans for vegetarian sauce, for meat, dairy free sauce etc. Meaning it is *one meal* with various combinations for the various diets.)
- 12) Endeavour to keep the price equal for all, with no 'fine' or 'penalty' for having special needs/food allergies or sensitivities.
- 13) Follow up people who drop out of the circle. If you have their email you can ask them if there is a physical reason they are no longer able to attend and you can see whether this is something which can be attended to. These people are gifts to us to help us see where *our* stumbling blocks lie.
- 14) Review how we are maintaining contact and communication with people of our community who are ailing, ill, challenged in some way, so that they can no longer participate. Is that true (that they can no longer participate?) Or is there a presumption there? *Is there a way for them to participate? Is there a way for a small group to visit them and sing and do our practices together? How do we keep in touch... if people wish to remain in contact?*
- 15) See if there is someone in your circle who is in touch or can make contact with the local town council to see what the local laws are about accessibility for people with physical challenges. And enquire what

facilities are available for such people and to encourage inclusivity. This is on going work/support for our groups.

## **2. Training and raising awareness**

Deepening our understanding as individuals, and across the Ruhaniat as an organization, about issues surrounding being inclusive, becoming *more* aware of unconscious bias, assumptions, stereotypes... we *all* have them. Finding and working with the very simple barriers to inclusion that we have the power to change.

- 1) That the subject of Inclusion be regularly revisited at all levels of our community from Murshid's Council to individual leaders and circles.
- 2) Make the Inclusion Guidelines part of the "Handbook for Guides". And available as a paper to Dance Leaders and those who organize gatherings.
- 3) Consider making resources including video on Inclusivity, on 'how to' and on the importance of this work, to be posted on the website, and to be recommended viewing for all Guides and Dance Leaders. This could include interviews with people with 'inclusion needs'. This video could give them a voice and support understanding.
- 4) Support and stimulation to remember, whatever we are seeing/experiencing: "This too is who I am. This too is the Beloved. What is the most open way to welcome Her/Him/Me?"
- 5) Remembering that true inclusion is not only about physical ability. We also need to reach out to and discover how to better support our dervishes of colour, our dervishes of differing sexual expression, or orientation, of differing religious and cultural backgrounds, of differing genders and gender expression. Whenever we think we've got this sorted, we need to re-think and look again... it's a challenge to see what we personally do not experience, to see through the eyes of those with challenges.

## **3. Communication**

Reviewing our communications, to ensure that they contain an all-inclusive message.

Review the website, make conscious decisions about the inclusivity of the contents. (For example from the inclusion work of Gaia House (UK) "We have also started a review of our communications, looking to make small but important changes which reflect our wish to be as inclusive and welcoming as possible. An example of this is a move away from directing people toward only a binary choice of male/female when asked about gender. We understand that a person's gender identity might not be either 'male' or 'female', and so it is important that our forms reflect this.")

Encouraging group leaders to provide simple access information with retreat flyers or websites. Eg. "a hearing loop is available. Please let us know if you require it, so we can notify the venue" or "level access and an

accessible toilet are available”. These are not small things for people considering attending.

### Questions

1. How are we discussing and encouraging Inclusion in our circles and our community?
2. How *will* we encourage this?
  - a. Will the Murshid's take the lead and bring this subject ... to their own meeting?
  - b. to the meetings they lead in the community?
  - c. to the people who organize their meetings?
3. How will we stimulate this conversation and opening in the wider circles of the community?
4. 4. Will we make Inclusion groups, with ZOOM meetings where the opportunities and challenges can be discussed?
5. 5. Will we make this an integral part of the work for our Jamiat Khas meetings?
6. 6. How will we reach the teachers/guides who are not able attend JK and maybe not watching the videos? And how will we extend this work into our Dance communities?

We in no way regard this document as 'final', it will continue to be a work in progress as our consciousness and awareness opens further. We trust the Murshid's Council will find it of use and be able to merge it with their work on Gender Inclusion.

Submitted with Love, Gratitude and Respect,

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(We suggest a review date of 21 March 2021.)