

PROMINENT SCHOLARS AND ORGANISATIONS OF UNIVERSAL SUFISM: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Universal Sufism has been a dominant and impactful ideology and has often been misunderstood as similar to, if not exactly like Islamic Sufism. This paper discusses the prominent scholars and organizations who are at the forefront in propagating universal Sufism. An overview of their beliefs and mission are provided in this article to help the readers gain a better understanding of this issue.

Keywords: Universal Sufism, Islamic Sufism, Un-Islamic Sufi Orders, Ammani Sufis

Universal Sufism is based on Perennialism or Perennial Philosophy which emphasizes that all world religions are based on a single philosophical truth from which all complex religious doctrines have grown. Universal Sufis claim that Sufism is an independent religion.

Islamic Sufism on the other hand is an inward search for Allah, the creator of this Cosmos, and avoidance of excessive love of materialism. It is different from Universal Sufism because of its sources of belief which are (i) the Quran, and (ii) Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) tradition. Islamic Sufis believe that Allah is the creator of the Cosmos and the Quran is His word. They also believe Prophet Mohammed (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) is the last Apostle to humanity.

Islamic Sufism is known as '*Ihsan*' which means to realize the presence of Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) in your life. Another major point of focus for Islamic Sufis is how to reform oneself so that one gets to feel of God's presence in his/her day-to-day life and be a good human being.

Prominent scholars and organisations of Universal Sufism

Some prominent Scholars and organizations preaching Universal Sufism in the world are as follows.

(i) Nazim Al-Haqqani (1922-2014)

Mehmet Nazim Adil Al-Haqqani was a famous Universal Sufi and mystic who died on May 7th, 2014. On his death, the Telegraph newspaper of UK wrote an obituary saying Nazim Haqqani was a strong supporter of NATO's war on Terror. The paper added, in 2003, Nazim Haqqani had announced that Tony Blair and George Bush have reached to the status of Sainthood because they fought with evil tyrants and devils in the world.

During his lifetime, Haqqani was an associate of Gurdjieff, an Armenian Mystic, and John Bennett, a devotee of Hindu Yogi Shivapuri Baba. He was also the follower of Gurdjieff.

In March 2003, Nazim Haqqani announced that he has granted Saint Hood (Wilayah) to (i) George Bush, US President, (ii) Tony Blair, British PM, (iii) Jose Maria Aznar, Spanish PM, and (iv) John Howard, Australian PM. Nazim Haqqani's announcement was widely criticized in the world in the religious circles.

Replying to the criticism, Haqqani said, George Bush and Tony Blair were God sent saints who were provided with divine sword which will be handed over to Jesus Christ in his second coming. Jesus will also kill the tyrants from this sword.

As far Jose Maria Aznar PM of Spain, and John Howard (PM of Australia), were concerned, Haqqani said they enjoy heavenly support, and their war is for the salvation of humanity from

repressive tyrants. Their sainthood is granted from the heavens.

(ii) Hisham Kabbani

Kabbani is the deputy (Khalifa) of Nazim Haqqani who lives in US. He wrote on his website 'Naqshbandi.org' as follows.

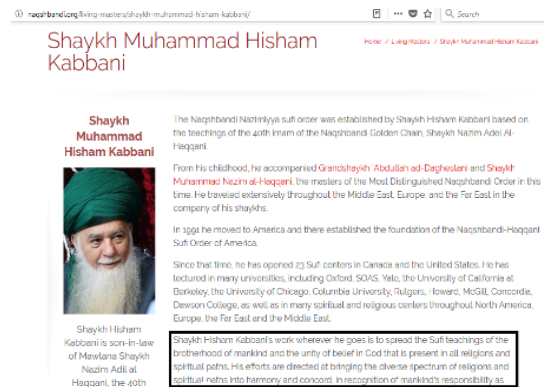


Figure 1: Hisham Kabbani as described on his official website

He wrote, he travels all over the world to spread the teachings of universal brotherhood and the belief in God that are the basic teachings of all the religions of the world.

(iii) Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan (1916 - 2004)

Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, son of Pir Inayat Khan, belongs to *Sufi Order International (SOI)*. The followers of SOI claim that Sufism is an independent religion existing before the advent of Islam. Therefore, they should not be treated as Muslims. They claim that they follow Islam as well as other religions. Their rhetoric and conflicting claims are deeply confusing.



Figure 2: Nazim Haqqani meeting Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan in New York, U.S.A., 1991

(iv) George Gurdjieff (1866-1949)

George Ivanovich Gurdjieff was an Armenian, founder of an infamous cult called Fourth Way which was described by him as different from the teachings of 'Sufi Fakir', 'Buddhist Monk' and 'Hindu Yogi'.

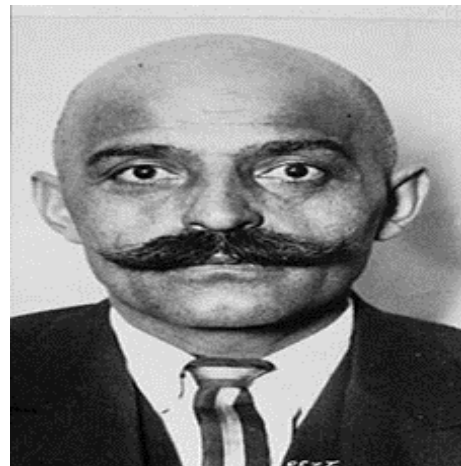


Figure 3: George Ivanovich Gurdjieff

Gurdjieff declared that Shamanism was the source of his cult's traditions.

He claimed that most of the human beings are living in hypnotic "waking sleep". To wake up from their sleep, they need to follow his teachings which will transcend them to a higher state of consciousness.

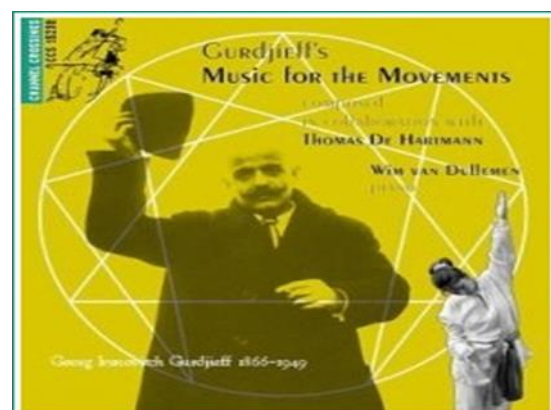


Figure 4: Gurdjieff's Music for the movements

His teachings consisted of (1) Music, (2) Movements, and (3) Group Work.

Many of Gurdjieff's followers suspected that he used black magic to entrap and manipulate people. His students used to get bewitched of

Gurdjieff, which made them vulnerable to manipulation. Gurdjieff admitted that he possessed hypnotic powers and he employs them on his students.

In 'Herald of Coming Good' (the first book published by Gurdjieff in 1933 in Paris, available on Amazon) he revealed that he was a professional hypnotist.

Nazim Haqqani regularly visited Gurdjieff events and spoke to his followers.

Haqqanis boast about the connection of their Grand Shaikh Abdullah Ad-Daghestani (1891-1973) (the Shaikh of Nazim Haqqani) with George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. Hisham Kabbani described the famous meeting of Abdullah Daghestani and Gurdjieff in his book "The Naqshbandi Sufi Way: History and Guidebook of the Saints of the Golden Chain", (Kazi Pub., US, 1995) as follows.

'George Gurdjieff visited Grand Sheikh Abdullah Daghestani in Istanbul, Turkey. He was blessed by the Grand Sheikh who told him to keep the meeting hidden from the people. Gurdjieff was awarded the title of Abdun Noor. (the enlightened one). He was told that he could stay with the Shaikh or go away, as he liked, and was assured that he was safe in divine presence.

Gurdjieff told the shaikh that from the spiritual power of Shaikh Daghestani, he ascended to the power of Nine Points (Enneagram) and a light informed him that this is a reward given to him, but he should refrain from using it.

It is reported in 1953, John G. Bennett, also had a secret meeting with Abdullah ad-Daghestani.

Ouspensky reported that Gurdjieff told him that the (Enneagram) is an ancient secret that has partly been disclosed to him. It is based on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. Enneagram is three interlocking triangles. It is also called a Nonagram, used by the Christian medieval philosopher Raymond Lull. (Reference - James Webb, *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Work of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers*, (New York and London: Putnam USA, and Thames and Hudson, 2001).

(v) Javed Nurbakhsh (1926 - 2008)



Figure 6: Javed Nurbakhsh

Javed Nurbakhsh was the founder of the Neimatullahi Sufi Order. Many video clips of Javed Nurbakhsh are available on You tube. He said that only the intelligent people know that we are not Muslims.

The present head of Neimatullahi Sufi order is Dr. Alireza Nurbaksh, popularly kown as Reza Ali Shah. He lives in UK.

(vi) Gohar Shahi

Riaz Ahmed Gohar Shahi (ریاض احمد گوهر شاہی), was born on November 25, 1941, in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. He died in Sindh, Pakistan in 2001 and was buried there. Some people say that he is not dead but has disappeared from his UK residence and was never seen again. Younus Gohar Shahi, his Assistant, claims that Riaz Ahmed Gohar Shahi is alive and only meets with him, and none others.

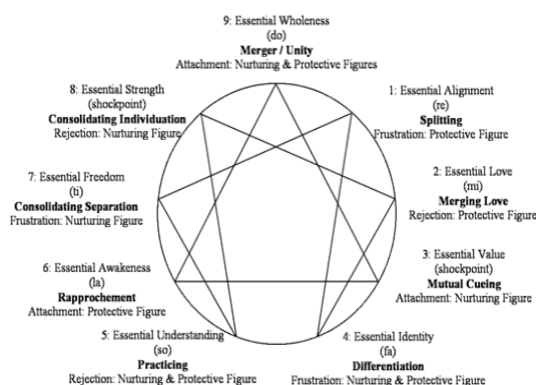


Figure 5: The Enneagram

Gohar Shahi is infamous for his strange beliefs. He claimed himself God of Gods. All his beliefs can be read at their official website <http://www.goharshahi.us> which is run by his deputy Younus al-Gohar.

Gohar Shahi became popular in Pakistan during late 1970s. He formed *RAGS International* and *Anjuman Serfaroshan-e-Islam* in 1980. RAGS International is still active whereas Anjuman Serfaroshan-e-Islam was banned in Pakistan.

Gohar Shahi and his followers were prosecuted in Pakistan for blasphemy and there were court cases pending against him in various Pakistani Courts. To avoid prosecution, he fled to London from where he visited many countries.

In an interview in London on 28th July 1997 Gohar Shahi claimed that he met with Jesus Christ (Isa - عليه السلام) in his Hotel Room. This interview was widely publicized throughout the world.

Younus al Gohar, is claimed to be the official Representative of Gohar Shahi. He has established Messiah Foundation International (MFI). He was born on June 16, 1970 in Karachi, Pakistan and claimed to have met Gohar Shahi when he was 15 years old and spent 24 years in his company.

Younus claimed that in 1999, Gohar Shahi stated 'I will meet only Younus now on, and Younus shall meet the world on behalf of me'. On Gohar Shahi's instructions, he formed 'Mehdi / Messiah Foundation International' and 'Kalki Avatar Foundation' to propagate Rama Ram Riaz Gohar Shahi's miraculous doctrine.



Figure 7: Hisham Kabbani sitting next to Gohar Shahi's feet in adoration and respect

Hisham Kabbani, Nazim al Haqqani's son in law and Khalifa, and In Charge of Haqqani Order in US, was honored to sit in the feet of Riaz Ahmed Gohar Shahi.

Mihajul Quran International headed by Dr. Taher-ul-Qadri is reported to have benefited from the spiritual lessons of Gohar Shahi. He was a regular teacher of Minhaj ul Quran during his lifetime. There are many videos on you tube showing Gohar Shahi teaching spirituality to his Minhaj ul Quran devotees.

(vii) Dr. Taher-ul-Qadri

Dr. Taher-ul-Qadri is the proponent of Universal Sufism / Ammanism in the world. Dr. Qadri is a signatory of the Amman Message. He is also a Senior Fellow of the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute of Islamic (Ammani) Thought, Amman, Jordan. Members of this Institute spread Ammanism in the world.



Figure 8: Dr. Taher-ul-Qadri

In 2010, Dr. Qadri published a 600-page book titled 'Fatwa on Terrorism' in Canada. Joel Hayward, a Jew, who was an Air Bombardment expert of UK Royal Air Force, wrote introduction to this book. John L. Esposito, Director of Saudi Prince Talal Al-Waleed Center at Georgetown University wrote 'Foreword' in this book. The Fatwa was condemned by Muslims all over the world for its apologetic approach. Pakistani newspaper Jang criticized it saying that it has not mentioned the Israeli brutalities in Palestine, persecution of Muslims in the West and killings of innocent Muslims in Iraq, Libya, Syria and other countries.

Dr. Qadri has allowed non-Muslims to worship in Minhaji mosques. Hindus, Buddhists and

others can perform Idol worship in Minhaji mosques. He also allowed his followers to visit Hindu temples, Sikh Gurdwaras, Christian Churches, Jewish Synagogues and participate in their prayers. Video clips in this context are available on Internet / you tube.

Following picture shows Usman Shah of Minhajul Quran, UK led a delegation to Neville Road Gurdwara in East Ham, UK on March 30th, 2009. Minhajis covered their heads and participated in prayers alongside Sikhs in Gurdwara Prayer Hall.



Figure 9: Minhajis participating in prayers in Sikh Gurudwara

Following pictures shows Minhajis prayed at International Gospel (IG) Church On December 17, 2009 on the occasion of Happy Christmas function.



Figure 10: Minhajul Quran participating in 'Happy Christmas function' conducted at International Gospel Church

Dr. Qadri conducted an Ammani Peace Conference in UK in 2011 and claimed Jesus Christ to be God. Listen to the video clip available on You tube. He said, we can hear the holy spirit of God Jesus Christ giving the message of Salvation to the mankind'. In the same speech, Dr. Qadri asked people to take

melodies (of Almighty) from Bible, Lyrics (of Almighty) from Torah, Rhythm (of Almighty) from Quran. He preached them to take (learn) humility (as taught in) the holy scriptures of all other religions. He asked people to remember (and benefit from) the awakening of Buddah. He urged people to remember the love of Krishna (and get rewarded) in their lives. He also urged people to remember (and learn from) the Optimism of the Sikhs (as taught to them by Guru Nanak Dev Ji). In the end he prayed 'May the fragrance (guidance) of all religions remain on this Earth (and we get benefited from them all).

(viii) Royal Aal-al-Bayt Institute

The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute is the venue from which Amman Message was launched in 2004-05. The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic (Ammani) Thought is an International Islamic non-governmental Institute in Amman, the capital of the Kingdom of Jordan.

This Institution is run under the direct supervision of King Abdullah II of Jordan. There are a number of scholars belonging to various sects in Muslims who are listed as (1) Senior Fellows, (2) Fellows, (3) Founding Fellows, and (4) Honorary Fellows of this Institution.



Figure 11: Image of the official website of Royal Aal-al-Bayt

Picture shows names of "Senior Fellows" of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute. Habib Ali Jifri is listed at # 74; Hamza Yousef Hansan (Zaituna College, Berkeley, US) at # 85; Dr. Taher ul Qadri at # 90, and Omer bin Mohammad bin Hafiz (Founder of Darul Mustafa, Tarim, Yemen) at # 94. Among its

fellows, Aboobacker Musaliyar of India is listed at # 12.

The Islamic thought propagated by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute and the kind of work they are doing is available on their official website. They have clearly mentioned that Amman Message is the essence of their Islamic thought.

The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute is the venue from which Amman Message was launched in 2004-05. For this purpose, a Conference was convened by King Abdullah II of Jordan in July 2005 in which 200 scholars, mostly from 72 misguided sects, were invited. It was reported that the Conference attendees endorsed King's initiated Document known as 'Amman Message', in which, Schools of thought of all Sects, like Salafis, Deobandis, Ikhwan, Shias, Ibadis, and hundreds of their sub groups, were declared as Islamic and the followers of all 73 sects and their hundreds of sub groups were declared as true Muslims. Later, the King issued another declaration, also through the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute, known as 'Amman Interfaith Message,' in which Christians and Jews were declared 'believers' on par with Muslims'.

Since 2005, the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute is conducting annual Conferences highlighting the importance of Amman Message.

(ix) Ammani Quran

Compilation of an Ammani Quran was started in 2005, after the declaration of Amman Message and in 2015 the Quran was published, titled '**The Study Quran**'.

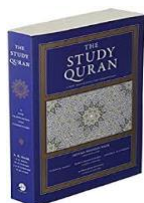


Figure 12: The Study Quran

The 'Study Quran' was published like the Christian Bible and Jewish Torah/Talmud. Original Arabic text of the Quran has been avoided and only the translation / interpretation of Ammani beliefs is provided in English.

An Ammani/Perennialist team of scholars headed by Shia scholar Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, was chosen by Amman Message Team to compile this Quran.

Dr. Nasr is a Perennialist in the school of Rene Guénon Traditionalism. Dr. Nasr was a student of Guénon's disciple Frithjof Schuon who established the Maryamiyya branch of Shadhili order in Europe and North America.

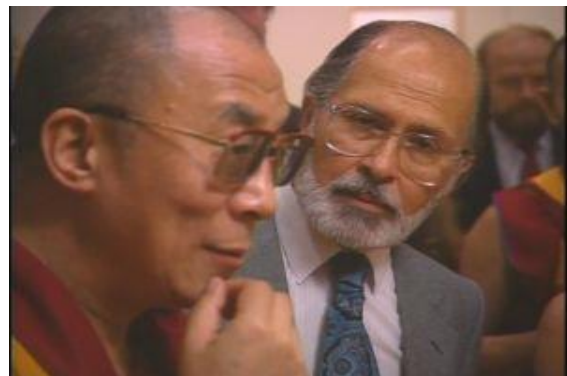


Figure 13: Dr. Nasr with the Dalai Lama

Maryamiyya is a perennialist Sufi Order. The founder of this order, Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), was a faith Guru in the tradition of Plato, Shankara and Eckhart who claimed that Virgin Mary authorized him to establish this order in 1965 by appearing in his dream.

Many of the books of Frithjof Schuon are available on Amazon.

Dr. Nasr has misinterpreted many verses of the Quran to lead Muslims to believe that 'Perennialism or Ammanism' is Islam. The following are the important features of Ammani Quran.

(a) They aim this book to be the part of the syllabi of all Educational Institutions who are offering courses on Islamic subjects.

(b) Dr. Nasr and his team treat Quran as an Object and not the word of God as believed by Muslims.

(c) The perennialist language used in the book is misleading. After reading this book, one will accept that all religions are authentic. Some essays, written by perennial scholars, are added on the back of this book to lead people to believe in pluralism; meaning all religions are authentic and followers of all religions will get salvation in Hereafter.

(d) The explanations have been written in such a way that one is led to accept that the belief in Prophet Mohammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) is optional, not essential for Muslims to get salvation in Hereafter. Only the belief in one God is sufficient. Even the belief in Quran in conformity with Islamic Sharia, is not compulsory for individuals living in the world today.

(e) There are many misinterpretations aimed at converting Muslims into Ammanism. Some of these misinterpretations are given below.

(1) The Kharijis have been exonerate from disbelieve. It is explained that the Kharijites were not refuted for their outrageous beliefs.

(2) The Christian belief of trinity is interpreted in such a way that the reader starts endorsing the Christian Trinity as authentic.

(3) The book claims that the people of Lot (عليه السلام) were not punished for sodomy, as there is difference between consensual sex and forced sex. They were punished for their crimes of having sex with children and not with same sex adults.

(4) The book also claims that what Muslims practiced for hundreds of years in punishing people for the act of Zina was based on the misinterpretation of Quranic injunctions by earlier scholars of Islam.

There is a lot of appreciation of this book in Ammani community. They claim it is the most important work done on the Islamic faith' in the English Language to date.

Conclusion

The spread of perennialism in the guise of Ammanism and Universal Sufism is widespread in the Islamic world these days. It is important that people understand the difference between Islamic Sufism and un-Islamic Universalism or Universal Sufism. We have written many books and research papers on this subject. Sahih

Iman is of paramount importance in a person's life. If you do not have correct understanding of correct Islamic faith and Islamic Sufism, there is a danger that you will lose the right path of Islam in this world and salvation in Hereafter.

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Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri is well known all over the world for his explanation of Islamic Tawheed, Sahih Iman, Sahih Islam and Sahih Ihsan. He is a scholar, historian and poet. He is the author of Tafseer-e-Asedi, Irshad Al Asedi, Fusus Al-Iman and over 1000

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Mir Habeebullah Quadri is a scholar / researcher in the fields of Artificial Intelligence, computer science and psychology. He has an interest in studying the correlation between religious / cultural practices and their scientific impact on human psyche. He shares an equal interest in studying philosophy and its intricate bond with religion.